PENETRATING THE SEVENTH PALACE:
READING THE SEXUAL DIMENSIONS OF THE *HEBREW BOOK OF ENOCH* AND
THE *HEKHALOT* GENRE

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in
Religion

Charlotte

2017

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ABSTRACT

SUZANNAH MACLEAN KIMBREL. Penetrating the Seventh Palace:
Reading the Sexual Dimensions of the *Hebrew Book of Enoch* and the *Hekhalot* Genre.
(Under the direction of DR. KENT BRINTNALL)

This thesis looks at the Late Antique mystical literary genre of *Hekhalot* alongside contemporary queer theory and modern psychoanalysis. Part 1 opens with an excerpt from "3 Enoch." The methodology is explained, and the relevant works of Sigmund Freud, Leo Bersani, and Georges Bataille are analyzed. These are then applied through a close reading of the "3 Enoch" text(s), with particular focus given to the microform of chapters 3-16. Part 2 describes the *Hekhalot* genre in greater depth, including its origins, the relationship it has with priestly and Rabbinic writers, and the questions that remain on how to situate this genre in relation to theoretical interpretations of mysticism and eroticism. The author describes literary themes of the genre, specifically looking at sexual and erotic overtones based on intense descriptive imagery, repetition, textual interruptions, and the use of hymns. These are examined in conversation with the writings of Luce Irigaray. In examining *Hekhalot* through the lens of queer theory and psychoanalysis the author observed the self-shattering nature of the texts. The climax is often the moment that the person ascending witnesses the divinity within the highest heaven yet at that moment there is a lack of clear, descriptive imagery indicating what Bataille would call "the place at which words fail." Heavenly ascent described in this literature is dangerous and self-shattering. Finally, the author provides conclusions and final reflections. The implications of examining Bersani, Bataille, and Irigaray together in light of the *Hekhalot* literature are discussed.

[...] it is impossible for one who is conversant with *ma`aseh merkavah* and with *ma`aseh bereshit* not to stumble. For it is stated (in scripture): 'and this stumbling-block is underneath your hand' (Isa 3:6); (namely), matters which a person would be unable to understand had they not stumbled upon them.

-Sefer Ha-Bahir

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE: MACROFORM AS ASSEMBLAGE

[... t]he *Hekhalot* texts, as texts, do not exist; and [...] their titles are arbitrary labels which medieval scribes attached to stretches of material whose extent they themselves barely knew how to define.[1]

Many scholars within the study of biblical and pseudepigraphic literature have relied upon the conception of the existence of an *Urtext*, or of theoretical "original" versions for manuscripts. Others such as Philip Alexander have disagreed, instead arguing for the existence of certain independently circulating literary chunks (microforms) that combine to form specific texts that are studied today as coherent units.[2] In this sense, the forms of works such as "3 Enoch"[3] that we have today (macroforms) are made up of assemblages of these narrative microforms. Assemblages, for queer theorist Jasbir Puar, "do not accrete in linear time or within discrete histories, fields, or discourses."[4] Puar's conception of assemblage mirrors that of the theoretical formation of literary microforms within pseudepigraphic (and possibly biblical) literature. The

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[1] David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), 364.

[2] P. Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch (Fifth to Sixth Century A.D.)," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Volume 1*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1983), 229.

[3] Throughout this paper I use scare quotes when referring to the shorthand title of the text of "3 Enoch" to indicate that the implied coherence (as well as the name) of this text is highly questionable and should be taken with a grain of salt.

[4] Jasbir K. Puar, "Homonationalism as Assemblage: Viral Travels, Affective Sexualities," *Jindal Global Law Review* 4, no. 2 (Nov. 2013), 25. Puar takes the term "assemblage" from a translation of Deleuze and Guatarri's concept of *agencement*, which loosely means a patterning of arrangements. See Gilles Deleuze and Guattari, Félix, *A Thousand Plateaus,* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987 [1980]).

independent story units have the potential to be arranged in a number of different ways; there is no original version that contains them in any specified order. If one takes the macroform that has emerged as the result of the combination of independent story pieces, a particular feature emerges from the text. The text itself as a unique mechanism can be examined for what it produces.

This appears to be a common theme within Merkavah literature. Morton Smith notes in "Observations on *Hekhalot Rabbati*" that the *Hekhalot Rabbati* text is "not so much a single composition as a collection of pieces illustrating different aspects of a single tradition of speculation concerning the Throne of God and the heavens beneath it."[5] Both of the parts of *Hekhalot Rabbati* can be broken into numerous separable sections. Each part includes textual interruptions: the first section involves an apocalyptic prose section in the middle of a collection of poems, and the second has both a passage of *Shi`ur Ḳomah*[6] and a prose account of the "ritual of heaven" interrupting a second set of hymns.[7] For both *Hekhalot Rabbati* and the comparable Merkavah text "3 Enoch," it is possible to read each apparently independent section to examine what it produces on its own. However, each extant manuscript can also be read as a unique textual assemblage in order to examine what each particular combination produces as a whole unit. I use this notion of "assemblage" to demonstrate that though the text or texts in question most likely did not exist in their present assembled form during the time period in which they

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[5] Morton Smith, "Observations on *Hekhalot Rabbati,*" in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. by Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 149.

[6] Literature or material that lists dimensions of the deity. Ibid., 143.

[7] Ibid., 148.

were originally produced, I am reading them as coherent literary units whose parts

function together to produce a particular phenomenon.

The intention of this preface is to outline my overall approach to the theory and

texts that I will be engaging in this thesis. Beginning with the concept of assemblage

demonstrates the unstable nature of identity for both literary works and human

individuals. For Puar and for others who use assemblage theory, identity itself is not a

given. Identity is a *process* and a *performance* that results from the accumulation and

interaction of affects, events, forces, etc.[8] This analysis of performativity calls into

question the emphasis placed on discourse for determining reality.[9] The texts that will be

addressed in this thesis are considered for the affective states that they produce for both

potential ancient and modern readers. In other words, I will examine "3 Enoch" and the

Hekhalot texts for the affective states that reading them produces, rather than solely for

the ideas that are conveyed through the texts.

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[8] Puar, *Homonationalism*, 25. See also Jasbir K. Puar, "I'd rather be a cyborg than a goddess," *Philosophia: A Journal of Continental Feminism* 2, no. 1 (2012): 49-66.

[9] Puar, "Cyborg," 51. The concept of performativity can be found in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

INTRODUCTION OF PROJECT

Still less do you have any ground for putting together an eclectic text, unless you are prepared to write your own *Hekhalot* literature.[10]

For there is finally, beyond the fantasies of bodily power and subordination [...] a transgressing of that very polarity which, as Georges Bataille has proposed, may be the profound sense of both certain mystical experiences and of human sexuality.[11]

Introduction[12]

R. Ishmael said: Meṭaṭron said to me:
Come and I will show you the curtain of the Omnipresent One, which is spread before the Holy One, blessed be he, and on which are printed all the generations of the world and all their deeds, whether done or to be done, till the last generation. I went and he showed them to me with his fingers, like a father teaching his son the letters of the Torah; and I saw:

 each generation and its potentates;
 each generation and its heads;
 each generation and its shepherds;
 each generation and its keepers;
 each generation and its oppressors;
 each generation and its tormentors;
 each generation and its officials;
 [...]
And I saw:

 Adam and his generation, their deeds and their thoughts;
 Noah and the generation of the Flood, their deeds and their thoughts;
 Nimrod and the generation of the division of tongues, their deeds and their
thoughts;
 Abraham and his generation, their deeds and their thoughts;
 Isaac and his generation, their deeds and their thoughts;
 Ishmael and his generation, their deeds and their thoughts;

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[10] Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 364.

[11] Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" in *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010 [1987]), 24.

[12] In a manner astonishingly befitting given the subject matter, the idea for this thesis came to me in a dream vision.

> Jacob and his generation, their deeds and their thoughts;
> [...]
> And I saw:
> The Messiah the son of Joseph and his generation, and all that they will do to the gentiles.
> And I saw:
> The Messiah the son of David and his generation, and all the battles and wars, and all that they will do to Israel whether for good or bad.
> And I saw:
> All the battles and wars which God and Magog will fight with Israel in the days of the Messiah, and all that the Holy One, blessed be he, will do to them in the time to come.
> All the rest of the leaders of every generation and every deed of every generation both of Israel and of the gentiles, whether done or to be done in the time to come, to all generations, till the end of time, were all printed on the curtain of the Omnipresent One. I saw them all with my own eyes, and when I had seen them I opened my mouth and said in praise of the Omnipresent One, "For the word of the king is paramount, and who dare say to him, 'Why do that?' He who obeys the command will come to no harm." And I said, "Lord, what variety you have created," and, "Great are your achievements, Lord."[13]

Upon first examination, this excerpt from the Hebrew book of "3 Enoch," as it is affectionately called by many scholars of Jewish pseudepigrapha, appears to be a standard example of the "heavenly tour" which often appears in Enoch literature. In such accounts, a particularly righteous individual is taken on an all-expenses paid trip around the cosmos, and is often shown past, present, and future events. What makes this particular example unique is the extreme use of repetition in the description of the events revealed by Enoch/Meṭaṭron. Each phrase is set up in an identical manner, with the first section beginning each line with, "each generation and its [...]," and with each section being introduced with "And I saw:" What will become apparent through an analysis of the *Hekhalot* genre and a close reading of the "3 Enoch" text (with a particular focus on the core chapters 3-15/16) is that the heavy use of repetition of both phrases and descriptive adjectives establishes the text itself as sexual. Additionally, the access to past,

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[13] Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," 296-299.

present, and future as well as the inner workings of the minds of all of humanity given to Enoch/Meṭaṭron establishes an association with sexuality and loss of the self. This particular passage takes place at the end of the "3 Enoch" macroform. In addition to demonstrating the extensive use of repetitive language, the excerpt is a demonstrative example of the narrative format of the text. Throughout, bits of sequential narrative are recounted and subsequently interrupted by vast lists of objects or adjectives. In other texts from the *Hekhalot* genre, these interruptions will include hymns.

"3 Enoch" can form an interesting case study to focus an exploration of the *Hekhalot* genre and Merkavah mysticism as a whole. This thesis will read the text of "3 Enoch" as it has been constructed alongside the queer theoretical writers Leo Bersani and Georges Bataille, both of whom share an engagement with Sigmund Freud's conception of the unconscious mind and the death drive. Using psychoanalytic queer theory renders "3 Enoch" as a fundamentally and profoundly sexual text. Following this logic, *Hekhalot* literature as a whole can also be seen as sexual and self-disruptive at its core. This thesis will also make use of the work of Luce Irigaray, who uses elements of psychoanalytic discourse related to female sexuality in order to read the eye as an extension of the phallus and the category of the feminine as existing only within parameters created by male subjects. Examining *Hekhalot* literature alongside Irigaray's writings will show that the moment of visual contact with the divine in the mystical texts falls outside of the linguistic realm and can be understood as a feminine space.

This thesis consists of two parts.[14] The first section will introduce the theoretical framework necessary for understanding the way that sexuality will be conceptualized. "3

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[14] This is perhaps extremely fitting for an analysis of a literary genre that is comprised of the interplay of multiple styles of writing.

Enoch" will be considered in detail as an exemplar of the *Hekhalot* literary genre.[15] It is

also clear that a visual experience is central to this particular genre of Jewish mysticism.

The second part of this thesis will take up the visual nature of these texts, focusing on

both the origins of the genre and the problems inherent in a visual experience of the

divine. Finally, the conclusion will explore the implications of reading *Hekhalot* texts

along with Bataille, Bersani, and Irigaray. Ladelle McWhorter and Lynne Huffer both

offer ways in which the previous theorists can be read together, and will be incorporated

into the final part of this thesis. The ideas espoused by McWhorter and Huffer will assist

in revealing the issues relating to gender (and the feminine, in particular) that come up

when reading *Hekhalot* texts.

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[15] Though "3 Enoch" does not share the same use of *Hekhalot* hymns with other texts of the genre, it is clear that these texts are generally grouped together based on their description of a heavenly ascent journey and upon a vision of an occurrence in the highest heaven. Like the majority of the other *Hekhalot* texts, "3 Enoch" interpolates descriptive recitations into narrative accounts, which serve a similar function in creating a sense of disruption.

PART I: ENGAGING PSYCHOANALYSIS AND "3 ENOCH"

> Midrash, like Freudian psychoanalysis, involves a process of linking. The midrashic expositor associates one Scriptural passage with another, apparently from a totally different context [...][16]

In order to read "3 Enoch" alongside queer theorists who engage with

psychoanalysis, some background theoretical frames will need to be articulated. In the

close reading of "3 Enoch" that follows, certain themes emerge; namely, those of

repetition, a sense of being overwhelmed, and negotiations between the self and the other.

I will use a psychoanalytic framework to show that these formal properties of the text can

be thought of as sexual. Beginning with Sigmund Freud's theorization of the sexual

drive, I will examine the theoretical trajectory of queer psychoanalytic discourses related

to the establishment of a relationship between sexuality, subjectivity, and death.

Sigmund Freud

The Drive

For Freud, sexuality became the "weak spot" in human cultural development;

sexual impulses are the ones least controlled by the mind's higher activities.[17] Freud's

essays on sexuality go on to show that the sexual instinct (or drive) does not have a

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[16] Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot,* 8.

[17] Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2000 [1905]), 15.

natural object.[18] In fact, he distinguishes between the "sexual object" and the "sexual aim," the former being the "person from whom sexual attraction proceeds" and the latter the "act towards which the instinct tends."[19] His first essay is presented as an analysis of aberrant sexualities; he devotes much of the beginning of the essay to an analysis of deviations with regard to sexual object. These include several varieties of inverts, only one of which is seen as having an innate character.[20] This means that *most* people have the capacity to become inverts (or homosexuals) due to some external force. Individuals must be trained to have a "normal" sexuality—every person has the potential to be (and already is, to some extent) perverted. Freud states:

> The conclusion now presents itself to us that there is indeed something innate lying behind the perversions but that it is something innate in *everyone*, though as a disposition it may vary in intensity and may be increased by the influences of actual life. What is in question are the innate constitutional roots of the sexual instinct. In one class of cases (the perversions) these roots may grow into the actual vehicles of sexual activity; in others they may be submitted to an insufficient suppression (repression) and thus be able in a roundabout way to attract a considerable proportion of sexual energy to themselves as symptoms.[21]

Here, the (sexual) drive is a fundamental constituent of every human, with the potential to develop normally or abnormally (as defined by Freud). Sexuality then becomes a drive independent of an object, one which we attempt to fit into categories in order to tame it. The object that it takes is never actually a pure manifestation of the drive; rather, it becomes a fixed point that allows humans to "trick" their desires into behaving in a manageable way. The desire for the object allows for the individual to be somewhat

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[18] Ibid., 13.

[19] Ibid., 2.

[20] Ibid., 5.

[21] Ibid., 37-38.

overwhelmed, but in a safe and manageable way. This will become particularly relevant

throughout the analysis of the "3 Enoch" macroform.

Infant Sexuality

In his second essay, Freud disagrees with the popular idea of his time that the

human sexual instinct is absent during childhood, and only surfaces during puberty.[22] Too

often, he finds, there is confusion between 'sexual' and 'genital'—the absence of genital

sexuality in infancy and childhood does not necessarily imply the absence of sexuality in

general.[23] Instead he sees the sexual instinct as existing within a person starting with

infancy, and developing into mature, adult sexuality later in life. The adult form,

however, has been regulated, formed, and constrained by societal forces; only through an

examination of infantile sexuality can one reveal the essential characteristics of the sexual

drive.

Freud takes thumb-sucking as a primary manifestation of sexuality in infancy. He

describes thumb-sucking as "the rhythmic repetition of a sucking contact by the mouth

(or lips)."[24] Clearly, the purpose of this activity is the taking in of nourishment, though it

is not limited only to the thumb. The infant may suck on another part of its body or an

object, and the sucking is often accompanied by a simultaneous rhythmic fondling with

its hand. In addition, "sensual sucking involves a complete absorption of the attention and

leads either to sleep or even to a motor reaction in the nature of an orgasm."[25] The

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[22] Ibid., 39.

[23] Ibid., 46.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

pleasurable sensation that the infant is seeking to replicate is the "warm flow of milk" from the mother that was first available through breastfeeding. This forms the foundation for the concept of orgasm. Freud even notes that: "No one who has seen a baby sinking back satiated from the breast and falling asleep with flushed cheeks and a blissful smile can escape the reflection that this picture persists as a prototype of the expression of sexual satisfaction in later life."[26]

Obviously, the survival of the infant depends upon its feeding. This requires the infant to engage with the outside world (here, the mother). In doing so the infant is both satisfied and overwhelmed. The taking of its own thumb for the replication of the initial pleasure allows the infant to be independent of the external world which he is not yet able to control. Being fed by and relying upon another for nourishment and survival provides both the pleasure found through the taking in of nourishment, and the horror of being overwhelmed by and powerless before the (m)other.[27]

Death and the Drive

The state of being in need of a repetition of the satisfaction reveals itself in two ways: by a peculiar feeling of tension, possessing, rather, the character of unpleasure, and by a sensation of itching or stimulation which is centrally conditioned and projected on to the peripheral erotogenic zone.[28]

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[26] Ibid., 48.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., 50.

Freud's conception of the death drive is more thoroughly developed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.[29] He seeks to clarify how the compulsion to repeat (also described as the "manifestation of the power of the repressed" or unconscious) relates to the pleasure principle.[30] He finds that this compulsion overrides the pleasure principle, and seems to be related to something more primitive and instinctual.[31] For Freud, this becomes a striving for an earlier state of being: "It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces."[32] This initial state is one of inanimacy; the individual, animate organism seeks to return to an earlier point in which it did not exist. Each organism wishes to die for internal reasons—in its own fashion—and so paradoxically struggles against external forces which would "help it to attain its life's aim rapidly—by a kind of short circuit."[33]

Freud uses a simplified version of a living organism: "an undifferentiated vesicle of a substance that is susceptible to stimulation."[34] This organism receives stimuli from the external world, leading to the formulation of a "crust," or protective shield, on the outer layer of the organism. Without such a protective layer, the organism would surely be killed from the constant barrage of stimuli, yet the separate outer layer must die for the less intense stimuli to pass into the organism. The organism's most important function in

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[29] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1961 [1920]).

[30] Ibid., 14.

[31] Ibid., 17.

[32] Ibid., 30.

[33] Ibid., 33.

[34] Ibid., 20.

order to stay alive is protection against the stimuli of the outside world.[35] There is,

however, no such shield against stimuli from the *inside* of the organism, and as such,

inner feelings of "pleasure and unpleasure" take supremacy. Internal feelings of

unpleasure are treated as though they come from outside; in order to shield against these

negative feelings they must be projected onto an external entity.[36]

There is an intimate relationship, then, between the pleasure that results from the

increase of stimulation and the unpleasure that occurs when this stimulation overwhelms

the individual. To put it simply, there is a fundamental drive towards repetition within the

individual, one which according to Freud forms the basis of sexuality. This drive, the

death drive, results in a threat to the structured self; the increase in pleasure through

obsessive repetition results in a disruption of the self as a distinct unit. Following Leo

Bersani's reading of Freud (which will be taken up in the following section), this death

drive is what makes up sexuality. Whereas Freud's earlier *Three Essays* describes distinct

or independent drives, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* reveals a singular death drive as

forming the basis of sexuality.[37]

Leo Bersani

Similar to Freud's conception of the sexual aberrations, Bersani sees gay male

sexuality as typifying something about sexuality in general. The common homophobic

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[35] Ibid., 21.

[36] Ibid., 23.

[37] In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud claims that the sexual drive and the death drive are distinct. However, in reading this text it is clear that the argument does not support this conclusion; rather, Freud ends up with a theory of a singular drive that encompasses both sexuality and death. Leo Bersani elaborates on this in *The Freudian Body.* See Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 3.

assumption about gay men is that they are promiscuous, perverse, and pathological. They

like sex too much; they have gone too far in the wrong direction. During the time that

Bersani was writing the AIDS epidemic was in full swing, and discourses surrounding

gay male sexual practices usually revolved around the potential for their promiscuity to

spread disease and infect the "general public."[38] This indicates that the sexual is always

present. The excessive practices that are associated with male homosexuality are

therefore culturally reviled because they come too close to revealing a "truth" about

sexuality that we are invested in denying; namely, that egalitarian sex is not possible or

even desirable. Here Bersani is considering the anti-pornography feminists Catharine

MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, whose condemnation of pornography as depicting

violence against women includes a redemptive potential for sex to be communal, loving,

and egalitarian.[39] Instead, Bersani finds sexuality *itself* to always already be a site of

power and powerlessness, rather than a phenomenon that is distorted by power inequities

and imbalances imported from elsewhere (such as gender in a patriarchal system).[40]

> Bersani engages with Freud as a narrative, noting that:

> Freud keeps returning to a line of speculation in which the opposition between
> pleasure and pain becomes irrelevant, in which the sexual emerges as the
> *jouissance* of exploded limits, as the ecstatic suffering into which the human
> organism momentarily plunges when it is 'pressed' beyond a certain threshold of
> endurance.[41]

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[38] Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" in *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010 [1987]), 27.

[39] Ibid., 22, 28.

[40] Ibid., 23.

[41] Ibid., 24.

Here, one can see that the essence of sexuality or sexual pleasure is inherently

masochistic; it encompasses both pleasure and pain for the purpose of allowing the infant

(who has not yet developed the ability to defend itself against overwhelming outside

stimuli) to paradoxically take pleasure in the simultaneously painful and self-shattering

interaction with the outside world.[42] Sexuality is fundamentally an overpowering

experience, one that does not leave the self intact. Practices that allow for a displacement

of the self are simultaneously pleasurable and unsettling. Bersani relates phallocentrism

to the fixation on the self/subject:

> Phallocentrism is exactly that: not primarily the denial of power to women
> (although it has obviously also led to that, everywhere and at all times), but above
> all the denial of the *value* of powerlessness in both men and women. I don't mean
> the value of gentleness, or nonaggressiveness, or even of passivity, but rather of a
> more radical disintegration and humiliation of the self.[43]

The self/subject for Bersani is thus a fundamentally masculine ideal; one that is, however,

shared by both men and women.[44] This includes the notions of never getting penetrated,

never getting overwhelmed, and never experiencing powerlessness. Maintaining one's

self as a solid, distinct entity requires a sanction of violence directed against anything that

might attempt to invade or cross the boundary of the self. Those who embrace the

powerlessness of being penetrated and overwhelmed become an immediate threat to the

masculine ideal of the self that is never threatened by annihilation.

Bersani's *The Freudian Body* reads the theoretical collapse in Freud's work as

fundamentally important to the concepts that Freud establishes.[45] Bersani finds that the

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 24.

[44] Ibid., 29.

[45] Bersani, *The Freudian Body,* 3.

"mysterious repetition" that Freud is dealing with in his *Three Essays* and in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is explicitly inherent in sexuality.[46] The narrative of sexual development that Freud presents is presented as a teleological one; the *Three Essays* outline the beginning of sexuality at the infant stage, and progress through the various stages into adulthood. However, his theorization itself *fails*, especially when presented as something that should naturally follow from a starting point to an ending point. Bersani claims that part of what makes Freud's concepts so persuasive is this failure; the "insistent stasis," or repetition, blocks Freud's attempts to define sexuality, which is the very idea he is trying to pinpoint.[47] This relationship between aesthetic form (such as the literary form of Freud's writings) and sexuality will become even more relevant with regard to Bersani's analysis in *The Forms of Violence*, and arguably will be seen in the "3 Enoch" text.

The Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture, Bersani's collaboration with Ulysse Dutoit, examines the relationship between violence, art, and the subject.[48] Bersani and Dutoit achieve this through an analysis of Assyrian palace sculptures put into conversation with contemporary cultural artifacts. Freudian conceptions of sexuality and masochism are used to illuminate the narrative qualities of both seemingly disparate bodies of work. The authors describe the complex visuals of the Assyrian sculptures, noting that "they demand, so it would seem, to be read narratively, but a narrative reading has led many critics to dismiss or at least to devalue them *for*

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[46] Ibid., 34-35.

[47] Ibid., 35.

[48] Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *The Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985).

narrative reasons."[49] Bersani and Dutoit see the reliefs as a subversion of narrative

techniques. The sculptures often depict so many images at once that it is difficult for the

viewer to know where to look or where to begin. The Assyrian sculptures demand to be

read in a narrative fashion, yet are structured in such a way that the narrative itself is

disrupted.[50] For example, points that would typically be considered climactic (such as the

killing of a lion during a hunt or the capture of an enemy city) are not kept as singular,

central points of action. Instead, the center of each scene is transformed into the margin

of the next.[51] The climax is constantly postponed and the viewer is kept in a constant

state of discomfort; we are led to "terminal points which are in fact anything but terminal,

which continuously send us back across the space between them."[52] For Bersani and

Dutoit, the viewer/reader's wandering from scene to scene "can also be experienced as a

momentary epistemological uncertainty about the identities of certain forms."[53] This

means that the very forms themselves of these visual and literary texts disrupt the sense

of cohesion of the self. Through the interspersion of different narrative elements the

subject of the narrative and the subject of the viewer are simultaneously shattered.[54]

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[49] Ibid., 14. Emphasis Bersani and Dutoit's.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., 15

[52] Ibid., 105.

[53] Ibid., 14.

[54] Bersani and Dutoit describe a variety of ways that this is done in the Assyrian palace reliefs. Background and foreground are merged, animal and human parts are depicted as overlapping, etc. These elements cause the viewer to be unsure of where the eye should follow, and of what actions are taking place in which order. Ibid., 14-23.

Georges Bataille

Georges Bataille's work *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* describes eroticism as

"assenting to life up to the point of death."[55] He takes a perspective similar to that of

Bersani in establishing a close link between the sexual/erotic and self-destruction:

> What does physical eroticism signify if not a violation of the very being of its
> practitioners?—a violation bordering on death, bordering on murder? The whole
> business of eroticism is to strike to the inmost core of the living being, so that the
> heart stands still. The transition from the normal state to that of erotic desire
> presupposes a partial dissolution of the person as he exists in the realm of
> discontinuity.[56]

The sexual/erotic, then, is a deeply unsettling force. If, as beings that are part of the

regulated social order, we are after continuity, as long as "that continuity which the death

of discontinuous beings can alone establish is not the victor in the long run," there is a

delicate balance that must be made between continuity and discontinuity.[57] An excess of

eroticism (such as the gay male promiscuity investigated by Bersani) both illuminates the

drive towards continuity that exists within us all, and also deeply unsettles our

simultaneous need to possess a stable individuality.[58] Intimacy, for Bataille, is when this

individuality is erased. It is inherently violent, as it requires a destruction of the separate

individual. This definition is deliberately vague. Bataille states:

> Intimacy cannot be expressed discursively.
> The swelling to the bursting point, the malice that breaks out with clenched teeth
> and weeps; the sinking feeling that doesn't know where it comes from or what it's
> about; the fear that sings its head off in the dark; the white-eyed pallor, the sweet
> sadness, the rage and the vomiting . . . are so many evasions.

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[55] Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986 [1957]), 11.

[56] Ibid., 17.

[57] Ibid., 18-19.

[58] Ibid., 17-18.

> What is intimate, in the strong sense, is what has the passion of an absence of individuality, the imperceptible sonority of a river, the empty limpidity of the sky: this is still a negative definition, from which the essential is missing.
> These statements have the vague quality of inaccessible distances, but on the other hand articulated definitions substitute the tree for the forest, the distinct articulation for that which is articulated.[59]

Here Bataille is only able to give incomplete snapshots of what intimacy is. It would be impossible to give a full understanding, as he is describing intimacy as something that lies outside of what we are capable of thinking about in concrete terms. To put it another way, Bataille is doomed to fail in attempting to use language to describe intimacy, as intimacy occurs at the very place where language is unable to travel.

Thus far, I have outlined the theoretical framework that will be relevant for a close reading of the "3 Enoch" text. What follows will use Freud as a point of departure for the understanding of sexuality as fundamentally overwhelming. Bataille's understanding of eroticism as an increase in life which surpasses the point of toleration will also be used. Finally, Bersani will be used to examine the ways in which the text's form disrupts the sense of stability for the self, following the idea that what is sexual is simultaneously self-destructive.

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[59] Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1992 [1973]), 50-51.

Close Reading of "3 Enoch"[60]

A variety of potential dates have been proposed for "3 Enoch," with none
unanimously agreed upon by scholars. This is due in part to the fragmentary nature of the
text, as mentioned earlier. Microforms featuring Enoch and Meṭaṭron were in use during
the early centuries of the Common Era, and were occasionally incorporated into (what
would become) larger manuscript forms.[61]

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[60] For the purposes of this inquiry, I will be relying primarily on the translation provided by P. Alexander in Charlesworth's *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Alexander primarily relies upon the Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 228/4 (Assemanus) and the Oxford: Bodleian Library 1656/2 (Neubauer) manuscripts, while allowing his translation to be informed by a number of other manuscripts and fragments that were unknown to Hugo Odeberg. Odeberg's edition focused primarily upon the latter of the two; Alexander finds that both belong to the same textual tradition, believing the former to give "superior readings." Alexander, "3 Enoch," 224-225. I will also consult the manuscript synopsis compiled by Peter Schäfer. Peter Schäfer, *Synopse Zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Mohr Siebeck, 1981).

    The title that is commonly attached to this work does not appear in any manuscript. In addition to attempting to create a unified critical edition of the extant manuscripts, H. Odeberg coined the title based on the extended passage that describes the transformation of Enoch into Meṭaṭron, chapters three through sixteen in the manuscript. According to Philip Alexander, the original title of the text appears to have been *Seper Hekalot*, or "The Book of the Palaces," though it has also been known as "The Chapters of Rabbi Ishmael," and "The Book of Rabbi Ishmael the High Priest." Alexander, "3 Enoch," 224.

[61] Alexander notes that some have tried to attribute "3 Enoch" to the time of Rabbi Ishmael based on some of the traditions that can be found in the text, he acknowledges that dating the text of "3 Enoch" as a whole to this time would be highly problematic. A common heroic figure in *Hekhalot* literature, Rabbi Ishmael has been added as a later authorial figure in order to establish authority in the work. This is particularly obvious given Ishmael's appearance in the first two chapters of the manuscript. Throughout the remainder of the text, different sections focus on divine narratives or knowledge, with the introductory phrase "Ishmael said" at the start of each chapter, with no mention of him throughout the bulk of the chapters. This is an easy way to take an existing text or set of texts and place them within an authoritative context. Ibid., 226.

    Rabbi Ishmael was a Palestinian scholar who died before the outbreak of the Bar Kokhba war in 132 C.E. Ibid. *Hekhalot* texts generally involved one of two main heroes: R. Ishmael or R. Akiva, one of which would frequently be the host of the text, and both of whom were reputed to have been taken to heaven and have great insight. Tannaitic literature has the two as foils of one another. Ishmael is supposed to have come from a priestly family.

    Odeberg attempts to claim a comparatively early date for the "3 Enoch" text. He finds that some of the traditions contained within the text are potentially as old as (if not older than) Talmudic *Ma`aśeh Merkabah* (literally, "the works of the chariot") texts. However, Odeberg seems to base most of his argument for an early (i.e. early Talmudic period) dating of "3 Enoch" on some of the traditions it contains; however, he fails to acknowledge that the text also makes use of later Talmudic material. The text very may well contain very old narrative microforms, but at the very least its final edited form is likely post-Talmudic. Hugo Odeberg, *3 Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch* (Cambridge, 1928).

    The manuscript Odeberg primarily relies upon is one which he believes stems unadulterated from a theoretical "common archetype:" Bodleian MS. OPP. 556, foll. 314 seqq. (Neubauer, 1656: "Written in

Textual Analysis: Repetition and Adjectives

The text known as *The Book of Enoch by Rabbi Ishmael the High Priest,* or "3

Enoch," begins with a brief, one line prologue in which R. Ishmael enters the seventh

palace of heaven.[62] The stage is set through the use of the Genesis 5:24 verse: "Enoch

walked with God. Then he vanished because God took him."[63] The first two chapters of

the text function as an introduction to what will form the central narrative unit of the text

(namely, the story of Enoch's transformation into the angel Meṭaṭron). In this section,

Rabbi Ishmael takes the place of the text's protagonist, setting the stage for the book

through an account of his own ascension into the seventh palace of heaven.[64] Ishmael's

immediate experience upon arriving into the seventh palace and beholding the entities

that inhabit the heavenly realm is one of being physically overwhelmed:

> But as soon as the princes of the chariot looked at me and the fiery seraphim fixed
> their gaze on me, I shrank back trembling and fell down, stunned by the radiant
> appearance of their eyes and the bright vision of their faces, until the Holy One,
> blessed be he, rebuked them and said, "My servants, my seraphim, my cherubim,
> and my ophanim, hide your eyes from Ishmael my beloved son and honored

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German Hebrew cursive characters by Yiṣḥaq גואקיל, about A.D. 1511?), containing Ch. 1-48 A B C D and
entitled "Book of Enoch by R. Ishmael ben Elisha, High Priest." Ibid., 17.

     J. T. Milik falls on the opposite end of the scholarly spectrum in his assertion of a relatively late
date for "3 Enoch." Milik argues that the "3 Enoch" text draws from 2 Enoch, which is dated to the 9th or
10th century. This is due to the supposed combination of the Arabic Hermetic traditions of the 8th-10th
centuries (in which Hermes is identified with Enoch) and the 7th-10th century incantation bowls (in which
Hermes is identified with Meṭaṭron). "While one must admire Odeberg's scholarly erudition in the
immense field of Jewish mystical literature, we shall find it easy to prove that he is mistaken in his dating
of the 'Hebrew Book of Enoch' by at the very least a thousand years. Hardly less inexact is the dating to
the sixth century put forward by some Jewish scholars." Milik's dating of 2 Enoch is also peculiar in its
lateness. The associations he makes between Hermes and Meṭaṭron in the incantation bowls are not attested
elsewhere in scholarly literature. J. T. Milik, "Enoch in Cabbalistic Literature," *The Books of Enoch:
Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford, 1976), 125-35.

[62] Alexander, "3 Enoch," 255.

[63] The verse uses the word וְאֵינֶ֫נּוּ, which translates literally as "and he was not."

[64] Ibid., 255.

friend, so that he does not shrink and tremble so." At once Meṭaṭron, Prince of the Divine Presence, came and revived me and raised me to my feet.[65]

Here, the physical encounter with these heavenly beings at once produces feelings of excess within the human. It is also interesting to note that the visible manifestation of this excess (i.e. the trembling and falling to the ground) is either seen as unacceptable by God, or is recognized by this figure as an uncomfortable experience within the human. Following the theoretical concepts outlined previously, this experience is essentially an erotic one. Ishmael finds himself utterly overtaken by the spectacle that he beholds, a notion which is illustrated by his physical reaction.

After Ishmael is given a brief respite, he is encouraged to sing hymns before the throne: "But after an hour the Holy One, blessed be he, opened to me gates of Šekinah, gates of peace, gates of wisdom, gates of strength, gates of might, gates of speech, gates of song, gates of sanctifying praise, gates of chant."[66] Alexander notes that in other examples of Merkavah texts the mystic will worship God in song at the "climax of his ecstasy" (this occurs, for example, in *Hekhalot Rabbati* 24:1).[67] Ishmael's overwhelming experience continues in the types of songs he sings: "He enlightened my eyes and my heart to utter psalm, praise, jubilation, thanksgiving, song, glory, majesty, laud, and strength."[68] The wide array of adjectives used to describe essentially the same feeling or concept give one the sense of the inability of language to fully capture what is happening for Ishmael. Each term used captures a similar idea, with slight nuance, but together they

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[65] Ibid., 256.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

have the effect of establishing a notion of excess; the joy and ecstasy Ishmael feels at the encounter is too much to be conveyed in words.[69] As described by Bataille, this fundamental inability to describe an experience is erotic at heart.

The repetitious use of adjectives and other descriptive phrases will be returned to repeatedly throughout the analysis of the text. Working together, these literary conventions have the effect of establishing the text of "3 Enoch" as sexual at the literary level. As noted earlier in the discussion of Freud's conception of sexuality, the drive is fundamentally related to being overwhelmed. The drive seeks a rhythmic repetition to the point of unsettlement, upon which point the self-shattering orgasm takes place. The literary conventions of the "3 Enoch" text (as well as the other texts of the *Hekhalot* genre) produce an experience of the erotic within the reader, as the experience of these overwhelming and repetitive adjectives serve to push the reader into a space of erotic affect.

Boundaries: Formation and Transgression

The second chapter of the text includes a criticism of Ishmael's presence in the heavenly realm. The angelic beings question Meṭaṭron, asking: "Youth, why have you allowed one born of woman to come in and behold the chariot? From what nation is he? From what tribe? What is his character?"[70] Here, the main concern for the angels is the maintenance of appropriate boundaries between two distinct realms. Ishmael, "one born of woman," is by his nature not supposed to be able to cross the boundary between

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[69] Interestingly, Alexander mentions in a footnote that the term he translates as "laud" and the term he translates as "psalm" come from the same root. He uses "laud" for *hillûl* and "psalm" for *tehillāh*. Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 257.

heaven and earth. Meṭaṭron must offer proof of Ishmael's qualifications before the angels

will allow him entry. Rather than weakening the boundaries separating the realms, the

proof given by Meṭaṭron has the effect of reinforcing the divide. It is not intended for

Ishmael to remain within the heavenly realm; he is allowed a brief journey but not an

indefinite or permanent stay. Additionally, his qualifications for Ishmael's journey would

be nearly impossible for any individual reading the text to replicate. Therefore, though

human, Ishmael is able to briefly negotiate a foray across worlds through his near

superhuman status.

Enoch and Meṭaṭron- Angelomorphosis[71]

> In asexual reproduction, the organism, a single cell, divides at a certain point in its growth. Two nuclei are formed and from one single being two new beings are derived. But we cannot say that one being has given birth to a second being. The two new beings are equally products of the first. The first being has disappeared. It is to all intents and purposes dead, in that it does not survive in either of the two beings it has produced. It does not decompose in the way that sexual animals do when they die, but it ceases to exist.[72]

A microform within "3 Enoch" (chapters three through sixteen) describes the

angelification of Enoch, a fate or an achievement which is alluded to in other Jewish

texts. As one can see, Ishmael's journey into heaven initially mirrors that of Enoch's,

which supposedly took place at an earlier time in history. In chapter four we get the first

mention that the angel Meṭaṭron is, in fact, Enoch. Ishmael asks why it is that Meṭaṭron is

called "youth," if he is "greater than all the princes, more exalted than all the angels,

more beloved that all the ministers, more honored than all the hosts, and elevated over all

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[71] Thanks to Dr. John C. Reeves for introducing me to this term.

[72] Georges Bataille, *Erotism*, 13.

potentates in sovereignty, greatness, and glory."[73] Meṭaṭron explains that he was taken up into heaven by the Holy One during the generation of the Flood in order to bear witness against the Flood generation in the time to come, and that he had been appointed as a ruler among the angels. Just like with Ishmael, the angels take issue with the elevation of the human Enoch.

The elevation and immortalization of Enoch posits him as an eternal, continuous link to the humans of the generation of the Flood. All of their progeny and potential for reproduction were wiped out, except for Enoch/Meṭaṭron (and the family of the Flood-hero).[74] He could arguably be seen as representing the link to the never-here, the figure of the Child that sustains human political imagination.[75] The fact that he is called "youth" despite being the ruler of the angels indicates that this almost infinitely powerful yet child-like figure holds the continuation of the social order in his angelic hands. This new angelic entity is discontinuous in that he has morphed into a being that is distinct from Enoch, yet he simultaneously represents a continuity in that his existence fuses human with non-human, flesh with fire, and past with future. For Georges Bataille, sexual reproduction similarly embodies this transition from discontinuity to continuity.[76] As

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[73] Alexander, "3 Enoch," 258.

[74] The Flood-hero and his family also survives, but are depicted in the Genesis text as mortal. The Flood-hero is depicted as Noaḥ in the Genesis text, but there are additional texts originating from the Ancient Near East that link this figure with Enoch or other heroes. For example, the Sumerian King List dated to the third millennium B.C.E. contains a genealogical chain mirroring that of the Genesis text. The flood hero in this text, Enmeduranki, is associated with many of the same phenomena that Enoch is associated with in other Enochic apocryphal texts. Thomas C. Hartman, "Some Thoughts on the Sumerian King List and Genesis 5 and 11B," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91, no. 1 (1972): 25-32.

[75] A concept that is expanded in greater detail by Lee Edelman. See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 2-3; 45.

[76] Two discontinuous beings are fused into one in the form of the offspring. Bataille, *Erotism*, 14.

mentioned before, the textual speculation surrounding the ascension and transformation of Enoch in this particular text originates from the Genesis 5:24 verse.[77] The text does not explicitly describe an ascension, other than stating that "God took him" (כִּי־לָקַח אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים).[78] The Hebrew word וְאֵינֶנּוּ translates literally as "and he was not." Enoch is not described as dying; rather, "he"/Enoch as a singular entity, a self, has been effaced.

In chapter eight, Meṭaṭron describes his ascent in detail for Ishmael. Prior to his initiation into serving before the throne of glory, the Holy One opened for Meṭaṭron:

> 300,000 gates of understanding,
> 300,000 gates of prudence,
> 300,000 gates of life,
> 300,000 gates of grace and favor,
> 300,000 gates of love,
> 300,000 gates of Torah,
> 300,000 gates of humility,
> 300,000 gates of sustenance,
> 300,000 gates of mercy,
> 300,000 gates of reverence.[79]

Here, for the sake of completion, I have followed Alexander in using the text from the manuscript Oxford: Bodleian Library 1656/2 (Neubauer). He notes that the specifics of the list vary greatly from one manuscript to the next, but that five of the manuscripts that he utilizes for the translation all mention "300,000 gates of Šekinah." With just one instance of 300,000 gates, one can see the level of awe and immensity the text is supposed to inspire. The inclusion or expansion into ten sets of gates expands this sense

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[77] וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוֹךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֵינֶנּוּ כִּי־לָקַח אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים: פ

"And Enoch walked around with God, and he was not, because God took him." (my translation) and rendered in NIV as "Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away."

[78] The Hebrew לָקַח ("he took") also conveys sexual connotations. Biblical Hebrew Lexicons list "to marry" as one of the possible translations of this term, which means that it is possible to read the "to take" in the Hebrew as indicating a sexual act (similar to connotations it carries in English).This verse could be read as indicating that God had sexual intercourse with Enoch.

[79] Alexander, "3 Enoch," 262-263.

of immensity, creating not only a feel of repetition (repeating "300,000 gates of" over and over), but additionally a sense of something impossibly large, to the point where it all but swallows up the individual. The passage continues:

> Then the Holy One, blessed be he, bestowed upon me wisdom heaped upon wisdom, understanding upon understanding, prudence upon prudence, knowledge upon knowledge, mercy upon mercy, Torah upon Torah, love upon love, grace upon grace, beauty upon beauty, humility upon humility, might upon might, strength upon strength, power upon power, splendor upon splendor, loveliness upon loveliness, comeliness upon comeliness; and I was honored and adorned with all these excellent, praiseworthy qualities more than all the denizens of the heights.[80]

Again, the passage exploits the repetition of parallel phrases. Here, similar to before, each quality is magnified beyond its common usage (i.e., "beauty upon beauty" indicates a level of beauty that surpasses human understanding). Meṭaṭron also claims that he now has these qualities in greater quantity than "all the denizens of the heights," indicating that he has attained a level of perfection that surpasses even that of the other angelic beings.

In the following chapter, Meṭaṭron also receives 1,365,000 blessings from the Holy One. As with the huge number of gates in the previous chapter, this number indicates a vastness meant to impress upon the reader the greatness of the heavenly realm, while at the same time giving a number that is theoretically conceivable yet practically difficult. It can be read as an attempt to solidify or place boundaries around a concept that is otherwise unquantifiable. Chapter nine continues with a description of

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[80] Ibid., 263.

Meṭaṭron's expansion to a size equivalent to that of the world itself, and the Holy One's

bestowment of 72 wings and 365,000 eyes upon him.[81]

After his growth spurt, Enoch is given a throne upon which to sit, and witnesses a

great revelation of divine secrets: "Before a man thinks in secret, I see his thought; before

he acts, I see his act. There is nothing in heaven above or deep within the earth concealed

from me."[82] Not only does Enoch/Meṭaṭron now possess all sorts of secrets of wisdom

and Torah, he also seems to have access to the inner "selves" of all of humanity. There is

no longer a boundary between the self and the other for Enoch/Meṭaṭron; his self has

literally been displaced (or, in this case, expanded beyond recognition).

This expansion of Enoch/Meṭaṭron into a being of equal size with the world also

indicates a loss of the individuality of Enoch as a person. He could potentially be seen as

encompassing the world; his self-hood dissolved and expanded into infinity. If he is

indeed expanded to encompass all, there is a startling loss of self involved. The fact that

this enlargement takes place directly following a passage utterly made up of rhythmic,

repetitious, and overwhelming adjectives suggests a sexual connotation to this

transformation, as the building within the text results in a climactic moment of expansion.

The incident culminates in chapter fifteen:

> When the Holy One, blessed be he, took me to serve the throne of glory, the
> wheels of the chariot and all the needs of the Šekinah, at once my flesh turned to
> flame, my sinews to blazing fire, my bones to juniper coals, my eyelashes to
> lightning flashes, my eyeballs to fiery torches, the hairs of my head to hot flames,
> all my limbs to wings of burning fire, and the substance of my body to blazing
> fire. On my right—those who cleave flames of fire—on my left—burning

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[81] Ibid. Additionally, the number "365" contained here within "365,000," and elsewhere in the text, can be seen as an allusion to Enoch. In other examples of Enoch pseudepigrapha Enoch is often associated with the calendar, hence the use of "365" to allude to the number of days in the year. Additionally, Genesis 5:23 describes Enoch's life span as totaling 365 years.

[82] Ibid., 264.

brands—round about me swept wind, tempest, and storm; and the roar of earthquake upon earthquake was before and behind me.[83]

This chapter (which some argue is the original final chapter of the "3 Enoch" core, claiming chapter sixteen to be a later addition) describes not only a physically overwhelming sensual experience, but additionally describes a being literally consumed by fire. There is a massive buildup to this moment, including divine enlargement, revelation of secrets, detailed description of Enoch/Meṭaṭron's throne, robe, and crown, and a list of all of the angels who are giving Enoch/Meṭaṭron homage. The fire that results marks a clear destruction; the body is not only consumed by the flames, but actually *morphs* into fire. Fire itself becomes representative of that which cannot be fully described.[84]

'Aḥer and the Other

Chapter sixteen concludes what has been called the "core" of "3 Enoch."[85] Meṭaṭron describes sitting on a great throne and maintaining the heavenly court of the Holy One, surrounded by the princes of kingdoms—all of which he had authority to do.

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[83] Ibid., 267.

[84] The vision of God's throne that is described in The Book of Ezekiel (described more fully in the second part of this thesis) makes use of a similar image. Ezekiel 1:27 describes God sitting on the throne: "I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him." (NIV) English translations render the word חַשְׁמַל as either "amber," "glowing," or "glowing metal." The term is likened to fire, but is not fully translatable as it appears nowhere else in Hebrew Bible texts (other than the three occurrences in the first chapter of Ezekiel). Interestingly, חַשְׁמַל is the Modern Israeli Hebrew term for electricity, which seems to be a similar concept. Both this fiery substance and electrical power are things we know *exist*, but can't quite touch or see.

[85] Ibid., 268. Alexander also claims that this chapter is probably a secondary addition that attempted to minimize Meṭaṭron's powers. Alexander finds that the most obvious source would be the Talmudic humbling of Meṭaṭron in b.Ḥag. 15a.

The problem arises when 'Aḥer, (literally "the other," or "another") visits the heavenly

realm:[86]

> But when 'Aḥer came to behold the vision of the chariot and set eyes upon me, he was afraid and trembled before me. His soul was alarmed to the point of leaving him because of his fear, dread, and terror of me, when he saw me seated upon a throne like a king, with ministering angels standing beside me as servants and all the princes of kingdoms crowned with crowns surrounding me. Then he opened his mouth and said, "There are indeed two powers in heaven!"[87]

Here, 'Aḥer has mistaken Meṭaṭron for God (or, at least, for an additional God). 'Aḥer

experiences the same disturbing, unsettling, overwhelming set of emotions upon entering

the seventh palace that Meṭaṭron himself undergoes during his ascent. He also makes an

honest mistake—a giant angelic form sitting on a throne doling out heavenly justice

seems to be a reasonable candidate for a deity, but God does not seem to think so:

> Immediately a divine voice came out from the presence of the Šekinah and said, "Come back to me, apostate sons—apart from 'Aḥer!" Then `Anapi'el YHVH, the honored, glorified, beloved, wonderful, terrible, and dreadful Prince, came at the command of the Holy One, blessed be he, and struck me with sixty lashes of fire and made me stand to my feet.[88]

'Aḥer and Meṭaṭron are *both* punished for this transgression, though to varying degrees.

'Aḥer becomes a heretic (possibly even *the* heretic), to the extent that his identity prior to

his ascent is no longer recognized.[89] His body is not destroyed *per se*; unlike the fate of

the other two sages he is allowed to keep existing with his mental faculties intact.

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[86] 'Aḥer is the nickname of Rabbi Elisha ben Abuya, a rabbinic sage of the late first/early second century. An account in Ḥagigah 11b-16a tells of four sages (including 'Aḥer) making the trip into Pardes, and all except Akiva suffering an unpleasant fate. Ibid., 230. This story is paralleled in *Hekhalot Zutarti*. See James R. Davila, *Hekhalot Literature in Translation: Major Texts of* Merkavah Mysticism (Boston: Brill, 2013), 202-203.

[87] Alexander, "3 Enoch," 268.

[88] Ibid.

[89] In the Ḥagigah story, two of the other three sages experience different losses of identity: ben Azzai dies, and ben Zoma goes mad after looking upon Pardes. Only Akiva remains safe.

However, he becomes the symbolic representation of all that poses a threat to the maintenance of the stable self. It is therefore *necessary* to condemn 'Aḥer, to strip him of any humanizing characteristics (such as his name) in order to preserve the distinction between self and other that is fundamental to the social order.

Slightly less extreme, Meṭaṭron is sentenced to lashes and is made to stand. This is a remarkably less harsh punishment than that of 'Aḥer, but can be seen as a moment which allows Meṭaṭron to experience a minor form of 'Aḥer's punishment. He is allowed, briefly, to take on the experience of being "the other." He undergoes the *jouissance* of being powerless just as he simultaneously witnesses the punishment of 'Aḥer, who is rendered utterly powerless. Here, again, we witness the tension between pleasure and displeasure that Freud discusses, as well as the necessitation of formulating the source of displeasure as outside of the (heavenly) entity. 'Aḥer *must* be cast out, *must* be condemned as the pinnacle of otherness in order for the "self" that is Meṭaṭron (as well as the self that is the deity) to remain stable and distinct. It is clear that the experience of continuity with the divine that is suggested by Enoch's expansion and conversion into Meṭaṭron is not permanent; Meṭaṭron must be removed from his position of exact likeness to God (which occurs through his punishment) because this space of continuity cannot continue. "Eroticism," the experience of continuity, "opens the way to death."[90]

Conclusions

The climax of the 3-16 microform of "3 Enoch" is the moment of transformation from Enoch to Meṭaṭron. However, this transformation is described as having already taken place in the past; words are used to tell what has already happened. The actual

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[90] Bataille, *Erotism*, 24.

moment of transformation remains unseen; only the end result of a fully transformed angelic figure who claims to have been human is experienced. This climax itself is two-fold: the narrative itself that is relayed to the reader by Ishmael reaches its apex when Meṭatron transforms and is subsequently punished, while the microform forms a climactic point within the macroform that is the "3 Enoch" text. The self-disruption that takes place in the transformation of Meṭatron is mirrored in the positioning of the 3-16 microform. As soon as the dethroning of Meṭatron is described, the text goes on to enumerate the various heavenly princes who keep watch over the heavenly realms. This abrupt narrative shift causes the reader to be unsure of where to find themselves in the text. At the same time, the emphasis on repetitive descriptive phrases links the reader to both earlier and later places in the text where similar phrases are used. These also cause an immediate recurrence of the build up to climax; the reader doesn't get to recover, and the conventional place of narrative climax is disrupted. This reading of the "3 Enoch" text with a specific focus upon the 3-16 section suggests that the text's form is sexual in character. Engagement with psychoanalytic theory shows us that "3 Enoch," a key text of the *Hekhalot* genre, overwhelms the reader with repetition, adjectival replication, and a disruptive narrative form, all of which seem to be intended to unsettle and shatter the self of the reader. A prominent feature of the texts within this genre, including "3 Enoch," is the emphasis placed upon the visual experience of the heavenly realm. The following section will deal explicitly with the visual elements of the *Hekhalot* genre.

PART II: THE MYSTICISM OF THE HEKHALOT GENRE AND THE RABBINIC RESPONSE[91]

The previous section made use of Freud, Bersani, and Bataille in order to reveal a particular text of the *Hekhalot* genre as sexual in form. This section will give a brief introduction to the *Hekhalot* texts and their relationship to the rabbinic and priestly circles of Late Antiquities. The overarching themes of the genre will be examined alongside the theoretical work of Luce Irigaray.

Origins of Jewish Mysticism

> Mystical experience reveals an absence of any object. Objects are identified with discontinuity, whereas mystical experience, as far as our strength allows us to break off our own discontinuity, confers on us a sense of continuity.[92]

Ezekiel

There is relative consensus that the earliest textual instance of a vision of the chariot/throne of God occurs in Hebrew Bible with the heavenly experience detailed in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel. This prophetic author ostensibly lived during the Babylonian exile of Nebuchadnezzar in the early part of the 6th century B.C.E. and was the first of the prophets to experience prophetic revelation outside of the land of Israel.[93] Although the visionary experience of Ezekiel eventually develops into a corpus of texts

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[91] Given the nature of medieval Jewish mysticism and the kinds of experiences and theologies described in Zoharic literature, it would have been possible to incorporate this later strain of Jewish mystical literature into an investigation such as this. However, I have chosen instead to limit this exploration to the earlier *Hekhalot* genre, upon which the Zohar writer/writers likely drew.

[92] Bataille, *Erotism,* 23.

[93] Peter Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 34-35.

that describe varieties of ascent experience, the Ezekiel passage does not involve a description of a human being from the earthly realm ascending into the divine realm. An implied separation between the home of humans and the divine throne is established; Ezekiel witnesses the chariot/throne *from earth*.[94] The later mystical traditions that build upon this initial experience of the divine throne differ in that the visionary leaves earth and enters into the heavenly realm itself.[95] In this variety of mysticism that develops out of the Ezekiel text the emphasis is placed on a visual experience of and encounter with the divine, as the initial experience expressed in the biblical text involves a clear emphasis placed on what Ezekiel witnesses visually.

Merkavah Mysticism[96]

Early scholars of Jewish mysticism sought to date the emergence of Merkavah mysticism as early as the first century B.C.E.[97] Given the nature of midrash and interpretation of biblical texts, it is certainly possible that strands of Merkavah speculation were extant during the late part of the Second Temple period. However,

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[94] It is possible to read the text as describing Ezekiel as only witnessing the vision through a reflection in the nearby river. Such a reading would further emphasize the separation between divine and human that is maintained in this vision; if Ezekiel sees only a reflected image of the throne rather than gazing upon the throne with his eyes directly, it allows for the visual experience of God to be diluted enough so that it is perceivable by humans.

[95]Ibid., 36.

[96] Peter Schäfer describes any attempt to define mysticism as "hopeless." Mysticism, for Schäfer, is largely culturally dependent, with no universal definition for the phenomenon of mysticism across traditions. Most definitions involve ecstasy, knowledge, and/or feeling as characteristics of mysticism, but it is also important to note that the individuals practicing what we might consider mysticism today did not think of themselves as mystics. At the very least, Schäfer notes that Jewish mystical speculation is devoid of the *unio mystica* (mystical union of the visionary and the divine) which in many Christian mystical traditions is the goal of the mystic. In terms of the *Hekhalot* corpus, mysticism can be loosely described as speculation about the heavenly realms, including but not exclusively limited to (a description of) actual visionary experience of the divine throne. Schäfer, *Origins*, 1-2, 19.

[97]Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), 40.

Gershom Scholem asserts that this "early phase" of Jewish mysticism (which he dates as spanning from the first century B.C.E. to the tenth century C.E.) can be treated as a single phase.[98] While it is certainly possible to make a distinction between the Merkavah speculation that appears in the *Hekhalot* texts and the mysticism of the Zoharic corpus, it would be an oversight to consider these early mystical texts as presenting an entirely unified set of ideas, as scholars since Scholem have noted. David Halperin, Peter Schäfer, and Philip Alexander have all placed the origins of the *Hekhalot* corpus as falling within the 5th-6th centuries of the Common Era.[99] Rachel Elior classifies *Hekhalot* and Merkavah literature as falling within her "third stage" of Jewish mystical tradition, one which takes place following the destruction of the Second Temple, and which shares a "distinct affinity" with earlier priestly traditions.[100]

Relationship to Rabbinic Texts and Priestly Circles

Scholem argued that the *Hekhalot* literature came into being alongside the writings of the Mishnah and the Talmud, asserting that the *Hekhalot* texts were closely related with the priests of the end of the period before the Common Era.[101] Though these texts were likely not solidified in their current forms at this time, it is clear that there is some rabbinic awareness of traditions surrounding ascent speculation and/or practice. Elior argues that this awareness (and ambivalence) is due to the turbulent relationship

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[98] Ibid.

[99] Rachel Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism,* trans. David Louvish (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, [2004] 2004), 232. Elior also notes that M. S. Cohen has placed the *Hekhalot* literature as late as the 9th-10th centuries C.E. See M. S. Cohen, The *Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, Md., 1983).

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid., 232. Elior cites Gershom Scholem's *Major Trends*.

between the secessionist priesthood and the rabbinic writers. Many of the rabbinic texts

of Mishnah and Talmud contain reports of halakhic debates, as the inheritors of the

Zadokite priesthood were consolidated into the new leadership of the Hasmonean

dynasty.[102] These legal debates, then, are not solely acting as clarifications of laws from

Hebrew Bible texts; the rabbinic writings are also functioning as establishing the

legitimacy of one group over that of another. Many of the earlier traditions that were

considered important to the priestly inheritors are downplayed or even over-written by

rabbinic writers.

The evolution of rabbinic interpretation of Bible involved textual study,

interpretation, and debate. According to Elior, this would have been outside of a Zadokite

priestly understanding of scripture, which would have included allowance for a

continuation of divine revelation.[103] Elior also describes the complex issues surrounding

the Book of Ezekiel itself. The prophetic text includes priestly and sacrificial laws in its

later chapters (40-48) that explicitly differ from and even contradict laws laid out in

Torah. This conflict could additionally stem from the central position of Ezekiel for the

Zadokite lineage.[104]

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[102]Ibid., 204.

[103] Ibid., 206. An interesting example of this perspective can be found in the tractate Bava M'tzi'a of the Babylonian Talmud. A particular rabbinic sage (Rabbi Eliezer) in this text is engaged in a legal argument. To argue his point he causes a carob tree to uproot itself, an aqueduct to reverse direction, and the walls of the study hall to lean. As a result, the other rabbis involved in the debate vote to excommunicate him on the basis that "one does not cite *halakhic* proof from a carob tree [stream]." Rabbi Yirmeya goes on to say: "Since the Torah was already given at Mount Sinai, we do not regard a Divine Voice, as You already wrote at Mount Sinai, in the Torah: 'After a majority to incline' (Exodus 23:2)." B. B.M. 59a-b. This particular instance illustrates the idea that encounters with the Divine (at least in the form of hearing a voice) was possible, but could not be used to support an argument of *halakha*. The only true way to establish legal precedent (so to speak) was through a rabbinic majority, *not* through personal experience of the divine.

[104] Ibid., 207. Elior cites Zimmerli, Eichrodt, Haran, and Brooke, all of whom discuss the elements in the book of Ezekiel that deviate from the laws of the Temple in one or more ways. W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel:*

Rabbinic texts also convey a hesitance with regard to the study of the book of Ezekiel, and Ezekiel's vision of the Merkavah is no exception. B. Ḥag. 13a describes the study of the Ezekiel vision as dangerous in itself: "The Rabbis taught: There once was a child who was reading from the Book of Ezekiel in the house of his teacher, and he understood the [verses regarding] the Chashmal, and fire came out from a Chashmal and burned him, and they wanted to hide the book of Ezekiel."[105] The very reading of the *text itself* had the power to maim and kill the individual who read it. The danger comes from something internal to the text, something within the individual, and/or something that Ezekiel experienced through prophetic vision.

Rarely is there a concept in texts of the Talmuds or Mishnah upon which there is rabbinic consensus, and Merkavah speculation is no exception. In a passage describing the disciples of Rabbi Hillel an apparently positive reference to the study of Merkavah mysticism is made:

> It is said of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai that he was not ignorant of anything: Scripture, Mishna, Talmud, Halacha, Aggadah, Biblical grammar, scribal traditions, deductive logic, linguistic connections, astronomical calculations, gematriot, incantations for angels, incantations for demons, incantations to palm trees, proverbs of washwomen, proverbs of foxes, a "Great thing," and a "Small thing."A "Great Thing," is the workings of the Chariot. A "Small thing," is the legal discourses of Abaye and Rava. All of this in order to fulfill what is said, "That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance, and that I may fill their treasuries." (Prov. 8:21) And since this was true of the lowest of them, how much more so was the greatest?[106]

A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, trans. R. E. Clements and J. D. Martin, 2nd vol. (Philadelphia, 1979-83), 327-8, 456-64.; W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, 1970), 559-74.; M. Haran, "Topics in Bible: The Legal Codex of Ezekiel 40-8 and its Relationship to the Priestly School" [Sugyot bamikra. Kovets haḥukin shel yeḥezkel 40-48 veyaḥaso la'eskolah hakohanit], *Tarbiz*, 44 (1975), 30-53.; G. J. Brooke, "Ezekiel in Some Qumran and New Testament Texts," in J. T. Barrera and L. V. Montaner (eds.), *The Madrid Qumran Congress*, 2 vols., Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah, II (Leiden, 1992), I. 317-37.

[105] B. Ḥag. 13a

[106] B. Sukk. 28a

Unlike the Ḥagigah passage, students are actively encouraged to invest their time in the study of *Ma`aseh Merkavah*, the workings of the Chariot in this tractate. For Elior, these obvious discrepancies in rabbinic attitude towards the engagement in Merkavah speculation indicates a lack of uniformity in the desire to suppress texts that were affiliated with the priestly circles.[107] This ambivalence is further illustrated in this Mishnah version of Ḥagigah: "The forbidden degrees may not be expounded before three persons, nor the Account of Creation before two, nor the Account of the Chariot before one alone, unless he is a Sage that already understands of his own knowledge."[108] Here it is clear that the study of *Ma`aseh Merkavah* ("Account of the Chariot") is not considered intrinsically dangerous, nor is it explicitly forbidden across the board. Instead, it is clear that one who is considering engaging in this kind of speculation must use caution; one is only to participate in mystical Chariot speculation if one can understand on one's own. This is further emphasized in the anecdote given at the beginning of b. Ḥagigah 14b:

> Immediately R. El‘azar opened the Account of the Chariot and expounded it. Fire descended from heaven and engulfed all the trees in the field. They opened up and sang out in hymn: "Praise the Lord, O you who are on earth, all sea monsters and ocean depths . . . all fruit trees and cedars . . . Hallelujah!" (Psalms 148:7,9). An angel answered from within the fire: "This is the very Account of the Chariot!"
> [Rabban Yohanan] stood up and kissed him on his head, and said: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who gave a son to our father Abraham who knows how to fathom and investigate and expound the Account of the Chariot . . . Happy are you, O Abraham, that El‘azar ben‘Arakh came from your loins!"[109]

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[107] Elior, *The Three Temples*, 208.

[108] M. Ḥag. 2:1.

[109] b. Ḥagigah 14b

In this section it is clear that the sage in question was only able to engage in Merkavah speculation if he already understood it *on his own.* Group study was not encouraged, nor was passing on knowledge from one adept to an initiate, which reflects the hesitancy of some rabbinic constituencies to allow for study or texts that were too reminiscent of an exclusive priestly tradition.

The rabbinic ambivalence continues in the account of the ascent of the four sages later on in b. Ḥagigah 14b. The following passage demonstrates to the audience the possibility of a successful heavenly ascent journey, while at the same time warning of its potential dangers:

> The Rabbis taught:
> There were four who entered the Orchard (a reference to the Garden of Eden), and they are -
> Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Acher (Elisha Ben Avuya) and Rabbi Akiva.
> Rabbi Akiva said to them:
> "When you reach near the pure marble stones, do not say 'Water, water',"
> Because it is said, "A speaker of lies shall not abide before my eyes (Psalms 101:7)."
> Ben Azzai glanced and died, and upon him the verse says, "It is precious in the eyes of Hashem, the death to his pious (Psalms 116:15)."
> Ben Zoma glanced and was hurt (mentally; he went insane), and upon him the verse says, "Honey you have found—eat [only] your fill, lest you become satisfied of it and regurgitate it (Proverbs 25:16)."
> Acher chopped down saplings [ie. he became a heretic].
> Rabbi Akiva emerged in peace.[110]

The crux of the issue as described in this story is not the *possibility* of an ascent journey. It is understood here that these four men were able to make such a voyage through the use of the right texts and/or practices (though the Ḥagigah passage does not give a great deal of detail about what these might be). All four of the sages theoretically engaged in the same study or practice, and all ended up in the same place; in this case, the Garden of Eden. Where the situation goes awry is in the misunderstanding of reality: Rabbi Akiva

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[110] b. Ḥagigah 14b

warns the others to not be fooled by a series of marble stones and misunderstand them as water. This is the moment that reveals the three other sages to be out of proper place. Though they are understood as learned men on earth, they lack some essential property that enables Akiva to emerge unscathed.

Fundamentally, this experience is desirable. These learned sages are men to be admired. Akiva in particular makes frequent appearances in rabbinic literature, often acting as a larger-than-life hero figure. The writers of this particular passage understood that the drive towards an experience of paradise was strong, but that it came with significant consequences. The loss of self is a potential repercussion to this variety of experience. Ben Azzai literally loses himself, as he dies during the journey. Ben Zoma experiences the loss of self that is experienced through insanity; he loses his mind, or his grip on the reality he had been involved with prior to the ascent. Elisha Ben Avuya's experience is that of a social death: it is through this ordeal that he becomes known as 'Aḥer (literally "other"), the model heretic of rabbinic texts.[111]

Places in the *Hekhalot* corpus also emphasize the puzzling relationship between Merkavah speculation and rabbinic writings. *Sar Torah* links the study of the Torah and Mishnah texts to the journey of the Chariot. Davila notes that this makes it difficult for scholars to maintain a claim that circles which were interested in ascent practices eschewed rabbinic methods of textual exegesis, and vice versa.[112] The close relationship described in the *Sar Torah* text supports the idea that there was a much closer

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[111] David J. Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven, Connecticut: American Oriental Society, 1980), 17. Halperin refers to stories in b. Ḥagigah 15b that describe the heresies of Elisha Ben Avuya/'Aḥer, including one in which 'Aḥer cuts a schoolboy to pieces.

[112] Davila, *Hekhalot Literature*, 165.

relationship between Merkavah mystics and classical rabbinic writers, and that individuals engaged in Merkavah speculation were not merely reactionaries to what could be described as an oppressive Talmudic regime.[113] It becomes clear in this text that at least some of the writers of the *Hekhalot* genre were very much in support of the kinds of textual study that the rabbinic sages touted. Conversely, it is possible that a group or groups of rabbinic sages were also engaged in Merkavah speculation, which would indicate that rabbis of the Talmudic period were not in unanimous opposition to Merkavah speculation, an idea discussed by Elior.

Hekhalot Zutarti also describes a relationship between an ascent journey and divine revelation. The text places an emphasis on the revelation and use of names, and begins with a claim that Moses ascended to God.[114] This has the immediate effect of forging a direct relationship between a major biblical figure and the ascent practices that are described later on in the text. These ascent practices are therefore to be understood as something intrinsic to the study of Bible and Mishnah. Placing heavenly ascent in the context of Moses establishes it as old, and especially given the association of Moses with divine revelation of Torah, institutes ascent practices as an inherent part of Torah itself.

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[113] Scholem describes the function of religion as to "destroy the dream-harmony of Man, Universe and God," to which mysticism is a response: it seeks to return to the epoch of the "childhood of mankind." Scholem, *Major Trends*, 7.

[114] Davila, *Hekhalot Literature*, 200.

The Body as Site of Conflict

Howard Eilberg-Schwartz discusses the contradictory mentality surrounding the

body in his essay, "The Problem of the Body for the People of the Book."[115] He notes

that the rabbis of 200-600 C.E. are the inheritors of a tradition in which "humans are

understood as created in the image of God, yet God has 'no-body'—neither others with

whom to interact nor a fully conceptualized body with which to do it."[116] This

demonstrates an irreconcilable conflict, as the biblical conception of humans as bearing

resemblance to God would imply that there is some original form to mimic, yet

conceptualizing God as formless and bodiless suggests that humans, too, have no forms

or bodies—a fact which we can prove to be altogether untrue simply by looking down at

our own. Following theorists such as Max Gluckman, Mary Douglas, and Victor Turner,

Eilberg-Schwartz finds that an object situated between competing motivations is often

both exciting and disturbing. The object in question will be the source of a great number

of legal restrictions, which serve to not only regulate and stabilize the precarious problem

but also to shield it from view so that the original contradiction is no longer evident.[117]

Problematic objects, such as the body in ancient Judaism, become the sites for many legal

constraints, as well as symbols for other religious issues.

Eilberg-Schwartz also goes on to discuss how regulations around the body

become a part of Jewish literature. It is the priestly book of Leviticus that contains many

strictures around bodily boundaries, often focusing specifically on what passes in and out

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[115] Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, "The Problem of the Body for the People of the Book," in *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 17-46.

[116] Ibid., 2.

[117] Ibid., 3.

of different bodily orifices (including food, semen, blood, and sexual discharges) and cases in which the body's integrity has been breached (such as with contaminating skin diseases, or accidental, congenital, or intentional disfiguration).[118] Here Eilberg-Schwartz offers a criticism of Mary Douglas, who has suggested that the body is a microcosm of society and that the Levitical restrictions, therefore, demonstrate a concern with societal wholeness. Eilberg-Schwartz finds that Douglas fails to explain why the body had become a problem for this one particular group of ancient Jews (i.e., the priestly community). Additionally, why would bodily emissions threaten the wholeness of either the body or the community as a whole?[119] If the issue was only that of the body reflecting society, as Douglas claims, then why is it not so evident within biblical writings from other sources?

For Eilberg-Schwartz, the answer lies in the specific concerns surrounding procreation held by the priestly writers. The priestly writings are often dated to the period during or shortly after the Babylonian exile, which would mean that there were greater pressures to increase the Israelite population.[120] This, however, is not the only factor that might explain the priestly concern with procreation. The priestly community was specifically concerned with patrilineal descent, as all priests were supposed to have descended from Levi or one of his descendants.[121] The priestly obsession with genealogies and their details was a result of the role of kinship in the legitimation of

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[118] Ibid., 5-6.

[119] Ibid., 6-7.

[120] Ibid., 9.

[121] Ibid.

Israelite priesthood. Clearly, sexual reproduction is necessary in order to *have*

descendants.

Issues surrounding sexual reproduction are emphasized in the two competing

Genesis narratives. The creation of humanity in Genesis 2 describes sexual reproduction

as something originally not a part of the human essence: God creates man, then creates

animals as potential companions for man, then later splits off a second human to be

man's partner.[122] Nowhere in this account of creation does reproduction involve

sexuality, which Eilberg-Schwartz claims could lead to a possible reading of this myth as

suggesting that human beings are most like God when they renounce sexual relations.[123]

The creation account of Genesis 1, however, establishes man and woman as created

simultaneously, thereby making sexual reproduction an essential trait of humanity: sexual

differentiation is not an afterthought in this story as it is in the other Genesis account,

indicating that reproduction through the sexual act is part of the original make-up of

humankind.[124]

While this solves the issue of genealogical descent specific to the priestly

community, it does not resolve the issue of a binarily sexed humanity that was

supposedly created in the image of a single God.[125] It is here that the aforementioned

tensions surrounding the human body are most evident for this community. Humans are

unlike God in the sense that they have embodied forms and reproduce sexually. The

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[122] Ibid., 10.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Especially as what immediately follows in the biblical account is the command to "be fruitful and multiply."

[125] Ibid., 11.

"Adam" of the Genesis 1 creation story is an un-sexed humanoid figure; it is through sexual un-differentiation that "Adam" is like God.[126] The sexual aspects of humanity are associated with animals, and sex is seen as something to engage in because of the command from God to reproduce.[127] A new tension emerges between the need to obey God and reproduce sexually, and the need to be like God.

Though it is clear that there is a denial of the existence of an embodied God for the Levitical community, other Israelite sources include references to different aspects of a divine body. Ezekiel 1, understood as the starting point for Merkavah speculation, includes a reference to a heavenly form that has the appearance of a human.[128] Other texts also contain references to parts of the body of God, such as hands and feet. It is understood in Exodus 33 that Moses is to hide himself when God passes by so that he will not be harmed by seeing God's face. This would imply that God does in fact have a physical form, it is just not one that is (or one that should be) immediately visible to the human eye.[129] Eilberg-Schwartz also notes the difference between having the form of a body and the actual experience of material embodiment: God might have a form that is human in appearance, but this does not mean that God's experience of human-ness is at all the same as that of actual human beings. The problem of human embodiment,

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[126] Ibid., 14.

[127] The command for humans to "be fruitful and multiply" in Gen. 1:28 parallels the command for animals to reproduce in Gen. 1:22. Ibid.

[128] Ibid., 15.

[129] Ibid., 15-16.

therefore, has still not been solved. God might have a human form, but does not experience death, sexual intercourse, etc.[130]

The sexuality of God poses a particular problem. It is never explicitly clear in biblical texts as to whether or not God has genital organs. As mentioned previously, if God does not have a sex then the sexes of both human males and females is a problem. Alternatively, if God does have sexual organs, they serve no purpose, as the Israelite God is assumed to be alone.[131] This forms the heart of the issue of a visual experience of the divine. In the *Hekhalot* literature a visionary is taken on a heavenly tour, as evidenced by the wide use of descriptive imagery found in these texts. If a human ascends or is taken to heaven to witness the divine throne, the sexual organs of God will no longer be a mystery. It will become clear that God either has no sexual organs, or that they have the appearance of either male or female genitalia (or, perhaps, both). In this sense, not only does a visual experience of the deity form the ultimate goal of a mystical ascent journey, but it also creates a point of paradox: learning (and therefore knowing) the sexual nature of the divine will solve the problem posed by the Genesis narratives, but it will also render human sexuality problematic. This experience, therefore, will inevitably be sexual, as the *yored merkavah* (ascent visionary) will encounter the divine in the most intimate of ways. The emphasis placed on this visual climax will be discussed in greater detail in a later section.

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[130] Ibid., 16.

[131] Ibid., 19. The same Genesis 1:26 verse that describes the creation of humans opens with the phrase "let us create." Exegetes have had to jump through interpretive hoops to make this phrase fit in with official Israelite monotheism. The phrase "let us" has commonly been read as a cohortative, potentially referring to angels or other beings dwelling in the heavens rather than to other gods. However, it is possible to read the verse as referring to multiple deities involved in creation, as similar passages in other Near Eastern creation myths indicate, especially as it originates from a time period in Israelite history before the establishment of a strict monotheistic perspective. Ibid., 33.

Luce Irigaray

> Every effort will have been made, however, to keep the eye, at least the eye, from being destroyed by the fires of desire. Wisdom, at its very beginnings, warns against looking directly at the sun, for fear of burning up the membrane at the back of the eye, screen for production and projection of forms in the eye's camera obscura. Finding an economy of light in all its dazzling brilliance, without risk of combustion and death, marks humanity's first steps into philosophy. And just as the sun, even in eclipse, must be observed only *indirectly, in a mirror* on pain of blindness, even so the spirit will serve as an additional reflector that helps us to look upon the Good. In the strictest sense, mortals cannot look upon Good.[132]

Luce Irigaray begins her *Speculum of the Other Woman* with a feminist critique of Freud's work and of philosophy and psychoanalysis in general. She describes the way in which both fields have relegated the feminine to the position of an enigma: psychoanalysis has often conceptualized the relationship between masculinity and femininity as a pairing of active and passive, but this conception fails when one looks at the relationship of mother to child.[133] Mothers are active in relation to their children, causing this model to fall apart; one cannot simply view femininity as an inverted masculinity. Irigaray's theory will be useful in understanding the phallocentric focus on the visual experience that is found in the *Hekhalot* texts.

Irigaray elaborates upon the theme of the female sex as inverted in her 1977 work *This Sex Which is Not One*. She describes the feminine sex as having always been "conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters."[134] Irigaray finds that this begins at the level of biology, as the female sex organ is conceived in relation to the male as representing an inversion: The vagina is conceived of as a "non-sex, or a masculine organ

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[132] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman,* trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985 [1974]), 147.

[133] Ibid., 16.

[134] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 1985 [1977]), 23.

turned back upon itself, self-embracing."[135] The very relation between the two organs is that of existence (the penis) and lack (the vagina). Female pleasure, in this system, is autoerotic; Irigaray describes the vagina as self-caressing without the need for an outside instrument, such as a hand. However, it is the very act of (heterosexual) sexual intercourse that disrupts the innate female sexuality. The penetration of the penis into the vagina represents a violent break in that results in an opened sex organ (or "hole") that no longer knows "the pleasure of its own touch."[136]

In Irigaray's formulation, the sexuality of woman depends upon that of man; she exists only as an object of male fantasy.[137] The desire she feels is not her own, and any pleasure she takes in such a union is masochistic. For Irigaray, female desire is unknown: "she will not say what she herself wants; moreover, she does not know, or no longer knows, what she wants."[138] Woman's desire has become subsumed into the masculine social order, and does therefore not exist on its own.

Irigaray describes the primary focus of the masculine social order as visual whereas female eroticism takes its pleasure from touching rather than looking.[139] Masculine form differentiation therefore forces woman to be passive, as she must become merely something beautiful to look at. Simultaneously, her sexual organ represents "*the horror of nothing to see,*" as the vagina appears literally as a hole in the body, lacking a

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[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., 24.

[137] Ibid., 25.

[138] Ibid.

[139] Ibid., 26.

form of its own.[140] Woman cannot be one, as she does not possess the marker of the individual (the phallus), but she can additionally not be counted as two in a culture that sees everything in terms of individual units. Her sexual organ has to be counted as none, as it is not one organ: the contact of the two lips of the vagina prevent a possibility of separating what is being touched from what is doing the touching.[141] In this way, woman comes to be defined only in opposition to man and as a part of masculinity. She exists only on the margins of or as the excess outside of masculine subjectivity.[142]

Irigaray also discusses how theories of "the subject" have always been appropriated by "the masculine."[143] Woman cannot ever be a subject within the imaginary of the masculine social order, and any identification of woman with the masculine subject will force herself into the position of object. Language specifically is a focus for Irigaray, as she finds (in true Lacanian fashion) that one must enter language in order to become a subject.[144] It is through seeing that one is able to differentiate forms, to divide the world into the subject and the object, and to know that one possesses that great marker of subjectivity, the phallus. In this way, the eye of man is the substitute for the penis, and the two can be understood as synonymous.[145] Luce Irigaray's analysis of the masculine social order as fundamentally reliant upon the exclusion or marginalization of

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[140] Ibid. Emphasis Irigaray's.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid., 30.

[143] Irigaray, *Speculum*, 133.

[144] Ibid., 143. Jacques Lacan is known, in part, for his work on structural linguistics. He found that there was a barrier between the words we use and the meanings we attempt to convey. The material (or verbal) element therefore has priority over the internal meanings. Darian Leader and Judy Groves, *Lacan: A Graphic Guide* (Minneapolis: Icon Books Ltd., 1995), 39.

[145] Ibid., 45.

feminine sexuality will become useful in the examination of *Hekhalot* literature in this thesis. Additionally, Irigaray's analysis of the visual focus of the masculine will be of great importance for the understanding of the ascent journey and experience as primarily a visual one.

The Erotic & Sexual Dimensions of the *Hekhalot* Corpus

This section will read a variety of texts from the *Hekhalot* literary corpus. The aim here is not to provide a close reading of any particular text, but to critically examine common themes that span the genre as a whole. I will examine the texts of the genre as manifesting a *sexual* core, operating on the understanding of sexuality from a psychoanalytic perspective. Therefore I take "sexual" to mean that which is repetitive and overwhelming, that which the human is inexorably pulled towards, and that which disrupts and/or ruptures the self. In a similar vein, I will examine the erotic components of the texts, taking eroticism to mean "assenting to life up to the point of death."[146]

Ascent/Assent: Rising to the Occasion (Foreplay)

One of the major themes of *Hekhalot* literature and Merkavah speculation is heavenly ascent. Here I will focus on this overall theme; in the following chapter I will investigate closely the ascent narrative found in "3 Enoch." Five of the major texts of the *Hekhalot* corpus contain both a description of a heavenly ascent journey, as well as actual instructions for engaging in ascent practice.[147]

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[146] Bataille, *Erotism*, 11.

[147] The macroforms of *Hekhalot Rabbati, Hekhalot Zutarti, Sar Torah, Ma`aseh Merkavah,* and *Merkavah Rabbah* all contain examples of instructions for ascent praxis. *Sar Torah* describes in much

Hekhalot Rabbati presents two varieties of practices that are involved in heavenly ascent. A number of hymns are sprinkled throughout the text, manifesting as both descriptive and prescriptive; heavenly entities are described as reciting the hymns, while it is also understood that humans are to recite these hymns during the heavenly journey.[148] Chapter 94 refers to a man (human) singing certain songs and making the journey to the chariot.[149] For Davila, this indicates that the hymns were intended to be used by humans, especially given the later information in chapter 251 that Rabbi Akiva learned these songs when he stood before God's throne. It is also clear that these songs that are used by humans are the same ones that the heavenly beings themselves sing. These are given in the context of daily worship both in heaven and on earth, which indicates a level of congruence between the two realms.[150] This can be understood as a level of continuity between humanity and the divine; human practice is revealed to be merely a mirror image of what takes place in the heavens. The dissolution of the human self does not occur at the moment of ascension; rather, it has the potential to take place on earth, at any given time.

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greater detail the ritual practices that a human should engage in in order to experience an ascent journey. Davila, *Hekhalot Literature*, 145. *Hekhalot Zutarti* focuses more on the use of divine names, but does so in a context that is intended to be used for an ascent practice; instructions for ritual practices are given towards the end of the text. Ibid., 196. The texts of *Ma`aseh Merkavah* and *Merkavah Rabbah* do not have as detailed a description of ritual practices for the purpose of ascent, but the two also contain a number of prayers and adjurations that can potentially be used in a ritual context. Ibid., 250, 307.

[148] Ibid., 45.

[149] Ibid., 56.

[150] Ibid., 45, 90-97.

Repetition: Building and Interruption (The Act)

The hymns and prayers found in the *Hekhalot* texts demonstrate the use of

repetition as well as the disruptive aspect of the literary genre. These hymns make use of

repetitive language, and are also repeated throughout many of the texts. For example, in

Hekhalot Rabbati certain "Songs of Threefold Holiness" are described in chapters 94

through 106, and similar songs appear in chapters 152 through 169.[151] While each set of

hymns use slightly different language, it is clear that they are all to be used for the same

purpose: to praise God. Additionally, as mentioned earlier the similar aims of these

groups of songs serve to illustrate a level of sameness between the two realms. The use of

repetitive language will come to its fullest form in the text of "3 Enoch," which will be

examined in greater detail in a later section.

The repetition of these hymns throughout *Hekhalot Rabbati* as well as throughout

the other texts of the *Hekhalot* genre also creates a facet of disruption within the texts

themselves. For example, in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* text, the hymns are interspersed

throughout the narrative portions of the text. Following the first portion of hymns that are

cited as those sung by humans, there is a description of a proclamation from Rome

against four prominent sages. This is included as a prelude to a description of an ascent

(descent) journey or R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah, who makes this journey in order to get a

heavenly response to the Roman decree.[152] This narrative is then interrupted by another

set of hymns, this time attributed to the heavenly beings. *Hekhalot Rabbati* also interrupts

the heavenly ascent narrative itself right at the moment of passing over into the seventh

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[151] Ibid., 56-65, 77-90.

[152] Ibid., 66.

and highest heaven. The angels who guard the first six heavenly palaces are listed and

described in chapters 204 through 212, while chapters 213 through 216 interrupt with a

description of the terrifying guards of the final palace, followed by a ill-fitting declaration

of praise for those who successfully complete a heavenly ascent journey.[153] The

description of the horrors (213-215) serve to heighten the emotional intensity of the

ascent journey: such huge and dangerous beings described in such detail give one a clear

picture of how treacherous this journey is for those who wish to remain physically and

psychically intact. This passage is immediately followed by a declaration of praise for

those who make the journey. This makes a clear contrast with the horrors described in the

previous passage, demonstrating a simultaneous push and pull within the human being.

The inclusion of these passages in proximity to one another as well as directly following

a description of the angels of the first six palaces has the effect of shattering the flow of

the narrative, especially as it takes place right before the moment of climax, as the goal of

the ascent is to reach the highest (seventh) heaven.

The narrative of *Hekhalot Rabbati* returns to the actual ascent journey in chapters

219 to 223, giving a description of the procedures for getting past the angels guarding the

first five heavenly palaces.[154] Once again, the account of the progression is interrupted.

Chapters 224 through 228 detail a question. The narrator of the text is aware that the

angels guarding the sixth palace often destroy select individuals who attempt to enter:

> Because the guardians of the entrance of the sixth palace used to destroy (some)
> from the descenders to the chariot, and not among the ones who descend to the
> chariot without authority, they gave orders concerning them and they beat them
> and burned them and they set others in their place. But, the others who stand

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[153] Ibid., 106.

[154] Ibid., 108-111.

instead of them, their nature is also such: they are not afraid, nor does it occur to them to say: Why are we burned? For what reason do we get a beating? Because we destroy (some) from the descenders to the chariot, and not among those who descend to the chariot without authority.[155]

The narrator then asks why the angel states "(some) from the descenders to the chariot" rather than "among the descenders to the chariot."[156] The passage implies that individuals both with and without authority have made the ascent, but it is not the unauthorized ascenders who are attacked. The text is making it clear once again that this is a dangerous endeavor. This interruption is followed by the instructions for entrance into the final two heavenly palaces.

Once the *yored merkavah* has reached the seventh palace, the heavenly guardians say, "Do not fear, O son of the beloved seed! Enter and see the King in his beauty."[157] Gazing upon the divine is the ultimate goal of the ascent journey, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following section. Immediately preceding the arrival of the *yored merkavah* at the throne of God is a list of praises of God as kingly figure:

> He is the upright King,
> He is the faithful King,
> He is the beloved King,
> He is the humble King,
> He is the meek King,
> He is the righteous King.[158]

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[155] Ibid., 112.

[156] Ibid., 115. Davila notes that this passage was difficult to reconstruct. He takes the preposition "from" to indicate that the individuals who are attacked are appointed (as scribes) by the group of descenders to the chariot, but do not themselves belong to this group.

[157] Ibid., 131. "The King in his beauty" appears in other manuscripts as "your eyes shall see a vision," "The King of glory has appeared/appears in His beauty," or "We see the King of glory in his beauty."

[158] Ibid., 131-132.

This series of repetitive phrases occurs directly before the arrival at the divine throne. At this moment, the *yored merkavah* sings a series of praises that are also sung daily by the throne of God itself. The list begins: "May psalm, song, melody, blessing, praise, psalmody, laud, thanksgiving, confessions, illustriousness, music, recitation, rejoicing, shouting, happiness, gladness, chantings, euphony, humility, fineness, truth, righteousness . . . be to ZHRR'L YHWH, God of Israel."[159] The great number of related words used at this particular moment of climax serves to give the sense that all potential synonyms are used and exhausted. This functions to convey the idea that language is insufficient at this point to accurately express what is taking place. At the moment in which the *yored merkavah* approaches the throne, the other beings that are residing in the heavens cover their faces or turn their backs, indicating that this experience is usually something not witnessed by anyone/thing outside of God God's self. The actual *image* that is seen by the *yored merkavah* is not described: the only aspect of God's throne that are made mention of are the songs that the anthropomorphic throne is said to sing.

Sar Torah also contains a depiction of a human encountering the divine throne. The vision is attributed to R. Ishmael, who is quoting R. Akiva in the name of R. Eliezer in the context of the revelation of wisdom related to Torah. At the moment of witnessing the divine throne, the *yordei merkavah* (plural of *yored merkavah*) are said to have fallen on their faces.[160] Unlike *Hekhalot Rabbati* there is no musical recitation to accompany this moment, yet the moment is similarly understood to be overwhelming: the human

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[159] Ibid., 133-134.

[160] Ibid. 180.

visionary is simply unable to handle the experience, which remains obscure to the reader.

God says to the visionaries:

> Why are you falling down and are thrown down on your faces? Stand and sit
> before My throne in the same way that you sit in the academy. And take hold of
> the crown and receive the seal and learn the order of this Prince of Torah: how
> you do it, how you inquire about it, how you make use of it, how they raise up the
> paths of your heart, how your hearts have a vision of Torah.[161]

Though the vision is either too glorious or too horrifying to behold, the visionaries are

nevertheless reprimanded by God and told to sit before the throne, presumably in order to

see whatever is taking place upon it.

Visual Focus: The Phallus and the Eye (Climax)

Elliot Wolfson notes the potential relationship between the hesitation to produce

visual images of the divine and the ambiguity of the gender and sexuality of God.[162]

While the priestly source in Leviticus seems to have more of a fluid understanding of

God as anthropomorphic, the Deuteronomistic author establishes a ban against producing

iconographic representations of God in the Decalogue.[163] According to Wolfson, this is

likely a later interpretation of a prohibition that was already in effect, but it indicates a

reliance upon understanding the voice of God as the "essential and exclusive medium of

revelation."[164] Obviously, the Deuteronomistic prohibition on conceptualizing the divine

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[161] Ibid.

[162] Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994),14.

[163] Ibid.; Deut. 5:8 "You shall not make a statue, any form that is in the skies above or that is in the earth below or that is in the water below the earth." See also Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed: A New View into the Five Books of Moses* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 319.

[164] Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 14.

in concrete visual terms was not universally accepted even within other biblical sources. As mentioned previously, texts such as Ezekiel 1 and Exodus 33 (among others) contain references to parts of the body of God, and even to a vision of the body of God.[165]

These discrepancies indicate a tension between imagining the divine as something greater than the human (and therefore not confined to a human body) and something which shares a fundamental similarity with humankind. The problem of the relationship between the human and the divine and conceptualizing the divine as human-like in shape will continue in Jewish mystical literature: "[T]he problem of visionary experience in Jewish mysticism cannot be treated in isolation from the question of God's form or image."[166] This indicates that the question of the nature of the relationship between visible form and sexuality will be of fundamental importance to the authors of Jewish mystical literature.

Before examining *Hekhalot* literature I will briefly outline the overarching attitudes towards visual perception of God in rabbinic sources. Wolfson discusses the third century compilation of midrashim on Exodus, *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*. A discussion of the revelations of the divine form takes place, in which God is reported to have appeared at various times as a warrior and in others as an old man.[167] This discussion is meant to emphasize the understanding that God is able to reveal himself in

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[165] See Ezekiel 1:26 "Above the expanse over their heads was the semblance of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and on top, upon this semblance of a throne, there was the semblance of a human form," and Exodus 33:22-23 "and, as My Presence passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen" (The New JPS translation). Both of these passages describe a visual experience of a clearly anthropomorphic God. In the Exodus verse, the issue is not whether or not God has a visible form, rather that seeing the *face* of God would be mortally dangerous for a human being; it is without question in this passage that God has a visible form.

[166] Ibid., 23.

[167] Ibid., 33-34.

different forms, and to quell the idea that there might in fact be multiple gods in the heavens.[168] These forms are seen as attributes of a single deity, rather than separate deities, or as different entities that make up parts of a divine whole (as they do within some Christian conception).[169]

Wolfson also discusses the prevalence of discussions about seeing the "divine presence" that takes place in a variety of rabbinic texts. Not only is this experience assumed to be physically real (not purely a vision in the mind, for example), it is also often discussed in highly sexual terms.[170] A commentary from *Wayyikra Rabbah*, for example, describes Moses having "derived pleasure" from the divine Presence though he did not "feast his eyes upon" it.[171] Moses' action is held up in contrast to the actions of Aaron's sons, who feast their eyes upon the Presence after uncovering their heads. Wolfson discusses the substitution of the head/face in this instance as a stand-in for the phallus, a concept discussed by Irigaray. The uncovering of the head/face by Aaron's sons would thus symbolize the uncovering of the phallus, understood for sexual use.[172]

An additional place in rabbinic literature where visual imagery is related to sexuality is in the blinding power of the Presence found in *Pirqe de-Rabbi `Eli`ezer*. Following the Exodus passage in which God claims that a human cannot look upon God's face and live, the rabbinic author claims that Isaac looked upon the divine

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[168] For an expansive discussion of this issue, see Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers Inc., 1977).

[169] Ibid., 40.

[170] Ibid., 42.

[171] Ibid., 42. *Wayyikra Rabbah* 20:10 commenting on the death of Aaron's sons in Leviticus 16:1.

[172] Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 43.

Presence and lost his sight as a result.[173] Here one can see that blindness is linked to, and even becomes a substitute for, death.[174] Here it makes sense to look at this analysis with relation to the previous rabbinic passages in which visual experience is linked to sexual arousal or climax. Death and blindness are equated in *Pirqe R. El.*, and as we have seen previously, the head/face (understood as the part of the body that sees) can be used to represent the phallus. It would appear as though losing one's sight can be equated with losing one's phallus, or at least with impotence. The use of the phallus has been lost, as has the capacity of the phallus-bearer to reproduce sexually. The individual in question has not ceased to live in the literal sense, but the capacity to produce offspring has been eliminated, leading to a social death in the sense that the continuity of one's bloodline (immortality) will be impossible.

It is clear that the rabbinic texts contain a continuation of the tension between the supposed impossibility of depicting the divine visually and the instances in Hebrew Bible where the deity is described in corporeal/anthropomorphic terms. Rabbinic writers from roughly 200-600 C.E. grappled and attempted to make sense of these scriptural inconsistencies. The same tensions will be evident within the mystical literature that emerges towards the end of the classical period of the rabbis and that continues to be generated in the Middle Ages.

Rather than approaching the study of mysticism as something that emerges later in a religious tradition as the result of the solidification of strict codes of law, Wolfson

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[173] The passage cited by the rabbinic passage is Exodus 33:20 "But,' He said, 'you cannot see My face, for man may not see Me and live'" (The New JPS translation).

[174] Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines,* 46.

claims that there cannot be one model applied to all of the given data.[175] He finds that the

relationship between theory and experience is dialectical; certain prior theoretical

assumptions can definitely be seen to influence Jewish mystical visionary experience, but

this does not mean that experience has no influence upon theory and interpretation. Using

Jacques Derrida's method of literary deconstruction, Wolfson approaches the analysis of

mysticism as primarily symbolic: "The vision attested in Jewish mystical sources . . .

reflects the coalescence of spirit and matter, which, in my terminology, renders the

experience in and of itself symbolic."[176] Hava Tirosh-Samuelson neatly summarizes this

approach as the claim that "reality is ultimately linguistical. Language is not simply the

technique we employ to understand reality; it construes reality as much as it veils

reality."[177]

Schäfer warns against approaching or studying the *Hekhalot* genre as a unity.[178]

While Schäfer has a valid concern, Wolfson identifies two major motifs that recur in the

various texts belonging to this tradition: mystical ascent and visionary experience.[179] This

demonstrates that the fundamental element of what makes a text part of the *Hekhalot*

corpus is its description of a visual experience of the divine. The danger involved in

viewing the divine on the throne is an essential part of this experience (a point that is also

made in biblical texts, as discussed earlier). Wolfson provides a translation of a passage

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[175] Ibid., 7.

[176] Ibid., 67.

[177] Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Gender in Jewish Mysticism," in *Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah: New Insights and Scholarship*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (New York, 2011), 204.

[178] Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 152.

[179] Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 82.

from *Hekhalot Rabbati* in which God is described as being impossible to behold upon the heavenly throne:

> He is wrapped when He comes to sit upon the throne of His glory.
> And all over it is inscribed, outside and inside, YHWH YHWH.
> The eyes of no creature can behold it,
> neither the eyes of any being of flesh and blood nor the eyes of His servants.[180]

God is impossible to see upon the throne because he is wrapped in some sort of garment.

The passage goes on to emphasize the enshrouding of God in this garment, noting that it is neither the invisible nature of God, nor the garment that prevents a visual experience; instead, it is the damage that would occur if any were to perceive the throne that prevents the visualization. Wolfson interprets this description as referring to a reversal of sexual imagery related to humans: the garment of glory is worn only when God is upon the throne, at the highest moment, while for humans it is the removal of the garment that indicates sexual activity.[181]

The passage continues:

> The one who looks upon it, or glimpses or sees it,
> his eyeballs are seized by pulsations,
> and his eyeballs emit and send forth flames of fire,
> and they kindle him and burn him up.
> The fire that comes out of the man who looks kindles him and burns him.
> Why?
> Because of the appearance of the eyes of the garment of Zoharariel YHWH,
> God of Israel.[182]

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[180] Translated from the Hebrew text provided in Peter Schäfer, et al., eds. *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1984) § 102. The translation was originally done by Morton Smith, with edits made by Wolfson. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines,* 92.

[181] Ibid., 93. This is found in biblical texts such as Leviticus 18:8 "Do not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife" and Deuteronomy 23:1 "No man shall marry his father's former wife, so as to remove his father's garment" (The new JPS translation). These examples serve to show that covering and uncovering are understood as euphemisms for sexual intercourse.

[182] Ibid., 92.

Here, there is a dual emphasis placed upon eyes. The eyes of the person who sees will suffer the consequences of the vision, and the source of this punishment is described as being the "eyes of the garment."[183] Following the theoretical discussion earlier in this thesis, the eyes in this passage can arguably be read as symbolic representations of the phallus. The "eyes of the garment," then, are a symbol for the divine phallus, which is understandably taboo.[184] Just as in *Pirqe R. El.*, the one who has inappropriately gazed (understood as inappropriately engaged in sexual enjoyment of the divine) will suffer punishment through the eyes.

While this passage (and others like it) clearly emphasizes the danger in a visual experience of the enthroned God, the *Hekhalot* texts simultaneously contain descriptions of a specific individual (*yored merkavah*) who is nevertheless able to successfully gaze upon the divine. This fundamental tension serves to present the visionary experience as something unbearable. The exact moment of the divine enthronement is the moment of sexual ecstasy, a moment Wolfson describes as itself a sexual union of the feminine throne and the masculine glory. The individual who has completed the ascent, then, is witnessing a divine coupling.[185]

This is evident in a passage from *Hekhalot Rabbati*, in which the throne of God is anthropomorphized. The witness to the union cheers, crying out, "Gladden the King who (sits) upon you, as the joy of the bridegroom in his nuptial chamber."[186] Here the analogy

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[183] עינים של חילוק in N8128 manuscript, עיניים של חלוק in O1531, עינים של חלוק in M22, M40, and D436. עינים של חולוק in V228 and עיניים שלחלוק in B238, *Synopse*, 48-49. All variations can be rendered as "the eyes of the robe."

[184] See the discussion of Eilberg-Schwartz's article earlier in which the revelation of a divine sexual organ poses a problem for the conception of humans as created in the image of God.

[185] Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 99.

[186] Ibid., 100. Translated by Wolfson from Schäfer's *Synopse* § 154.

is made clear: the seating of the glory upon the throne is like a sexual union. Further,

Halperin has noted that the imagery of splitting the heavens functions as a metaphor for

the opening of the female genitalia.[187] Here it would appear as though Wolfson is making

the claim that this moment of enthronement consists of a union of the masculine and

feminine aspects of the divine, as the many-eyed ḥayyot (with eyes understood as

representative of the phallus) split the firmament like a sieve.[188] However, based on the

conception of the relationship between masculine and feminine that Luce Irigaray

provides, it could be argued that both of these aspects of God are masculine ones. If God

is assumed in classical rabbinic and Merkavah speculation to be an indivisible unity (at

least with regard to a figure that is assumed to take a separate hypostatic form), it would

be impossible for this figure to truly be conceptualized as masculine and feminine.

Alternatively, if the throne is assumed to be an entity separate from the divine

glory, it would be possible for it to represent a feminine figure in the Irigarayan sense that

the feminine object is subsumed into the masculine subject. In this way, the throne is

separate from the divine glory, but becomes the passively receptive object to the glory's

subject. The danger posed to the witness of the divine union (the *yored merkavah*) lies in

the very act of witnessing itself. As the eyes represent an extension of (or substitute for)

the phallus, witnessing the divine in the act of coitus would be threatening the

subjectivity, or very existence, of the divine. Seeking to see (read "penetrate") the divine

glory in this manner relegates the glory to the position of object within this particular

linguistic realm.

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[187] Ibid., 103; David Halperin, "A Sexual Image in *Hekhalot Rabbati* and Its Implications." *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6:1-2 (1987), 120.

[188] Schäfer's *Synopse* § 189; Halperin, 119.

Conclusions

The previous sections have demonstrated how the Merkavah speculation found within the *Hekhalot* literature has both sexual and erotic dimensions. In reading this genre of mystical literature alongside the theorists Georges Bataille and Luce Irigaray certain tensions have arisen which call into question some of these scholars' initial assumptions.

Hekhalot literature is undoubtedly sexual. Reading texts from this literary corpus alongside Bataille in the first part of the thesis illuminates the erotic quality of this particular strain of mysticism. While Bataille mainly examines literature and practice within the mysticism of medieval Christianity, it is clear that aspects of his analyses ring true for the Merkavah texts. While his interpretations of religious experience might not map perfectly onto the relationships between human and divine described within *Hekhalot* texts, it is clear that the interactions of these two realms of thought interrogate the nature of the self and subjectivity. The fulfillment of the ascent, or the moment of climax, is accompanied by a lack of description as to what exactly is witnessed. This is the moment in which words fail the *yored merkavah* and the authors of the *Hekhalot* texts. In the conception presented by Bataille, this is the erotic moment of continuity with the divine, yet incorporating an understanding of Irigaray's analysis of the feminine perhaps yields a better conception of what precisely takes place at this moment of self-dissolution. If, as Irigaray claims, the social order and the language it uses are constructed solely upon a masculine understanding of the world, then this moment of loss of self/subject is one in which the *yored merkavah* accesses the feminine.

CONCLUSION

> Thus, totally devoid of what we have been trained to think of as "sexual content,"
> this remarkable art teaches us to read the unreadable sexual by the excessive
> visibility of its subversion of narrative readability.[189]

The texts of the *Hekhalot* genre convey a sexual character rather than a sexual content. The form of the texts themselves demonstrate a narrative that is deeply unsettling and disruptive to the structured self. Throughout "3 Enoch" and the other texts that are included in the *Hekhalot* genre there is a recurrent use of narrative interruption. Pieces of traditional narrative are broken up by Merkavah hymns, or (as is the case in "3 Enoch") large lists of adjectives and descriptive phrases. The macroforms that these texts have been shaped into are thus able to guide the reader through a series of climaxes, rather than including one climax within a single plot. This has the effect of forcing the reader to experiencing what Bersani calls "intersubjective shocks:" the reader's psyche is shattered as it is made to experience the painful pleasure of its own disruption.[190] The repetition used throughout these texts further serves to reveal the sexual core of the *Hekhalot* literature.

Hearkening back to Freud, the conception of sexuality begins at infancy with the insistent repetition of first breastfeeding, and later thumb sucking. The infant is forced to depend upon the parent (specifically the mother, for Freud) in order to alleviate its

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[189] Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body*, 115.

[190] Ibid., 114.

hunger. This reliance upon and engagement with the outside world satisfies the child's need, but is at the same time overwhelming to its new senses. The repetitive phrases in the *Hekhalot* texts mirror that of the very essence of sexuality. At the same time, the texts use a large number of descriptive adjectives and images. Synonymous terms are used in succession, which serves both to re-emphasize the repetitive nature of the texts, as well as to overwhelm the reader. An experience of "too much-ness" is therefore achieved through reading any of the *Hekhalot* texts.

Though the *Hekhalot* texts are clearly literary works, they function to convey the idea that language is insufficient to fully describe an experience of the divine. This is achieved through the over-emphasis placed on synonymous adjectives as well as through the priority given to visual experience in the texts. Although the piling on of adjectives is linguistic in nature, the sheer number of similar words that are used renders the individual terms themselves meaningless; words upon words are used to describe a single phenomenon to the point where they stop having any real significance to the human brain: it becomes simply too much for the brain to comprehend all at once. For Bataille, this is where intimacy occurs. This intimacy requires a disruption or destruction of the individuality of the person. As the *yored merkavah* ascends into the heavenly realm, he assents to life up to the point of death; the visionary's sense of self must be shattered in order to achieve this journey.[191] As was seen in the "3 Enoch" story about the punishment of `Aḥer and Meṭaṭron this moment of intimacy can have extensive consequences; both parties are punished. This details a moment of re-establishing the boundaries of the self after the overwhelming experience of ascent/assent has disrupted the order within the

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[191] I use a masculine pronoun here because the rabbinic sages of the Late Antique period were men. The *yordei merkavah* described in the texts are all understood to be men, as were the authors of the texts and the individuals engaged in Merkavah speculation.

heavenly realm. Meṭaṭron is mistakenly perceived by `Aḥer to be the deity; here the concept of *unio mystica* as a blending of physical selves is rejected and replaced with a visual experience of the divine itself.

It is at this point that the emphasis placed on the visual within "3 Enoch" and the *Hekhalot* genre becomes crucial for analysis. Just as the use of overwhelming, repetitive adjectives and disruptive narrative are central to the genre, visual experience is given a position of prime importance. In order to fully understand the themes of this literary genre it is necessary to focus on them individually, as well as on how they function together. The emphasis placed on visual descriptors is apparent from a surface level as many of the repetitive phrases describe something that the visionary is seeing within the heavenly realms. For both Irigaray and Wolfson the eye can serve to take the place of the phallus. In this sense, the *Hekhalot* literature is not only sexual in its form, it is also distinctly masculine/male in the way that it is presented. The central focus of the eye as well as the literal act of penetrating into the heavenly realm fit within a masculine way of understanding the world, according to Irigaray. The multiple climaxes that take place in the literature as a result of the frequent interruptions and the meshing of different narrative and literary forms also mirrors Irigaray's description of female sexuality. Female sexuality is conceptualized here as always multiple; the vaginal organ touches itself indefinitely.[192] The single climax that is inherent in male sexuality is not found in this literature.

Additionally, the specific goal of the ascent journey that is described in the *Hekhalot* literature is to visually witness the deity and/or the divine throne. In other

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[192] Irigaray, *The Sex Which is Not One*, 26.

mysticism traditions this type of journey sometimes involves a clear dissolution of the self through a unification with the divine. What is distinct in this particular strand of Jewish mystical literature is the human visionary's maintenance of a distinct self throughout the journey.[193] The intimacy that is attained with the divine does not involve a physical dissolution of the self in the way that Bataille describes its taking place in the Christian mystical tradition with which he was familiar. At the same time, it is without a doubt that this intimacy occurs during the ascent experience. Just as language fails for Bataille, the *yored merkavah* is unable to accurately describe the vision that he experiences. Details of the visual components of the levels of heaven are given, as are details about the various angels and heavenly beings that make up and guard the gates of the different realms. The large quantity of descriptive terms used actually serve as a sharp contrast to the lack of clear descriptive visual imagery that takes place at the moment of seeing the divine throne itself.

It is clear here, as evidenced in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* text described above, that the vast majority of the time the "body" of God is concealed both in the sense that it resides in the highest heaven (which is usually inaccessible to humans) as well as by being clothed by some sort of garment or shroud. The act of witnessing the moment that this shroud is lifted or garment is removed is the moment at which the visionary experiences intimacy with the divine through the phallic gaze: a gaze which

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[193] This is especially made clear through the use of the phrase *yored merkavah* to describe the visionary. This literally translates to "descender to the chariot." Rather than describe the visionary in terms of his successful ascent, the description places more importance on the successful *descent* from the chariot after the vision is completed. This demonstrates that the visionary is assumed to maintain a physical form (or to reattain one) after the vision of the divine throne has taken place. James R. Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot: The People Behind the* Hekhalot *Literature* (Boston: Brill, 2001).

simultaneously propels the visionary into a space that is not covered by the conventional linguistic/textual understanding of the world.

Given the importance of text for the writers of the Rabbinic period, it is understandable that this variety of speculation would have been conceived of as potentially dangerous. As discussed by Elior, not only do the *Hekhalot* texts retain traces of an earlier priestly tradition that many of the rabbinic writers were hesitant to support (and often openly hostile towards), they also undermine an authority that is maintained through the careful attention to detail that is established through textual study. The self-shattering experience that is attained through the reading of "3 Enoch" and the *Hekhalot* texts is also particularly unsettling for a group who is concerned with preserving a solid identity with a clear chain of textual transmission.

A final thought I would like to focus on as this thesis comes to a close is the question of what is *produced* through a reading of Bataille, Bersani, Irigaray, and the *Hekhalot* corpus. It has become clear that the *Hekhalot* literature reveals a place of self-disruption, and through reading Bataille and Bersani it appears that that self-disruption is distinctly masculine in nature. If only Bataille and Bersani are relied upon, one could potentially see this loss as functioning as the feminine in this space. However, Ladelle McWhorter clarifies Irigaray's position on this subject: "We are not reduced to reiterating absence as the only possible other of the same;" in other words, conceptualizing the place of femininity as only at the location of dissolution of the masculine self/subject does not in itself "challenge his solipsistic sovereignty."[194] McWhorter identifies the dissolution of the boundaries of the self that Bataille describes as having one of two potential outcomes:

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[194] Ladelle McWhorter, "Is There Sexual Difference in the Work of Georges Bataille?" International Studies in Philosophy 25, no. 1 (1995): 36.

either the "phallic self" is overcome, or a fusion of two distinct entities into one takes

place. She notes that for Bataille, this can only be between "two finite and previously

bonded beings;" true communicative ecstasy cannot take place with a transcendent deity,

as *both* beings must be lacerated.[195]

McWhorter asserts that the ecstatic experience of the mystic (as described by

Bataille) never risks sacrificing or destroying the "self" of God.[196] This is perhaps true

within the Christian mystical tradition, in which typically the mystic visionary

experiences a loss of self through subsumption into the Godhead. In this scenario the

mystic takes the place of Bataille's female who is dissolved as the "other" at the hand of

her masculine partner. I would like to argue that the experience of the visionary in the

Hekhalot literature calls Mcwhorter's (and Bataille's) assumption into question. Through

the *yored merkavah*'s visual experience of the deity upon the divine throne God *does* risk

God's self. The *yored merkavah* is not dissolved into the unified Godhead; rather, the

visionary experiences a self-altering event which leaves both him and the deity

changed.[197]

This alteration is most clearly displayed in the Enoch/ Meṭaṭron narrative in "3

Enoch." Here, the original visionary or ascender, Enoch, has his selfhood effaced, yet the

essential being has not been lost. Enoch and Meṭaṭron are still the same person/angel in

essence, but are also profoundly different in form: Enoch is assumed to be the size and

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[195] Ibid., 38. It is additionally worth noting that the deity is quite literally lacerated in Christianity, as Jesus is experiences crucifixion.

[196] Ibid.

[197] It has been noted to me that the dissolution of the visionary into the divine that takes place in much of Christian mysticism at times involves the claim that a remnant of the divine remains within the visionary, which would also suggest a kind of lacerating of the deity.

shape of a standard human while Meṭaṭron is huge and possesses a large number of eyes and wings. One must be destroyed for the other to exist, but they are not separate beings. While this transformation is explained to the reader in the narrative, its essential catalyst (i.e., the encounter with the divine) is inexplicable. Still, it is clear that something has taken place. Enoch/ Meṭaṭron is neither fully Enoch nor fully Meṭaṭron, is not really both and not really either. Enoch/ Meṭaṭron's existence comes to illustrate Irigaray's labial "twoness" that marks the female body.

The relationality between self and other is also discusses by Lynne Huffer, who is writing as a scholar of both feminist and queer theories. Her *Are the Lips a Grave?* offers some suggestions for incorporating Bersani and Irigaray into a discussion of *Hekhalot* literature.[198] Huffer returns to Irigaray's linking of writing with the visual. If both men and women are wrapped up in the phallic nature of the act of writing (and looking), where can we find something outside of this?[199] As Huffer puts it, "How can we write differently?"[200] Her solution is not concrete: the answer has "no clear form as a cultural product or thing to be named, but rather lies in the relation I call reading."[201] This act is relational; Huffer returns to the image of two lips to understand a mutual model of subjectivity. Lips on lips "refuse the closure of truth" and destabilize "epistemic certainty."[202] There is constant interplay of self and other, one which does not allow for

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[198] Lynne Huffer, *Are the Lips a Grave?: A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

[199] Following Irigaray, Huffer notes that women (and especially lesbians) are associated with and have been kept silent. However, silence cannot be rendered, by its very nature it is an absence. Ibid., 132.

[200] Ibid., 124.

[201] Ibid.

[202] Ibid.

subjective stability, but also does not result in the utter destruction of the self. Instead, the "self" is lost in the act of reading and in what is being read. Nothing, no product or solid artifact, is produced through this practice.[203] The feminine cannot be spoken.

The affective state that is produced through the experience of reading "3 Enoch" and the *Hekhalot* texts is not something that can be codified. The closest we come to a solidified expression of the result of a heavenly ascent journey is in the narrative told by Enoch/ Meṭaṭron to R. Ishmael in the "3 Enoch" microform. The experience is only conveyed through expressions of near-impossibility. The Enoch/ Meṭaṭron narrative mirrors the self-shattering, self-transforming experience that the reader undergoes when reading these texts. Both involve interplay between two discontinuous beings, which become continuous at various points through the experience. The climactic moment that it witnessed by the *yored merkavah* is impossible; it is feminine because it cannot be solidified into language. If the encounter with the divine is truly mutual, if both the deity and the visionary are vulnerable at this moment then this moment can be seen as this interplay. Two are one, are two again, are still two, but oneness remains.

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[203] While one is reading, one experiences a certain "loss" of self within the text. As soon as one becomes aware of this, however, one is no longer in the space of loss. It is also impossible to fully explain this state to another; one cannot describe, one can only experience.

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