a look at this incredible sight, why the bush is not burning." And YHWH saw [*wayyarə' YHWH*] that he turned aside to look, so the deity called out to him from the midst of the bush [*wayyiqrā' 'ēlāyw 'ĕlōhîm mittôk hassəneh*] and said, "Moses! Moses!" And he said, "I'm here." Then he said, "Don't come over here. Take your sandals off your feet, because the place where you are standing—it is holy ground." And he said, "I am the deity of your father [*'ānōkî 'ĕlōhê 'ābîkā*], the deity of Abraham, the deity of Isaac, and the deity of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at the deity [*yārē' mēhabbîṭ 'el-hā'ĕlōhîm*].

Verse 2 describes the messenger appearing to Moses in the burning bush, but YHWH is the one observing Moses' actions in verse 4, a verse that also states that the *'ĕlōhîm* called out from the bush. This may exploit the semantic vagaries of the term *'ĕlōhîm*—a divine messenger could be referred to as a deity, or as Sommer (2009, 41) designates it, "a lower ranking divine being"—or it may have been understood to refer specifically to YHWH, in which case, the author has understood the identities of the messenger and of YHWH to have merged, and for some reason is highlighting that merger. In verse 6, the entity identifies themselves as the deity of Moses' ancestors. If we understand verse 2 to contextualize verses 3–6, as most do, then the messenger is appropriating the diving name, identifying themselves as YHWH. Here's the rub, though: the simple removal of the single occurrence of the Hebrew word *mal'āk* from verse 2 results in a perfectly consistent and clear narrative about the deity YHWH appearing to Moses in a burning bush (cf. Fischer 2007).

I will argue in following that that conflation of the identities of YHWH and their messenger is rooted in the textual interpolation of the word *mal'āk* in passages that initially narrated the deity's own direct interactions with humanity. As the deity's profile accreted more abstractions and more rhetoric associated with their transcendence and the dangers of looking upon the divine glory, and the deity was distanced from certain earthly acts, earlier passages were edited with the addition of the word *mal'āk* in order to obscure the deity's presence and replace it with that of the messenger (traditionally, "angel"). This resulted in some narratives in which the messenger self-identifies as the deity, or in which an individual refers to their interlocuter alternatively as the deity and as their messenger. These circumstances appear to have been acceptable to the communities in which the texts ultimately circulated, which has caused a great deal of debate among scholars. The theoretical framework of communicable divine agency I have developed in this book, however, accounts for all the idiosyncrasies of these narratives, including those of a late passage in Exod 23 that explicitly distinguishes the two entities, but also seems to appeal to communicable agency in an attempt to accommodate and account for their conflation.