SOME REMARKS ON THE SPECIFICITY OF THE NOTION OF 'JEWISH MYSTICISM' FOR GERSHOM SCHOLEM

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Defining the aim of his illuminating *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Gershom Scholem stated that his attempt was "a critical appreciation involving a certain philosophical outlook, as applied to the life texture of Jewish history, which in its fundamentals I believe to be active and alive to this day" (Scholem 1995: 3)[1]. The 'texture' here in question is for Scholem the continuous, organic life of Jewish mysticism. We must say from the beginning that for Scholem Jewish mysticism is not a phenomenon (that 'happens") *in* Jewish history, not even only a very 'complex' or 'incredibly rich' one, it is *the texture* of this history – it is somehow the 'justification', the 'foundation' of this history itself, at least in a period of it, corresponding, as we will see, to a certain "stage of the religious consciousness".

To put it briefly, in the next pages our own intention is to dwell on the concept of 'Jewish mysticism' in Scholem's view. We mention that we will try to reach the objectives of such an endeavor basing our research mainly on his remarkable book from which we have just quoted. Before effectively starting our brief analysis, it is worthwhile to observe a certain kind of tension contained in the above quotation, a tension between the 'theoretical' (objective, scientific, etc.) dimension of the surveyor's approach of a tradition and the real life of the tradition itself in which he is almost completely emerged – somehow the tension of being spectator and actor (but not the director!) of the same play. Moreover, even if we do not want to develop here this point, someone should also expect that this kind of 'theoretical' analysis undertaken by Scholem would not be a usual or contingent one, but one that types also the

[1] When we give in brackets only a number, we will refer to the page number of the 1995 edition of Major Trends... from which we quote. In all other situations, the reference is standard.

letters of a personal 'destiny', developing in a particular way its main 'moments'.

As a main thesis, we consider that, methodologically speaking, Scholem's approach comprises *a double movement*: 1) an *outer delimitation* of Jewish mysticism from other religious forms and other mysticisms, especially the Christian one, and 2) an *inner demarcation* of its history, in a *sui generis* dialectic manner, as we shall see.

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The first movement is accomplished by Scholem in the introductory chapter of *Major Trends…* and relies on a general methodological principle that asserts the irreducible character of all mysticism: "there is no such thing as mysticism in the abstract, (…) there is only the mysticism of a particular religious system, Christian, Islamic, Jewish mysticism, and so on." (Scholem 1995: 6) The reason for that is the fact that, for Scholem, all mysticism has a particular relation with the other phenomena of the religion which it belongs to and with its 'truths'.

Developing on our own Scholem's point of view, important corollaries could be formulated here, as such: the most important signification for mysticism doesn't involve the understanding of the position of the ('universal') man in the cosmos or of his purely out-of-time relationship to God. Moreover, and a little risky we agree, we could add: mysticism does not speak primarily about man as such, about his an-historical and abstract essence, and – paradoxically, if we meditate on the current meaning of 'mysticism' – not even about him strictly as an individual, but about his *destiny*, about the manner of being included in a *common history*, with all its avatars. Mystical experience, although very personal 'technically' speaking, reaches its utmost significance only in the historial-communitarian perspective. As Scholem remarks, "[m]ystical tendencies, in spite of their strictly personal character, have (…) frequently led to the formation of new social groupings and communities." (Scholem 1995: 18)[1].

[1] 'Frequently' means obviously that for Scholem this is a historical-sociological 'fact' (i.e. that could be somehow 'verified'), in a sense like

The 'history of mysticism' means therefore in our reading of Scholemian approach also the 'mysticism of history' – the way in which the history itself is captured as a vivid whole in which we are living, without even noticing it. The history in question here is the history of concrete men, but not at all in an immanent, secular, pure 'humanly' sense – we are speaking here about the 'history' of man's trying to transcend / to escape from history. This is, of course, a peculiar kind of 'history' – for trying to escape from history, the man (i.e. the Jewish mystic) 'carries' with him, in the same movement, the sense itself of our 'questioning' of God.

We should notice on this occasion the intimate, organic relationship between the intrinsic messianic dimension of Jewish history and Scholem's destiny itself. As Michael Löwy said once, "[o]ne must realize that themes and interests in the thought of Scholem on Messianism are astonishingly continuous from his early years to his last writings: they run through his work like a leitmotif. Yet his stance is not merely that of an erudite historian of Jewish Messianism: one need only read his work carefully in order to recognize the *sympathy* – in the etymological sense of the Greek word – of the researcher with his object." (Löwy 2001: 191). We must see much more in his 'theoretical' act – we could speak here about a kind of 'restoration', with profound, even religious connotations, because, as we have seen, the 'object' of his investigations was "the life texture of Jewish history", and putting the Jewish mysticism in the right place of it (i.e., for Scholem, in its real core) meant also a 'fight' with the dominant, even overwhelming stream of interpretation of that times[1].

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an empirical hypothesis. But we should think also about the possibility of linking 'necessarily' mysticism and community.

We should stress also the presence of the adjective 'new' in the above quotation: inside a tradition, mysticism imposes himself an 'escape from history' – and also an escape from this tradition itself too! – that brings itself a new kind of tradition more or less inside the 'older' one.

[1] As the same Michael Löwy observed, "Gershom Scholem's work is not only a singular monument of the modernist writing of history, it also opens a new perspective on the Jewish religious tradition, since it restores to it the messianic and apocalyptic dimension that was ignored

Turning back now to scrutinizing the notion of mysticism, we could conceive and develop, of course, a general *analysis* of it (though not a general mysticism), because it is possible theoretically to establish some 'common' experiences by means of a comparative approach[1]. But such a procedure, even very 'attentive' and 'well done', could not play a significant role in understanding mysticism as such, and could not produce a *'coherent' theory* or *doctrine* of mysticism, precisely because these experiences could have (very) different functions in every particular mysticism that includes them. The irreducible particularity of all mysticism involves specific 'inner' links and functions of all its parts – like in the case of organisms of a certain species, where we have the same parts and organs, but we can assert the irreducibility of all its specimens. Even in the case that some 'techniques' are – 'materially', 'physically' – really the same, they 'speak' about different realities; and, even more, about different 'histories' or, better yet, 'destinies'.

An example is offered in this sense by Scholem in respect to cosmogonic and eschatological trends that characterize both Jewish mysticism and Neo-Platonism and are considered by him to be "in the last resort ways of escaping from history rather than instruments of historical understanding; that is to say, they do not help us to gauge the intrinsic meaning of history." (Scholem 1995: 20) Of course, from the beginning we have to interpret attentively these words, in the light of what we have previously said about the link between mysticism and history for Judaism. In another work, Scholem clearly stated that the symbols used by mysticism "grow out of historical experience and are saturated with it" (Scholem 1969: 3).

In our opinion, this is somehow the consequence of the fact that the mystic does not speak for himself, but tries to express the link between the whole community and God – and the community 'comes' in his words, incantations, etc. with all its destiny.

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by the rationalist-liberal view of the Wissenschaft des Judentums and German sociology" (Löwy 2001: 178).

[1] We should understand epistemologically this approach either as an essentialist one, or as one led with the intention of discovering only 'family resemblances'.

Moreover, this is exactly an important point that differentiates Jewish mysticism from other forms of mysticism. Precisely, "[t]he key to the understanding of the Kabbalistic books" (for Jewish mysticism in general, we should add) consists in accepting that they "presented symbols of a very special kind, in which *the spiritual experience of the mystics was almost inextricably intertwined with the historical experience of the Jewish people* (our underlining)" (Scholem 1969: 2). So we do not find here the presence of reason with its pure Cartesian "clear and simple concepts", as they are literally identified by Scholem. Using this time Moshe Idel's words, "[t]he kabbalists under the impact of more collective forms of dramatic experiences, formulated their own experiences in more historical terms. Symbols cannot escape history" (Idel 2012: 92).

Escaping from history is thus a way to 'produce' or (better) to 'give birth' to history, to continue it and developing it, even in quite unexpected directions, as was the case of Isaac Luria. Unexpected but… accepted in Judaism, and this is the paradox of Jewish mysticism (and, we dare say, its force), since "[n]early all the important points and major theses in Luria's system are novel, one might even say excitingly novel – and yet they were accepted throughout as true Kabbalah, i.e. traditional wisdom. There was nobody to see a contradiction in this" (Scholem 1995: 21-22).

As we have just seen, for Scholem "symbols grow out of historical experience and are saturated with it." This means also that the approach of the exegete is a special one; it is not simply a 'textual' analysis. It implies "both a 'phenomenological' aptitude for seeing things as a whole and a gift of historical analysis. One complements and clarifies the other"; they have to be "taken together" (Scholem 1969: 3).

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We mentioned above two Scholemian movements for revealing the true meanings of Jewish mysticism. The first one presents also an attempt, concomitantly *'topographical'* and *historical*, for placing mysticism properly among other religious manifestations. *In the first sense*, Scholem takes as a real dominant trait of mysticism the constant re-assimilation of the religious truth,

because the signification of it remains always to be developed by the mystic: "With no thought of denying Revelation as a fact of history, the mystic still conceives the source of religious knowledge and experience which bursts forth from his own heart as being of equal importance for the conception of religious truth. In other words, instead of the one act of Revelation, there is a constant repetition of this act." (Scholem 1995: 9). This means that the truth accepted by the mystic is never 'ended', given once and for all; it is somehow dynamic, in the manner that it could even receive new interpretations, through 'free' developments or through reactions to the vicissitudes of collective history – this is the case when we understand, for instance, Isaac Luria's mysticism as a reaction to Spanish exodus or Sabbatianism as an 'integration' of Sabbataï Zevi's apostasy.

We could synthesize, in our own words: *mysticism consists in a lived, vivid assimilation of religious truth in a determined historical context*. As for Scholem, the "mystical religion seeks to transform the God whom it encounters in the peculiar religious consciousness of its own social environment from an object of dogmatic knowledge into a novel and living experience and intuition." (Scholem 1995: 10). However, in all these cases the mystic relies on the same sources: the Torah and the Talmud. As we have already underlined, for him the Torah is "a living organism animated by a secret life which streams and pulsates below the crust of its literal meaning"; he transforms the text in a reality, in a divine and infinitely rich in meanings – if not 'proteic' – organism: "[t]he Torah, in other words, does not consist merely of chapters, phrases and words; rather is it to be regarded as the living incarnation of the divine wisdom which eternally sends out new rays of light" (Scholem 1995: 14).

At the same time, mysticism is to be differentiated from the simple ecstasy – the first "comprises much more than this experience, which lies at its root" (6). So the assimilation we have spoken about is detached both from strict textual commentary or analysis of religious truth and from subjective, self-exaltation. What makes possible, in our opinion, this lived, continuous re-interpretation of the religious dogmas is the remarkable force of signification of the Hebraic language.

Another distinction useful here should be made between mysticism and Gnosticism. Although "the mystic does not even recoil before the inference that in a higher sense there is a root of evil even in God" (Scholem 1995: 13), the Kabbalist is not dualist, he does not accept the existence of two opposing principles, of the "the hidden God and the Creator", as in Gnostics' doctrine. "On the contrary, all the energy of 'orthodox' Kabbalistic speculation is bent to the task of escaping from dualistic consequences; otherwise they would not have been able to maintain themselves within the Jewish community" (Scholem 1995: 13). Here, we must notice again the strong link between mysticism as a lived doctrine and the life of Jewish community itself, affirmed by Scholem. It's like the mystic could not reach by his 'developments' consequences that could threat the community. We could also say that mysticism, ideationally speaking, occupies somehow the narrow and 'difficult' territory situated between "science" (the rationalistic theology and the philosophy of Judaism) and heresy. The second Scholemian movement will reveal the dialectics of this 'impossible habitation' of Jewish mysticism that, in its quest for the lived truth, frequently (but 'involuntarily') cross over the neighboring boundaries.

The two main traits that distinguish the Jewish mysticism from all other form of mysticism are *the impersonality of discourse*[1] and *the strong, intimate link with the language*. Regarding the first aspect, it is important to notice that, describing their experiences, the Jewish mystics are "as though they were hampered by a sense of shame" (Scholem 1995: 16); there is even a kind of voluntary censorship corresponding to the passages considered to have a too intimate nature. As Scholem underlines, "[i]t must be kept in mind that in the sense in which it is understood by the Kabbalist himself, mystical knowledge is not his private affair which has

[1] Reflecting on the impersonality of discourse of the mystic and remembering that we have here however a pure personal experience, we could formulate this paradoxical situation in Jewish mysticism in our own words as a personal attempt to reach the impersonality of God or as a subjective experience for somehow attaining the divine 'non-subjectivity'.

been revealed to him, and to him only, in his personal experience" (Scholem 1995: 21).

One reason in Scholem's view for this sentiment of shame is the fact that "the Jews retained a particularly vivid sense of the incongruity between mystical experience and that idea of God which stresses the aspects of Creator, King and Law-giver" (Scholem 1995: 16). To complete this 'psychological' or 'existential' dimension of Jewish mysticism, we should add that the Kabbalism is "a masculine doctrine, made for men and by men" (Scholem 1995: 37). The women have played almost no role in its history (and this is of course in opposition to the Christian mysticism); the consequence was that the Kabbalism "remained comparatively free from the dangers entailed by the tendency towards hysterical extravagance which followed in the wake of this influence" (Scholem 1995: 37).

As for the second aspect, the most significant point is that the Hebrew is not a simple *tool* for expressing certain thoughts and experiences. Much more than that, the Hebrew "reflects the fundamental spiritual nature of the world; in other words, it has *a mystical value*. *Speech reaches God because it comes from God*. Man's common language, whose prima facie function, indeed, is only of an intellectual nature, reflects the creative language of God. (…) All that lives is an expression of God's language (our underlining)" (Scholem 1995: 17). As Katz expressively formulated, "in this context, words have locomotive power. They transport the spiritual self from the world below to the world above" (Katz 1992: 20-21); and, significantly for our discussion, he considered that the clearest expression of such a doctrine is to be found in the *Hekhalot* and *Merkavah* texts of rabbinic era.

Of course, this is a hugely discussed topic in Jewish culture, with a complex history and structure, and we cannot exhaust it in a few lines of a study. We just point out here to another important figure of Judaism exegesis, Moshe Idel, for whom "Jewish mysticism offers a series of different conceptions of language that correspond to the mystical foci that dominated its various trends" (Idel 1992: 44). Summing up, Idel distinguishes in his analysis four basic views of language that are present in Jewish mysticism: 1) language "regarded as instrumental in the process of the creation

of the world and as a natural component of reality"; 2) language as reflecting "the divine structure by way of symbolism and by virtue of an organic link between the symbol and the object it symbolizes"; 3) language "considered to be a technique to attain a mystical experience"; 4) language as "a means by which one can attract or capture the divine in the lower world" (Idel 1992: 44). If the first one characterizes the whole Jewish mysticism, the other three are dominant respectively in some of the major trends of it.

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For *the second sense*, the historical dimension of what we have called the first methodological movement, the main reference is to Scholem's idea that the mysticism is linked to a certain stage of religious consciousness – in fact, it is "the romantic period of religion". More concrete, mysticism "strives to piece together the fragments broken by the religious cataclysm, to bring back the old unity which religion has destroyed, but on a new plane, where the world of mythology and that of revelation meet in the soul of man" (Scholem 1995: 8). Scholem's dialectical vision of history becomes very clear when we take into account his conception about the interplay between myth and law (reason): "To a certain extent, therefore, mysticism signifies a revival of mythical thought, although the difference must not be overlooked between the unity which is there before there is duality, and the unity that has to be won back in a new upsurge of the religious consciousness." (Scholem 1995: 8). We should note, there is not the case of a simple recurrence of mythical thinking, not even a 'relapse' or a 'revival' (even though they are the terms used by Scholem himself), but a *development* of it in history, an enrichment of it through religion – in other passage we even find that, against current opinion, "perhaps Monotheism contains room after all, on a deeper plane, for the development of mythical lore" (Scholem 1995: 22).

Before analyzing more attentively this (peculiar) kind of dialectic, we must stress the congruity stated by Scholem of myth and mysticism, Kabbalism in particular, as it can be seen in the passage above. So, he will also speak about "[t]he peculiar affinity

of Kabbalist thought to the world of myth [that] cannot well be doubted" (Scholem 1995: 22)

For Scholem, Hasidism restored to mysticism the sense of reality, through a process of both 'democratization' and 'moralization'. Plunging in everyday realities, the mysticism becomes an ethics and *unio mystica* turns into a humble pantheistic identification with all things. We could even speak about Scholem's nostalgia for the 'true' mysticism of the past, despite the admission by him of the fact that the 'texture' of Jewish mysticism is still living and that the future could offer us again a new enrichment of it. This nostalgia also hangs a question mark on the current processes of rationalization and secularization in Judaism. For Scholem, "[t]he secret of the success of the Kabbalah lies in the nature of its relation to the spiritual heritage of rabbinical Judaism. This relation differs from that of rationalist philosophy, in that it is more deeply and in a more vital sense connected with the main forces active in Judaism" (Scholem 1995: 23).

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Passing now to *the second methodological movement*, identified by us as an *inner demarcation* of the history of Jewish mysticism, we should underline again the intimate relation between this history and that of the Judaism itself. Within this latter history, both mysticism and rational philosophy have to be reported to the first stage of Judaism, identified with the classics of the rabbinic literature, and both represent, in their specific ways, a new qualitative stage, that of a self-reflected Judaism: "Classical Judaism expressed itself: it did not reflect upon itself. By contrast, to the mystics and the philosophers of a later stage of religious development Judaism itself has become problematical. Instead of simply speaking their minds, they tend to produce an ideology of Judaism, an ideology moreover which comes to the rescue of tradition by giving it a new interpretation." (Scholem 1995: 23) This illustrates what we could call a kind of dialectic within the history of Judaism, in which mysticism plays a particular role.

It is important to notice in this context that, for Scholem, both Jewish mysticism and Jewish rationalistic philosophy are not

simply opposite and exclusive trends (or positions) in Judaism, but that they are trying to express, with different tools, the same profound 'ideological' task – they both speak about the destiny of Judaism. One does not (try to) 'eliminate' the other; we do not have to understand them in a 'chronological' way. Scholem is in this sense critical about the perspective of Heinrich Graetz – the essence of each of them could not be understood as a 'reaction' to the other. In fact, we have here somehow amalgamated two important ideas: 1) both mysticism and philosophical rationalism are 'developments' of the first stage of Judaism, so their opposition should be relativized, not to be understood as a mutual exclusion; as a historical fact, they did not see each other at their beginnings as opposite movements; and 2) one include often (and even more so in the beginning, when we do not find a real 'consciousness' of their own movement) certain 'elements' from the other:

> "It is not as though the rise of Jewish philosophy and of Jewish mysticism took place in widely separated ages, or as though the Kabbalah, as Graetz saw it, was a reaction against a wave of rationalism. Rather *the two movements are inter-related and interdependent*. Neither were they from the start manifestly opposed to each other, a fact which is often overlooked. On the contrary, the rationalism of some of the philosophical *enlighteners* frequently betrays a mystical tendency; and conversely, the mystic who has not yet learnt to speak in his own language often uses and misuses the vocabulary of philosophy. Only very gradually did the Kabbalists, rather than the philosophers, begin to perceive the implications of their own ideas, the conflict between a purely philosophical interpretation of the world, and an attitude which progresses from rational thought to irrational meditation, and from there to the mystical interpretation of the universe. (our underlining)" (Scholem 1995: 23-24)

In order to highlight better Scholem's own position, it could be interesting to sketchily present here a clarifying parallel between his dialectic and the one pertaining to Jung, from the perspective of David Biale's analysis. In Biale's own words,

> "Jung's dialectic between conscious and unconscious, repeated on the social level as myth, resembles Scholem's dialectic between rationalism and irrationalism in Jewish history. Scholem believes that myth compensates for the excessive efforts of rationalism to preserve monotheism. Jung was attacked for favoring irrationalism; so, too, Scholem has been attacked for glorifying nihilistic forces in Jewish history. But Jung pointed out that an excess of one leads to exaggerated compensation by the other. Scholem also conceives of a healthy balance between the contradictory forces in history, and does not glorify the powers of destruction. Myth is necessary, but also dangerous." (Biale 68).

We could name this dialectical figure of both thinkers a 'dialectic of equilibrium'. Speaking only of Scholem this time, the 'result' of this dialectic is the real, 'sapful' life of Judaism itself.

But we may also encounter a dialectical process *within* the Jewish mysticism, like an internal continuous accommodation of itself. This is as well the dialectical expression of a process of 'vivid' evolution, that of the 'body' of Jewish mysticism itself. As for the phases of a life of an organism, the different stages of Jewish mysticism are concatenated, negating but continuing the precedents. This means that it is no privileged stage which could be seen as an absolute value, that all stages have a 'partial truth' of their own, 'valid' for a certain period of time. Despite the above mentioned Scholemian nostalgia, a strong methodological consequence springs out from this position: we should have no 'privileged' theoretical point of view, from which we could judge the rest of the Jewish mysticism. Even for Sabbatianism, judged constantly as a veritable heresy, as a departure from traditional Jewish religious values, Scholem finds here incredible thorough research arguments in favor of interpreting it as a profound and 'positive" mystical source.

What it is important, in the end, is the whole, the entire historical and concrete life of Jewish mysticism. This is the reason for Scholem's process of 'rehabilitation' of some mystic Jewish schools, often denigrated and despised by rationalist scholars and minimized or banned as simple (and / or dangerous) heresies by significant religious figures of Judaism. The true historian of Jewish

mysticism (and, we should add, of the history of Judaism) has as a major duty the reintegration of all the elements that were let apart over the time due to various theoretical or practical reasons (not to call them *parti pris*).

But, of course, we shouldn't forget or veil Scholem's own sympathies and – as we have already seen – nostalgias, some of them very 'visible'. One of these expressions is his treatment of Hasidism, which is for him a "popularization of Kabbalistic thought" that relentlessly decreases its value. (However, Scholem himself accepts that the growing process of social function for Kabbalistic ideas had already started with Lurianic proselytism and Sabbatian missionaries.)

For Scholem, Hasidism "represents an attempt to preserve those elements of Kabbalism which were capable of evoking a popular response, but stripped of their Messianic flavor to which they owed their chief successes during the preceding period. That seems to me the main point. Hasidism tried to eliminate the element of Messianism – with its dazzling but highly dangerous amalgamation of mysticism and the apocalyptic mood – without renouncing the popular appeal of later Kabbalism." (Scholem 1995: 329).

This position is in fact an extreme one, Scholem himself immediately amends it: we have in this case rather a "neutralization" of Messianism and, moreover, "there is no single positive element of Jewish religion which is altogether lacking in Hasidism" (Scholem 1995: 329-330).

A "burst of mystical energy", but a 'shy' mystical movement, so to speak, from a strict theoretical point of view, Hasidism produced no new religious *ideas*, "to say nothing of new theories of mystical knowledge" (Scholem 1995: 338). Hasidism emphasized definitely the psychology at the expense of theosophy. We can say eventually that for Scholem "Hasidism represents throughout a curious mixture of conservatism and innovation. Its attitude towards tradition is somewhat *dialectical* (our underlining)" (Scholem 1995: 348). Apparently only a kind of historic curiosity for the author, Hasidism could (and should) be 'recovered' theoretically

in a Scholemian scheme through its very dialectical potential, as stated in the above passage.

Our short analysis of the dialectical dimension in Scholem's view on Jewish mysticism overlaps somehow with that of Pawel Maciejko, more accurate, with his distinction between "internal dialectic of Jewish history" and "the external dialectic of the Jewish religion's relationship to other religions". First one "refers to the historical relationship and mutual influences between Sabbatianism (and Judaism in a wider sense) and other religions, notably Christianity" (Maciejko 2004: 208). As for the second, "dialectic is understood as the internal structure of Jewish history, in which contradictions are resolved on a higher plane" (Maciejko 2004: 207). To these two forms of dialectic, the same author adds also a third one (a form which is not present in our analysis), defined on "a higher, non-historical plane", where the first two dialectics "points to the undialectical (unmediated) character of the notion of Redemption in Sabbatianism" (Maciejko 2004: 208). (Maciejko's approach is developed mainly in order to capture the role of Sabbatianism in Scholem's work, restraining it mainly to another seminal work of Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi and the Sabbatian Movement During His Lifetime*, which, of course, could be seen as a major example for the Scholemian use – or practice – of dialectics especially in the history of Jewish mysticism.)

We must say here that we also adhere to Maciejko's general view about Scholem's dialectical mechanism and its presence and functioning in his work. He synthesizes it accurately in this regard:

> "Unfortunately, Scholem nowhere clearly defines his understanding of the notion of dialectic or the dialectical character of history. This does not mean that he uses the term inconsistently or unpremeditatedly way. He understands dialectic in a roughly Hegelian way: as interplay of opposites which are reconciled on a higher level. Opposites change into each other when they are intensified: a concept passes over into another concept through the development of its internal contradictions." (Maciejko 2004: 208)

Finally, we want to point out once more to the richness of the possibilities of interpreting the dialectical element in Gershom Scholem's work – a fair conclusion would assert that a much more thorough and applied analysis of it is necessary in the future.

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Harold Bloom once said about *Major Trends…*: "This book's influence has been enormous, and is likely to continue all but indefinitely". This indefinite future of a book is not mere the 'endless' recognition of the value of a 'scientific' content (all these analysis are prone to a 'demolishing' critique), but the expression of completing an important spiritual task for the Jewish people. As Jody Myers observes, although the 'Scholem-type' scholarship[1] "was not meant to nurture people's religious lives", nevertheless "academic studies of Kabbalah eventually were, and still are, used as a resource by people exploring ultimate issues or hunting for material to be used for self-expression" (Myers 2011: 179).

In the last lines of his *Major Trends…*, Scholem states nostalgically "that in the end all that remained of the mystery was the tale". But this is of course an 'unfinished', only a 'partial' tale – "[t]he story is not ended, it has not yet become history, and the secret life it holds can break out tomorrow in you or in me. Under what aspects this invisible stream of Jewish mysticism will again come to the surface we cannot tell" (350). In another way of speaking, we cannot 'deduce' from this story the future of Jewish mysticism. But, through his constant fidelity for it, to which it must be added a remarkable scientific erudition, Scholem's work takes part creatively to this future and also to the renewal of the mystery itself.

[1] We have not to forget that the Major Trends… was in its initial form a series of lectures delivered at the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York in 1938 and that Scholem was the first professor of Jewish mysticism at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

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