



# Old Worlds, New Mirrors: On Jewish Mysticism and Twentieth-Century Thought (Jewish Culture and Contexts)

*Moshe Idel*

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There emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a new Jewish elite, notes Moshe Idel, no longer made up of prophets, priests, kings, or rabbis but of intellectuals and academicians working in secular universities or writing for an audience not defined by any one set of religious beliefs. In *Old Worlds, New Mirrors* Idel turns his gaze on figures as diverse as Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida, Franz Kafka and Franz Rosenzweig, Arnaldo Momigliano and Paul Celan, Abraham Heschel and George Steiner to reflect on their relationships to Judaism in a cosmopolitan, mostly European, context.

Idel—himself one of the world's most eminent scholars of Jewish mysticism—focuses in particular on the mystical aspects of his subjects' writings. Avoiding all attempts to discern anything like a single "essence of Judaism" in their works, he nevertheless maintains a sustained effort to illuminate especially the Kabbalistic and Hasidic strains of thought these figures would have derived from earlier Jewish sources. Looming large throughout is Gershom Scholem, the thinker who played such a crucial role in establishing the study of Kabbalah as a modern academic discipline and whose influence pervades Idel's own work; indeed, the author observes, much of the book may be seen as a mirror held up to reflect on the broader reception of Scholem's thought.



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