

rather an infinity of virtual significations that correspond to the infinity of possible interpretations. To say that the Torah is a divine text signifies that it is infinitely open to interpretation. The day when "the ancient names and seals"—today buried away in the unconscious of secular culture—will emerge anew into the light of day, no one can say how they will be re-interpreted. But the risk is great, according to Scholem, of seeing their return, after a long period of collective repression, take the form of an anarchic explosion of uncontrolled religious forces.²¹

APPENDIX

Gershom Scholem

"Confession on the Subject of Our Language [Bekentnis über unsere Sprache]"

A Letter to Franz Rosenzweig, December 26, 1926.

This country is a volcano. It houses language. One speaks here of many things that could make us fall. One speaks more than ever today about the Arabs. But more uncanny than the Arab people [*unheimlicher als das arabische Volk*] another threat confronts us that is a *necessary* consequence [*mit Notwendigkeit*] of the Zionist undertaking. What about the "actualization [*Aktualisierung*]" of Hebrew? Must not this abyss of a sacred language handed down to our children break out again [*wieder aufbrechen*]? Truly, no one knows what is being done here. One believes that language has been secularized, that its apocalyptic thorn has been pulled out [*ihre den apokalyptischen Stachel ausgezogen zu haben*]. But this is surely not true. The secularization of language is only a *façon de parler*, a ready-made phrase. It is absolutely impossible to empty out words filled to bursting, unless one does so at the expense of language itself. The ghostly Volapük spoken here in the streets points precisely to the expressionless linguistic world in which the "secularization" of language could alone be possible. If we transmit to our children the language that has been transmitted to us, if we—the generation of transition [*das Geschlecht des Übergangs*]—resuscitate the language of the ancient books so that it can reveal itself anew to them, must then not the religious violence of this language one day break out against those who speak it [*gegen ihre Sprecher ausbrechen*]? And on the day this eruption occurs, which generation will suffer its effects [*und welches Geschlecht wird dieser Ausbruch finden*]? We do live inside this language, above an abyss, almost all of us with the certainty of the blind. But when our sight is restored, we or those who come after us, must we not fall to the bottom of this abyss? And no one knows whether the sacrifice of individuals who will be annihilated in this abyss will suffice to close it.

The creators of this new linguistic movement believed blindly, and stubbornly, in the miraculous power of the language, and this was their good fortune. For no one clear-sighted would have mustered the demonic courage to revive a language there where only an Esperanto could emerge. They walk, and walk still today, spellbound [*gebannt*] above the abyss. The abyss was silent and they have delivered the ancient names and seals over to the youth. We sometimes shudder when, out of the thoughtless conversation, a word from the religious sphere terrifies us, just there where it was perhaps intended to comfort. Hebrew is pregnant with catastrophes. It cannot and will not remain in its current state. Our children no longer have another language, and it is only too true to say that they, and they alone, will pay for the encounter which we have initiated without asking, without even asking ourselves. If and when the language turns against its speakers—it already does so for certain moments in our lifetime, and these are difficult to forget, stigmatizing moments in which the daring lack of measure of our undertaking reveals itself to us—will we then have a youth capable of withstanding the uprising of a sacred language?

Language is Name [*Sprache ist Namen*]. In the names, the power of language is enclosed; in them, its abyss is sealed. After invoking the ancient names daily, we can no longer hold off their power. Called awake, they will appear since we have invoked them with great violence. Truly, we speak in rudiments; we truly speak a ghostly language [*wir freilich sprechen eine gespenstische Sprache*]: the names haunt our senses. One or another plays with them in writings and newspapers, lying to themselves or to God that this means nothing, and often, out of the ghostly shame of our language, the power of the sacred speaks out. For the names have their own life—had they not, woe to our children, who would be hopelessly abandoned to the void.

Each word which is not newly created but taken from of the "good old" treasure is full to bursting. A generation that takes upon itself the most fruitful in our sacred traditions—our language—cannot live, were it to wish it a thousandfold, without tradition. The moment the *power* stored at the bottom of the language *deploys itself*, the moment the "said [*das Gesprochene*]," the content of language, assumes its form anew, then the sacred tradition will again confront our people as a decisive sign of the only available choice: to submit or to go under. In a language where he is invoked back a thousandfold into our life, God will not stay silent. But this inescapable revolution of the language [*diese unausbleibliche Revolution der Sprache*], in which the voice will be heard again, is the sole object of which nothing is said in this country. Those who called the Hebrew language back to life did not believe in the judgment that was thus conjured upon us. May the carelessness, which has led us to this apocalyptic path, not bring about our ruin [*Möge uns dann nicht der Leichtsinn, der uns auf diesem apokalyptischen Weg geleitet, zum Verderb werden*].

Jerusalem, 7 Teveth 5687

Gerhard Scholem

Translated by Gil Anidjar