



Tamar S. Drukker

## Language and Silences in two of Aharon Appelfeld's Coming-of-age Tales

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Tamar S. Drukker

## Language and Silences in two of Aharon Appelfeld's Coming-of-age Tales

1 Aharon Appelfeld, a prolific writer and a master of language, devotes his creative work to the re-creation of a literary universe of European Jewish life in the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> The author of more than forty published novels, collections of short stories, novellas, and essays, has become for many *the* voice of the child Holocaust survivor, of the orphan. Ironically, or perhaps very appropriately, this voice is often mute, as it emerges from a speaker who has no language. Appelfeld often refers in interviews to his complex relationship with language and speech. He describes his parents' home, before the war, as an assimilated, cultured Jewish home, filled with 'silence, with much listening'.<sup>2</sup> He remembers feeling safe, cherished and loved, but also engulfed in silences, spending long hours quietly observing the world around him, engulfed by images, rather than descriptions. For him, perhaps the essence of the experience of the war years is having spent so much of it in silence. Appelfeld testifies:

During the war, one did not talk... Whoever was in the Ghetto, the camp and the forests, knows silence from within. At war one does not argue, does not clarify disagreements. The war is a hothouse of listening and of silences. Extreme hunger, quenching thirst, the fear of death make words redundant. As a matter of fact, they are unnecessary. In the Ghetto and the camp only those who lost their sanity talked, explained and tried to convince. The sane did not talk.<sup>3</sup>

2 At the age of 14, Appelfeld arrived in *Eretz Yisrael* without a mother tongue, speaking six languages, but knowing none. Slowly, and with difficulties, he set out to learn and master the Hebrew language. However, the *sabra* Hebrew spoken and written in mandatory Palestine and in the early years of the state, could not express or relate to the life and experiences of the young survivor.

3 Appelfeld's biography informs much of his literary works, although the factual data seems often irrelevant. As a child survivor, Appelfeld admits that he has no recollection or memory of 'facts', names, places, dates, but can easily recall certain sounds, visions, and especially feelings. Appelfeld's distrust of language is evident in his entire corpus. Here we will look closely at two of his works which contain autobiographical elements and both have a young child as the protagonist, growing into adolescence over the course of the story. Both tales are set during World War II and recount the whereabouts of the Jewish child in hiding from the Nazis. The first is a short story, 'Kitty,' first published in Hebrew in 1963,<sup>4</sup> of a Jewish girl devoid of both language and memory, hidden in a French convent. Eleven-year old Hugo is the protagonist of *פרחי האפל"ה*, *Blooms of Darkness* (first published in Hebrew in 2006), whose mother smuggles him out of the Ghetto when the Nazis begin to liquidate it, and leaves him in the care of her childhood's friend, Mariana, a Ukrainian prostitute.<sup>5</sup> Appelfeld's texts are filled with silences as are the lives of these two young children, where lexis, speech and knowledge are all interlinked with physical and emotional changes and maturity.

4 This paper will trace the lack of language, the presence of silence, and the growing awareness to both in the fictional lives of Kitty and Hugo, and demonstrate the importance of both language and silence to memory, identity and the self. Through a close reading of these fictional biographies, we will find Appelfeld's delicate treatment of the issue of Holocaust testimony in general and of the condition of the hidden child in particular.

5 Words have a strong physical presence in 'Kitty', from its very opening:

She was expected to read slowly and to memorize the sentences. She felt how the words hit the stone and returned to her, chilled. They called her name [...] Sometimes she felt the full impact of the air gripping the back of her neck, stifling the syllables in her mouth. But at other times the flow increased, the good words remained within her, like a warm secret which planted itself slowly, spreading its roots ('Kitty', p. 220).

6 In the onset of this story, the author places his readers in Kitty's position. She is a Jewish girl who finds herself in a foreign surrounding, without language or tools to understand her new

environment, and no memory of her past or her identity. The readers know very little about Kitty, and the narrator's words are the only physical clues we have to piece together the puzzle that is Kitty's life. Like Kitty herself, we—the readers—need to make sense of a sparse and distant language in order to achieve understanding.

7 Holocaust literature is a literature of silences, of absences, insisting on the limits of language and representation and the impossibility of literary representation.<sup>6</sup> But Appelfeld does not pause to justify or authenticate his fiction. Rather, his controlled presentation of the limitations and failures of language, capture in part the essence of the child protagonist's experience. Thus the child's voice, which 'is a frequently suppressed voice, and one that cannot freely assert itself but must be mediated [...] is well-suited to treatments of the Holocaust, for these contend with a fundamental tension between silence and words'.<sup>7</sup> But Kitty lacks language all together. And this absence cannot be overcome, because the language that she is being taught, is foreign, the language of a world that is not her own. Kitty's introduction to language is linked to a teaching of a world that is strange and new to her. 'She was taught French, arithmetic, and a few passages from the New Testament [...] the names of the birds [...] Sometimes it would be plants' ('Kitty', p. 220). Kitty does not have a language to describe the world around her—the convent and the Christian dogma which dictates every aspect of life—nor the vocabulary to describe the natural world she encounters in the garden. Maria, the nun who is entrusted with her care and education, makes no references to Kitty's previous life, treating her as a *tabula rasa*. Perhaps benignly, she does not attempt to build on Kitty's past knowledge or rekindle her memory, on the contrary: she uses speech and language to erase the past and to help her emerge as a true convert, whose identity is made solely of her experiences in the convent.

8 Appelfeld describes an extreme existence, in minute and almost understated manner. The atmosphere is serene, silent, calm, and there is no mention of the horror, the killing and the violence. Nonetheless, Kitty's unknown past and unsafe future form a dark shadow which hovers constantly over her present state. Although throughout most of the story Kitty seems oblivious to the war, to her loss and to the real threat to her life, her state of being is alarming. Appelfeld denies her language, thus presenting us with a protagonist whose life and identity have been already taken by the Nazis. For Appelfeld, the convent as a hiding place for Jews during World War II, is not a safe haven, but rather marks the horrific possibility of complete uprooting of a child from his or her family and tribal roots.<sup>8</sup> As the story opens, Kitty is already a victim of the Holocaust, and her execution at the end of the story is only the physical act that completes the Nazi annihilation of the Jewish people.

9 Kitty is the living dead, a Jewish child lost forever.<sup>9</sup> 'The convent filled her entire life, imbuing her with its sole being, pushing out memory' ('Kitty', p. 222). And while greatly affected by changes in the usually-unchanging life of the convent, Kitty's silent existence is a result of a complete break from who she is, and Appelfeld insists: 'Memory was inaccessible. It had sunk to the darkest recesses' (p. 224). But, this seemingly static existence is only a façade. Stone walls and tradition cannot stop growth and change. Spring arrives, the garden grows wild, and so does Kitty. Now her silence is the result of choice, the more she learns French, the less she converses with Maria. The world around her is full of sounds and meanings, whereas the conversations with her supervisor seem to teach her little. Kitty's command of language only enhances her 'defect', her disability, to which the author only hints, which is in fact the complete break away from herself.

Maria felt that in her, too, something was dawning. It was a sort of a compassion by virtue of which she wanted to bring the girl near to her, to make her happy, to tell her about herself. How attentive Kitty's eyes sometimes seemed. A slender body, a reluctant gesture, and sadness—one could not make her speak. The child spoke to herself, inventing phrases which did not exist in the language. Only daydreams and secret desires give rise to such meaningless combinations. Sometimes a sound escaped her, as if rent from the innermost recesses (p. 228).

10 Kitty's failed attempt at language does not free her from her death-in-life state of being, imprisoned as she is in self-denial, but moves Maria to reconnect to her own past, her family, and her former self. These memories bring with them the realisation that, '[o]ne cannot sever oneself from one's thoughts, from the first sights seen, from oneself, from one's family, from

one's sisters who had taken up a dubious profession' (p. 230). Yes, here, again is Kitty's tragedy. Unlike Maria, Kitty cannot hope for such thoughts, feelings and memory to resurface within her, and she remains, therefore, unexplained.

11 With the passage of time, as she grows older, Kitty is introduced to a different silence as she undergoes physical changes and sensations that she would rather not discuss. Puberty brings with it knowledge, as well as many unanswered questions, and a sense of loss of one's previous known self to yet another unknown. Partly informed by Peppi, an earthly maid with a loose tongue, and partly by her own fragmented Christian learning, Kitty re-invents herself, now that she is no longer a child, as 'God's daughter' (p. 234). Words both fascinate and fail Kitty. She cannot use them to make sense of the world around her, nor to bring herself back to life, not until Peppi tells her, directly, that she is 'a dirty Jew' (p. 240). These words change nothing and change everything. They are both meaningless and fundamental, and what follows is the return of Kitty to her people, by sharing their existence and fate, alongside her inability to load these words with meanings. As the Germans surround the convent, Kitty moves to live in the cellar, the locus of the haunted Jew, what Yigal Schwartz renames as the 'region of the penalty colony' in Appelfeld's oeuvres.<sup>10</sup>

12 Kitty's final 'conversation' is with the jars of beet, fermenting in the darkness of the cellars, where she still questions who she is, linking her new physical knowledge with Peppi's revelation, questioning, and at the same time repeating the only certainty she has ever known: "'Am I a hairy Jew?'" she asks, and answers, "'Yes, I am hairy'" (p. 244).<sup>11</sup>

13 Kitty tells the story of a Jewish child exterminated by the Germans, long before they drag her out of her hiding place. And thus the story concludes with almost a narrative formality, a 'final ceremony' (p. 246), the brief and detached description of Kitty's execution by German soldiers, merely acting out the death sentence the girl has been living with for the duration of the war.<sup>12</sup>

14 Appelfeld attempts to tell the story from the perspective of and using the language of a mute child. This is achieved by the sparse narrative and the many unknowns, which nevertheless results in a coherent, moving and effectively-shocking story. Thus insisting that the emotions, the perspective and the depth of a child's experience is by no means lesser than that of an adult.<sup>13</sup>

15 Appelfeld's protagonist in his 2004 novel *Blooms of Darkness* is a Jewish boy, who over the course of the novel, set during the Holocaust, becomes a young man. We, the readers, know much more about Hugo than about Kitty, as he too is more informed of his past and is therefore aware of the changes he undergoes. The novel opens with facts, giving us information about the child and his situation:

Tomorrow Hugo will be eleven, and Anna and Otto will come for his birthday. Most of Hugo's friends have already been sent to distant villages, and the few remaining will be sent soon. The tension in the ghetto is great, but no one cries (p. 5).

16 The silence here is not as total as in 'Kitty,' and is not verbal, but emotional. Crying is not permitted, and the music played at Hugo's birthday party 'fails to raise their spirits. The accordion player goes to great lengths to cheer them up, but the sounds he produces only make the sadness heavier' (p. 6). For his eleventh birthday, Hugo receives some books and a pen, and with them the imperative to read and write, and thus preserve his language and links with those who gave him the presents. But he is denied non-verbal expressions, entering a life where fear, sadness, anxiety and even love cannot be expressed in words. Hugo uses different forms of language to communicate with the people he loves. His mother always talked to him, showing great command and precision in her use of language, willing Hugo to do the same. Whereas with his father, Hugo "holds a long, silent conversation [...] that was his father's way of talking. Always a single word or a short sentence. He always mixed reservations into his speech" (pp. 51-52). Thus Hugo learns to listen. And when he does not gain understanding from talking, nor from listening, he uses sight, as when his father converses with his Uncle Sigmund:

He would sit and talk with him, sometimes for hours, about medicine and literature. Hugo didn't understand a thing from those conversations, but he enjoyed watching the men. Even then he would say to himself, 'Everything I see, I'll lock up in my heart.' (p. 47)

17 It is with this ability to read, write, speak and make sense of the world through language the Hugo finds himself, at the age of eleven, away from his family and his home, hiding with a Ukrainian friend of his mother, Mariana. It is sight, again, that assists Hugo to make sense of words he does not understand later on in the novel, when he hears reports of the suicide of a young prostitute who worked in the house where Hugo has taken refuge. 'Hugo hears the voices, and as he listens, he *sees* the rushing water envelop her pure legs' (p. 137, emphasis mine). Hugo's mother equips the young Hugo with the ability to use all his senses to gain meaning of the world around him, especially of those things the mother cannot tell her son in words.

18 Once in hiding, a new language dominates his life. Hugo has learnt Ukrainian from their maid, Sofia, and her speech and manner are part of his childhood memories too. Thus, his new surroundings and experiences are linked also through language, to his past. But Hugo's mother instructs him to continue to read and write in German, thus to safeguard a mental link with his home, his parents, his childhood and his self. Sometimes, a single word, brings back to him his entire past life. Ironically, it is the word that describes his new surrogate mother, a word he still does not fully understand, that belongs to both worlds:

Once he asked his mother, 'What's a whore?'

'It's a word we don't use. It's a dirty word.'

But Sofia [the Ukrainian maid in Hugo's house, before the outbreak of the war] uses it, he was about to say. [...]

Now, in the last darkness of the night, Hugo sees Sofia's whole body, and she, as always, is singing and cursing, and that obscene word is rolling around in her mouth. The familiar, clear vision restores his house to him all at once, and amazingly, everything is in its place—his father, his mother, the evening and the violin teacher, who used to close his eyes in protest every time Hugo played out of tune (pp. 59-60).

19 Hugo's assimilated Jewish middle-class home, where German is spoken and the child receives violin instruction, is evoked and retained in Hugo's mind in the Ukrainian word for 'whore'. To Hugo, the word means much more than it denotes, or perhaps something else altogether. Mariana, who is a Ukrainian whore, is not the 'dirty word' his mother forbade him to say, but 'the woman who saved [him]' (p. 254). And when words can no longer mean what they denote, they are replaced by silence. '[...] the power of the words he would use has faded. Now it isn't words that speak to him, but silence. This is a difficult language, but as soon as one adopts it, no other language will ever be as effective.' (p. 56)

20 Like Hugo, Appelfeld himself adopts silence as his language, and his prose is made up of words only to frame and make room for the silences. Every word is loaded with meaning and significances, every word and language has a physical presence. While Kitty knows not who she is, because she lacks language, Hugo recognizes the people around him by their speech. Each character has his or her language and the way in which they use it, and throughout the novel Hugo notices and senses how those around him use words and how he too learns to use the speech of others.

21 In an illuminating article, Jeffery M. Green, who translated many of Appelfeld's works from Hebrew to English comments on the author's unique prose style. Green describes Appelfeld's use of language as a tool to express something that is known and experienced before or beyond language. Language trails behind the meaning and essence rather than creates and defines them.<sup>14</sup> Words do not create meaning, but can awaken, rekindle, remind oneself and express things that one already knows. Hugo himself realises this in a conversation he has with Kitty, another young prostitute, after the Germans retreat and he is allowed out of Mariana's room, and can reflect out loud on his previous life. And Appelfeld writes:

The things he told Kitty opened the seal on Hugo's memory. He now sees his house before his eyes – the kitchen, where he liked to sit at the old table, the living room, his parents' bedroom and his room. A little kingdom, full of enchanted things – a parquet floor, an electric train, wooden blocks, Jules Verne and Karl May.

'What are you thinking about Hugo?' Kitty asks in a whisper.

'I'm not thinking, I'm seeing what I haven't seen in a long time.'

[...]

'Thank you.'

'Why are you thanking me?'

'Because of my conversation with you, my parents, my house, and my school friends appeared before me. The months in the closet had deprived me of them.' (p. 184)

22 Kitty's curiosity, naivety and kindness, have given Hugo access to his past and his identity: not through language, but *by* language. Her questions evoked a familiar image he does not talk about, but *sees*. It is this link to one's past and one's memory that the protagonist of the short story *Kitty* lacks, and none of those around her can or will to give her the tools to achieve. The loose women in Appelfeld's *Bloom of Darkness* do much more to ensure Hugo's safety in offering him both a shelter and insisting on reminding him of himself, whereas the religiously-motivated women of the convent betray Kitty, not by informing the German soldiers of her whereabouts, but by denying her access to her past and her identity.

23 Mariana insists on Hugo improving his Ukrainian, and also gives him a cross, hoping that both will assist in safeguarding him if he is found. But she also insists on talking to Hugo about his mother, and encourages him to keep his previous habits. Hugo's past, the memories of his parents' home and of his friends, who often appear in his dreams, ensure that Mariana's language, the cross and other exterior changes do not replace the self. Hugo's period in hiding is filled with vivid dreams, where he often converses with his parents and his friends Otto and Anna. In the novel, these dreams are as real as lived events, and in many ways more crucially significant. Hugo's life in hiding is monotonous and dull: he spends most of it waiting for his meals and for the time spent alone with Mariana, but the majority of the time he spends alone, in reverie or sleep. He does not fully understand, or would rather not know, what happens in Mariana's room when she is working, and the dreams and memories of the past also serve to shield him from the truth: Mariana's occupation, his parents' fate, the gravity of the situation he is in. But, like the mute Kitty hidden in the convent, Hugo too changes over time, adapting to his new condition and adopting the speech and manner expected of him. And, like Kitty, the passage of time also marks physical changes in him. In one of the rare occasions when he writes in his notebook, he confesses to his mother:

There's no doubt I've changed a lot in these months, and I'm not what I was. For a fact: it's hard for me to write and hard for me to read. You remember how much I loved to read. Now I'm entirely immersed in listening. Mariana's room, my eternal riddle, is a house of pleasure for me, and at the same time I feel that evil will come from there. The tension that pervades me most of the day has apparently changed me, and who knows what else will be (pp. 113-114).

24 Hugo has changed, and his past experience and knowledge, his command of language and his reading cannot prepare him for this change or offer an explanation. And when he is old enough to enjoy a night with Marianna, language fails to express the physical and emotion pleasure of this union.

More than once in his life, Hugo will try to reimagine that drunken night. He will call up the thick darkness that was infused with perfume and brandy, and the pleasure that was mixed with a fear of the abyss. But not a word passed between them, as if words had become extinct (p. 194).

25 Appelfeld too refuses to use words to describe those moments, like Mariana and Hugo himself, the author offers the readers the sense and knowledge of events that happen beyond and after language, only hinting and suggesting to them, allowing silences, or words that mean something else, to express and preserve those moments.

26 Here, and throughout his oeuvres, Appelfeld exhibits to express emotions, and recount lives, in few and simple words. The author seems to be guided by the same literary guidelines as his young protagonist Hugo.

Every time he write—and he doesn't write often—Hugo feels that the days in the closet have dissolved his active vocabulary, not to mention the words he has adopted from books. After the war, he'll show the notebook to Anna. She'll read it, lower her eyes for a moment—a lowering of self-assurance—and say, 'It needs, it seems to me, further thought, also reduction and polishing,' She would always relate to a page of writing as if it were a mathematical exercise, removing all

the superfluous steps. In the end she would say, 'It's still not enough, there are still unnecessary words here, it still doesn't ring true.' (*Blooms of Darkness*, p. 185)

- 27 Appelfeld writes with Anna's call for precision and minimalism constantly guiding his prose. Words are not to be used lightly or unnecessarily, as they are the essence of one's being and the forms for gaining understanding, knowledge and meaning.
- 28 The Holocaust is the greatest tragedy that befell the Jewish people in modern times, but it is also a name used to describe a long and significant period in the lives of those who lived through it. Appelfeld himself, like his fictional characters Kitty and Hugo, has spent the years of the war changing and maturing, living in fear and experiencing loss, but at the same time gaining new experiences and knowledge. Appelfeld's fiction insists that life also happened during the Holocaust,<sup>15</sup> and the stories discussed here try and tell of such lives. With the war raging around them, their family members lost, many of them forever, these young Jewish boy and girl face new realities and also discover the changes within themselves. They need to retain their identities, but also redefine and find themselves as young adults, in a reality that wishes to deny them their identity, their sexuality and self awareness, and eventually their lives.
- 29 Aharon Appelfeld's fiction offers a different and unique approach to Holocaust literature. His themes are often those less apparent and dominant in both Holocaust fiction and in Holocaust studies generally. In the majority of his works, and in those discussed here, he does not describe the enormity of the tragedy, does not attempt to set it in context, nor does he offer detailed personal narratives of lives in the Ghettos or in the Nazi concentration camps. His protagonists, as their fictional fates, seem to be on the margins of the canonical Holocaust narrative. In this respect, we can consider Appelfeld's fiction under Shaked's rubric of 'postrealistic Hebrew literature'.<sup>16</sup> The story of the hidden Jewish families, and especially of the children, was generally left untold until the 1990s.<sup>17</sup> But for Appelfeld, a child survivor himself, this is a story that is not forgotten and nor is it a secret. It is the story of a life, and of many lives, biographical and fictional that together form and inform the epic narrative of Appelfeld's entire corpus, the story of European Jewry in the past one hundred years. Those untold, often muted lives require a level of authenticity and a language that reflects, recreates and faithfully represents life on the margins. Appelfeld's muted protagonists, like Kitty<sup>18</sup> as well as the eloquent and verbally attuned Hugo, need a master of language, to tell their tragic stories. Appelfeld's exceptional command of Hebrew allows him to write it as if it were a translation of a language that does not exist—of the complex linguistic map of the Jews of Europe on the eve of World War II, and the language of those who lack a mother tongue, a Hebrew that is 'next to' Hebrew<sup>19</sup> and can give voice to the silences.

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## Notes

- 1 Gila Ramras-Rauch (1998).
- 2 Aharon Appelfeld (1999), p. 110, in Hebrew. Translations from the Hebrew are my own, unless otherwise stated.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 4 'Kitty' was published in Appelfeld's second collection of stories *In the Fertile Valley* (1963) בניס הפורה. The story was translated by Tirza Sandbank and included in *Modern Hebrew stories* edited by Ezra Spicehandler (1971). Citations will be from this bilingual edition.
- 5 All subsequent citations will be from the English translation, Appelfeld (2010).
- 6 On silence in Holocaust fiction see Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi (1980), especially chapter four and Sara R. Horowitz (1997).
- 7 Naomi Sokoloff (1994), p. 262.
- 8 Esther Fuchs (1982), see also Yigal Schwartz (1996), chapter 1.
- 9 Another literary hidden Jewish child, whose denied knowledge and struggles with self-identity is Lena in Leah Goldberg's play *Lady of the Castle* (1955). Christian motives and narratives also informs the play. However, a detailed comparison of these two texts is beyond the scope of this paper.
- 10 Y. Schwartz (1996), pp. 91-93.
- 11 On the inner voices in 'Kitty' see G. Ramras-Rauch (1994), pp. 57-60.
- 12 On the strong religious overtones of this execution see Lily Rattok (1989), pp. 74-75.
- 13 On fantasy, sensation and feelings as tools to understand childhood experience of the Holocaust see Andrea Reiter (2005), pp. 1-10.
- 14 Jeffrey Green (1997), p. 209.
- 15 Emily Miller Budick (2005), xi.
- 16 Gershon Shaked (1996). Shaked ascribes the changes to modern Hebrew poetry that Natan Zach identified after the 1960, to prose writers, among them Appelfeld in whose works he finds 'the deflation of style and rhetoric, the preoccupation with the marginal, "nonrepresentative" aspects of reality, the influences of the modern world, and the increasing flexibility of the structural design of the narrative' (p. 274).
- 17 Frida Scheps Weinstein's 1985 memoir is one of the only accounts in English published before 1990. And note the telling titles of collections and studies of the lives and experiences of hidden children published since: Jane Marks (1993), *The Hidden Children: The Secret Survivors of the Holocaust*; André Stein and Harriet Lampert (1994), *Hidden Children: Forgotten Survivors of the Holocaust*, to name just two examples.



18 Or the protagonist of 'In stone', not discussed here, in A. Appelfeld (1965).

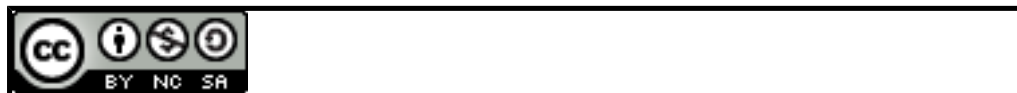
19 J. Green (1997), p. 205.

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### ***Résumés***

Hugo, the eleven year old protagonist of Appelfeld's novel *Blooms of Darkness* (first published in Hebrew in 2006) 'likes to listen to words', their sounds often evokes an image in his mind. When the Nazis begin to liquidate the Ghetto, his mother smuggles him out, and leaves him at the care of her childhood friend, Mariana, a Ukrainian prostitute. When his mother turns to leave and kisses him for the last time, Hugo cannot pronounce the word 'mother'. Language is suppressed, and with it, all of Hugo's memories of pre-war years and of his parents. It is replaced by silences, and a new functional lexis. "Now it isn't words that speak to him, but silence," Appelfeld writes. "This is a difficult language, but as soon as one adopts it, no other language will ever be as effective."

In a much earlier short story, 'Kitty' (first published in Hebrew in the collection *In the Fertile Valley*, 1963), Appelfeld introduces his readers to a young Jewish girl who is hiding from the Nazis in a convent. Kitty is about the same age as Hugo, and she too is surrounded by silence and her muteness allows her to create a parallel reality.

In this paper I will look closely on language, silence and the inability to use language as they are linked with the coming of age of Appelfeld's young protagonists who find themselves in the most unspeakable reality.

### **Langue et silences dans deux récits de jeunesse : *La chambre de Mariana et Kitty***

Hugo, le héros de onze ans du roman d'Appelfeld *Pirhe ha-afela* (« Fleurs de ténèbres », publié en hébreu en 2006, traduit en français sous le titre *La chambre de Mariana*) « aime écouter les mots », leurs sons font souvent naître des images dans son esprit. Quand les nazis commencent à liquider le Ghetto, sa mère le confie à son amie d'enfance, Mariana, une prostituée ukrainienne. Quand elle l'embrasse pour la dernière fois, il n'arrive pas à prononcer le mot « maman ». Le langage disparaît et, avec lui, tous ses souvenirs d'enfance. Il est remplacé par le silence et par un nouveau lexique fonctionnel : « Maintenant, ce ne sont pas les mots qui lui parlent, mais le silence. » Appelfeld écrit : « C'est une langue difficile, mais une fois qu'on l'adopte, aucune autre langue n'est aussi efficace. »

Dans une nouvelle écrite longtemps auparavant, « Kitty » (publiée en hébreu dans le recueil, *Ba-gay ha-poreh*, « Dans la vallée fertile », 1963 ; trad. française F. Rameau-Le Davay in *Anthologie de la prose israélienne*, textes choisis et présentés par M. Hadas-Lebel, Paris, Albin Michel, coll. « Présences du judaïsme », 1980), Appelfeld présente aux lecteurs une jeune

filles juives cachées dans un couvent. Kitty a le même âge que Hugo et, comme Hugo, elle est entourée par le silence et sa mutité lui permet de créer une réalité parallèle.

Cet article se propose d'examiner le langage, le silence et l'incapacité d'employer le langage dans leur rapport à la maturité des jeunes protagonistes qui se retrouvent dans une réalité insoutenable.

### לשון ושתיקות בשניים מרומני החניכה של אפלפלד: פרחי האפלה וקיטי

הוגו בן האחת עשרה, גיבור הרומן "פרחי האפלה" (2006), אוהב להקשיב למילים. הן יוצרות תמונות בעיני רוחו. כשהנאצים מתחילים לחסל את תושבי הגטו, אמו מבריחה אותו לחברת ילדותה, מריאנה, זונה אוקראינית. ברגע הפרידה הוא אינו מצליח לבטא את המילה אָמא. השפה נעלמת ועמה כל זיכרונות הילדות והבית של הוגו, את מקומם תופשת הדממה. בסיפור הרבה יותר מוקדם, "קיטי" (1963), הגיבורה, בת גילו של הוגו, מסתתרת מפני הנאצים במינור. גם היא מוקפת בדממה, מה שמאפשר לה ליצור עולם מקביל. מאמר זה עוסק בקשר שבין שתיקותם של הילדים ביצירת אפלפלד ובין המציאות אותה הם חיים.

#### *Entrées d'index*

**Mots-clés :** La chambre de Mariana, Kitty, silence, mémoire, adolescence, identité, appartenance, Appelfeld Aharon )1932-(

**Keywords :** Blooms of Darkness, Kitty, silence, memory, adolescence, identity, belonging, Appelfeld Aharon )1932-(, literature

**מילות מפתח :** אפלפלד, פרחי האפלה, קיטי, דממה, זיכרון, התבגרות, זהות, שייכות

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