

MEMORY AND IDENTITY – REPRESENTATIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST IN THE WORKS OF AHARON APPELFELD AND DAVID GROSSMAN

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Abstract: Aharon Appelfeld and David Grossman's literary works represent an exemplary synthesis between Jewish literature and the modern and postmodern aesthetics landmarks. On one hand, their writings stand as references to the European Jewry of the twentieth century, to the Yiddish authors and the currents of thought that changed the history of Judaism. On the other, they reflect the Israeli reality and identities. On the map of modern Jewish culture, Appelfeld and Grossman are at the intersection of traumatic past and heroic imaginary, their writings having in common the Holocaust as literary subject. For Appelfeld, the specificity lies in the fact that although he experienced the horrors of Mogilev as a child, hid in the forests and in Ruthenian peasants' homes, and then wandered along the shores of Italy in refugee camps, the trauma has not found expression until much later in his life and writing career. For Grossman, the Holocaust was not just his parents' trauma, but become of himself. The world of Momik, the main character of his novel *See under: love*, represents the artistic treatment of the second generation's reality and its quest of the past. Nonetheless, the representations of camps, which the two treat very differently, remain consistent in their narratives, in order to give them a deeper meaning. Aharon Appelfeld and David Grossman belong today to Israeli literary canon and are internationally recognized precisely for this reason: they knew to overcome the Holocaust as a theme in a broader search of the self, converting the individual struggle into an exemplary reflection on the human nature.

Keywords: *Holocaust literature, Holocaust representation, Aharon Appelfeld, David Grossman, Shoah, Israeli literature, generational identity.*

The Israeli literary canon about Shoah is based on the breaches opened by the poetry and theatrical plays of the 50s, the prose gaining ground only in the next decade. The first stage was that of silence and denial, when the opposition between *there* and *here*, between "their Holocaust" and "our life"¹ was insuperable, the writings of that period consisting of only testimonies. Writing about Shoah was survivors' monopoly and moral duty. A second phase corresponds to what is called "the second generation," that of survivors' children. Their literature would not have been possible without the precedent represented by Yoram Kaniuk's

¹See Aviad Raz, *Rewriting the Holocaust. An Israeli Case Study in the Sociology of the Novel*, in Russell Stone and Walter Zenner (eds.), *Critical Essays on Israeli Social Issues and Scholarship*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994, p. 15.

novel *Adam Resurrected* (Adam Ben Kelev, 1969), where the Holocaust is treated in a carnivalesque manner² and whence the second generation, through David Grossman, took "the fantasy, the validation of pathology as 'artistic creation', the supernatural powers of the survivor, his inability to save the others, the less-demonic-Nazi-officer and, finally, the belief that love between people is the only possible atonement."³ The literature of the second generation is one of confrontation and displacement, "they are united by the belief that the Holocaust experience, which European Jews gone through, had a detrimental impact on the lives of their descendants in Israel and that the only way to end these consequences is to confront their causes."⁴

Of all that Shoah themed Israeli fiction I choose only two major names, Aharon Appelfeld and David Grossman. From the former's works I will consider only those novels that have a definite connection with the Holocaust experience. The first is *Badenheim 1939*⁵ (*Badenheim Ir Nofesh*, 1979), an allegory of the Holocaust, whose stake is to illustrate the intellectual and social background that preceded the tragedy. Led in the antechamber of historical reality, the reader is confronted not with factual details about the European Jewry of early twentieth century, but with its ideological positions in relation to modernity, the imminence of anti-Semitism and the lure of assimilation. I have then analyzed the novels *Katerina* (*Katerina*, 1989)⁶ and *For Every Sin* (*Al Kol Ha-Psha'im*, 1987)⁷, as they illustrate the same idea: in a life drained of meaning, certain individuals remained symbolic inheritors of those who have disappeared. This essentially implies the duty to preserve their memory and system of values. The post-apocalyptic atmosphere of these two novels represents a *reductio ad absurdum*, and the main characters personify this conditioning of what would happen in a world in which Jews would disappear – physically or from an identity point of view. Appelfeld's answer parts, in this case, with the skepticism which governed *Badenheim 1939*: there can be legatees of memory. The last novel of Appelfeld's that I examined is *The Story of a Life* (*Sipur Hayim*, 1999)⁸, a novel that, beyond the obvious autobiographical character,

²Yael Feldman, *Whose story is it, anyway? Ideology and Psychology in the Representation of The Shoah in Israeli Literature*, in Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation. Nazism and the "final solution"*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 235.

³*Ibidem*, p. 236.

⁴Gilead Morahg, *Breaking Silence: Israel's Fantastic Fiction of the Holocaust*, in Alan Mintz (ed.), *The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction*, Hanover, University Press of New England, 1997, p. 156.

⁵Aharon Appelfeld, *Badenheim 1939*, translated by Antoaneta Ralian, București, Univers, 1988.

⁶Idem, *Caterina*, translation, forward and glossary by Rodica Amel, București, Univers, 2002.

⁷Idem, *Pentru toate păcatele*, translated by Mirjam-Lea Bercovici, București, Hasefer, 2000.

⁸Aharon Appelfeld, *Povestea unei vieți*, translated and footnotes by Any Shilon, Iași, Polirom, 2009.

discusses and refines Appelfeld's literary system: the narrative is the only place where trauma can be expiated. In order to write about it not true words, but right words are needed and the writer's originality lies not in covering the facts, but in imagining and organizing a universe of emotions.

Regarding the works of David Grossman, I chose to discuss only his novel *See under: love* (Ayen Erech: Ahava, 1986)⁹, leaving aside his literature for children and adolescents, as well as his essays. This novel, astonishing at the time of its release – and through which Grossman has caused certain emulation – treats in four different manners the Holocaust theme. In terms of length and structure, the four parts of the book are micro-novels themselves, so I have analyzed them separately. *Momik*, the first part of the novel, is the story of the eponymous character, exemplary for the second generation, who wants to discover the secret that darkens the existence of all the adults (i.e. the survivors) around him. Understanding the suggestion about "the Nazi beast" at a literal level, the boy builds a menagerie designed to reconstruct the Holocaust atmosphere in order to provoke "the beast" and defeat it. The second part, *Bruno*, presents the same Momik, who grew up and became a writer who tries to solve the dilemma of his childhood by making the famous Jewish writer Bruno Schulz a character in his novel and thus changing his fate. The third part, which finally faces the failure of the first two versions of writing about the Holocaust, is moving towards magic realism. The last part, *The Complete Encyclopedia of Kazik's Life. First Edition*, suggests that humanity is the only possible solution to overcome the traumatic past. Concluding, Grossman's novel is an important piece among the fiction writings addressing the Holocaust subject and, due to its completeness, finishes a chapter in the history of this topic.

Aharon Appelfeld's work is known as Holocaust literature. But, like any taxonomic classification, this label is limited and unfair. Firstly because it contradicts the auctorial intention of writing about "The Jewish Hundred Years of Solitude" – which involves trauma, but is not limited to it – and secondly because the alleged thematic subordination did not prevent Appelfeld to explore other internal territories. *Badenheim 1939* still retains something of the boldness of his early proses: the critical perspective, the minimum of resources, the allusions and the silences. But the auctorial attitude is different. The need to enact the historical reality as a whole is no longer felt; the narrative voice does not require the empathy of only the partakers in trauma. On the contrary, the vision in *Badenheim 1939* is an

⁹David Grossman, *Vezi mai jos: dragostea*, translated by Ioana Petridean and Paula Marcu, București, Niculescu, 2007.

extremely lucid one; the narrative instance is visibly detached. The major change consists of yet another mutation, which gives, in the end, the measure of Appelfeld's literature.

It is about a transformation in the very act of thinking about writing: instead of describing (incompletely, obstinately and invariably from the victim's perspective) the horrors of genocide, the writer, survivor or not, has to create his own fictional universe. One with distinct referent, subordinated to the personal experience of the author and relatively autonomous from the traumatic history. The novel opens explicitly in the fictional space and the references to historical reality are allusive, although very striking. Even the title raises a question about the way in which this novel can be read: either one puts the historical reality and Appelfeld's narrative alongside and seeks an equivalence of one to one, or the universe of the novel is taken *per se*. The reader is given the most important landmarks in understanding the fictional approach: the place, a fashionable resort – maybe a fictional replica of the Austrian town of Baden –, and the time: 1939, the beginning of World War II. From the detached atmosphere of all those vacationers, challenged only by Trude's hallucinations and the restrictive measures of Sanitation Department, the focus moves on the issue of identity. The characters' conversations become more and more abstract as their universe narrows.

The major criticism related to their situation concerns the exacerbated rationality of their approach and the attempt to find some causal chaining. One of the characters states: "[S]mash your normal mind and maybe you will begin to understand."¹⁰ You can hear the author's voice behind the characters, taking a stand against the practice of Holocaust historiography. Nor the description of various horrors, nor the quantification of the crimes can speak about what it was like, but the most appropriate method for this purpose – Appelfeld states – belongs to the literary area. Fiction is not intended to present, but to re-present, and this representation means probing the depths of being. The novel ends somewhat cyclical, with the characters gathered at the train station, waiting for what we know – although we are not told – that would be their last journey. While the deserted station recalls the moment when they came on vacation and the promise of recreation, the characters no longer have the illusion of salvation. The preservation can come, Appelfeld suggests, only through fiction. Moreover, this is the true ending of the novel. And not because the writer ignores the horrors that followed, but because nothing more can be said about the characters' fate. The few lines added after this poignant description of the station are strikingly contrasting with the rest of

¹⁰ Aharon Appelfeld, *Badenheim 1939*, p. 75.

the novel¹¹, their aim being to put in relationship Appelfeld's fiction with the insuperable historical reality.

More than a decade after the publication of *Badenheim 1939* Appelfeld publishes two other novels, *Katerina* and *For Every Sin*, that have the same message, that of the imperative of memory. In one of his interviews, the writer confessed his intention to write about the Jewish destiny: "I want to show that what happened in the war has been a long process of fermentation, so I follow the steps that led to what is called Shoah."¹² More than in *Badenheim 1939*, in these two novels Appelfeld tries to describe the assimilation of Jews in all its nuances. It is no longer about an arid dispute between the characters, but an inquiry of the Jewish identity in modern Europe. The characters of these two novels are no longer prototypes, but they attain complexity, and the events they go through have also a certain pathos. The transition is done – how it was foreseeable in the case of a writer of Appelfeld's stature – from the literary pretext to the subjectified proses. And although *Badenheim 1939* remains an extraordinary novel, it still retains the ornate character, unlike the later ones.

Thus, Katerina's duty, as she perceives it, is to keep alive the memory of traditional Jewish life, and although the novel follows chronologically the character's destiny, it is to be re-read from the end back to its first pages. Of course, this would be a symbolic hindsight, but the way Appelfeld envisioned his novel permits it. Not only that the first and last pages are almost identical, suggesting a certain circularity of the narrative, but without the perspective given after reading the entire novel one cannot fully understand the fullness of the incipit. Katerina is an important character because she is the only one affected by the lack of Jews and by others' major fault. In her universe, now limited to the village where she was born, Katerina is the only bearer of their memory and therefore all she does and all she sees has no significance in the present, but serves as a memorial to the perished Jews. In one particularly powerful scene the woman has a theophany within the ruins of a Jewish building. The skin disease she suffered from in prison heals and the suggestion is that – since the physical signs of guilt disappeared – Katerina consents to her transformation into the depositary of Jewish memory. Therefore the woman makes a list of Jewish holidays with all the details she can remember. The form in which the recollection is done suggests a certain cyclicity, since the

¹¹ "Its appearance [of the locomotive] was so unexpected, as if it irrupted out of a crack in the earth./– Climb aboard! the voices of invisible creatures were shouting. / And people were sucked in the wagons. [A]ll of them were sucked up as wheat grains overturned in a funnel." (Aharon Appelfeld, *Badenheim 1939*, pp. 151-152).

¹²Yael Feldman, *Whose story is it, anyway?* ...,p. 232.

holidays recap relates to the representations of the liturgical year, as they project the profane history into the timeless sacredness.

Appelfeld's novel is not about alienation, but on the contrary, it is about recovery; is not about the love of one's neighbor, but about the nuances of memory. Although tributary to the Jewish culture that shaped her, Katerina is nothing else but what the author wanted her to be, a Ruthenian. A Ruthenian peasant full of doubts, who has made contact with Judaism and appreciated its characteristics, but still a Ruthenian, a goy. This particular fact makes the novel an exemplary story of meeting the Other, a novel with the decreases and the tensions that such an approach entails. Seen through Katerina's eyes, this interval of Jewish life – continued, reiterated and amplified in the memory of the old woman – is a highly subjective and nuanced appropriation of a stranded history.

Like *Katerina*, *For Every Sin* is a novel whose central character is the solitary type. But unlike Katerina, whom the death of her closest people and the long detention have symbolically brought back to her village, Theo, the main character in *For Every Sin*, programmatically decides to be alone. Not only in relation to his perished relatives, but also alone from his peers who survived the tragedy. Not because of the context, but out of his own desire. The novel's first page presents him tired and alone: "And even though he knew that this decision will part him with other people (...), his decision was final."¹³ The narrative has two levels: on the one hand, the present of the story traces the youngster's journey and his proximity, physical or spiritual, with the refugee camps. On the other hand, this linear present is interrupted by several analepses that summarize Theo's existence before the war. What is characteristic to Appelfeld's style is that it can bring together, even by overlapping, multiple temporal axis and creates interdependence between them. In *Badenheim 1939*, the historical time and the time of allegory could not be understood one without the other; in *Katerina*, the recollection, especially in the last pages, creates a continuum between the character's past and present.

The central character in *For Every Sin* avoids coming into contact with the survivors and that seems to give him some sort of courage in his journey. But between the way the survivors are named and Theo's attitude a discrepancy occurs: between his rejection and the term "brothers" cannot be middle ground. The style of writing – indirect speech – allows the narrator to present the events and to accompany Theo's views. But this problem of the

¹³ Aharon Appelfeld, *Pentru toate păcatele*, p. 5.

ideological brotherhood is one of the hot spots of the novel when the author's voice can be clearly heard: the survivors must remain brothers, even if the way they relate to the experience they went through may differ. Theo and all the readers must understand that it is about a deeper connection, a bond that must be assumed in its metaphysical fullness.

The two novels of memory, *Katerina* and *For Every Sin*, share a number of elements that circumscribe this type of narrative and the possibilities that such recoveries entail. First, both are centered on a witness character, a *raisonneur*. The suggestion of this option is that there are characters around which a writer can create a narrative, as is the case of Aharon Appelfeld's latest novels, and there are characters that can coagulate a narrative universe. Theo and *Katerina* necessarily belong in this second category.

If in the proses published before *The Story of a Life*, Aharon Appelfeld explored the central theme of survivors' collective memory, as well as the writer's powerlessness and wandering and the untranslatable character of the trauma, with this autobiographical novel, Appelfeld reveals more intimate feelings and thoughts. His foreword tries to recover the meaning of these tortuous experiences: "Here are chapters of life chained together in my memory, that live and pulsate. Many were lost, some of them swallowed by oblivion. What's left seemed insignificant for the moment, however, when I put fragment next to fragment, I felt that they were connected not only by the years, but also through a certain meaning."¹⁴

The experience of war, the flight and loneliness, then the overflowing refugee camps are described in this novel not through a fictional character's eyes, as was the case in other of his works, but through the senses of who he was half of century ago. Thus, everything is related to the child's sensorial memory and is shown as it is, while the interpolations belong to the mature ego who understands the war and the trauma at a more abstract level. The universe which the child belonged to is visibly decomposed, and what took its place could not acquire coherence. Unlike Appelfeld's characters, which have the means to express the trauma, Erwin's wandering is limited to a sum of inarticulate sensations that the adult who he become put into writing as more or less autobiographical narratives.

On a literary scene full of memoirs, testimonies and memories, Appelfeld's literature really changed the outlook, drawing inner maps that others had left unwritten. He has been considered and criticized for being a writer of the Holocaust, but also that his approach is

¹⁴ Aharon Appelfeld, *Povestea unei vieți*, p. 9.

somewhat marginal compared to the pattern of this literary area. Appelfeld writes from his unrepeatable experience, about him, unwilling to assume the collective patterns and that is what makes his works aesthetically valid.

Unlike the survivors' generation, trained in European cultures, but deeply stricken by the exacerbated anti-Semitism of the twentieth century, the sabras were raised in another pedagogy. For them, the history begins with the first temple, continues with the second and ends with the independence of Israel. "The young generation is more inspired by the heroism than tragic aspects of history."¹⁵ This is the ideological context in which David Grossman was raised and his political activism tackles this very commonplace of the heroic Zionist imaginary. Without ignoring the fine line between literature and ideology, "[t]he difficulty of the Israeli writer [remains that of] overcoming the fact that Zionism erased the past."¹⁶ Therefore, his literature is forged by the search of alterity, whether it is immediate – as in the case of Amos Oz or even of Grossman's himself in the *Smile of the Lamb*¹⁷ – or is an inaccessible otherness, as in the second novel of Grossman's, *See under: love*.

In this novel David Grossman tried in each of the four parts another manner of writing about the Holocaust: as the story of a child of survivors, as a surreal narrative about a Bruno Schulz left alive, as the expiatory reiteration of Anshel Wasserman's story and, finally, as an not at all comprehensive but rather empathetic Encyclopedia. His innovative approaches, honest in their impossibility of explicitly rendering the survivors' trauma, were the main argument of those who saw *See under: love* as an authentic Holocaust novel.

The first part, *Momik*, seems to be the easiest approach to the topic: it is the story of a boy from Tel Aviv, Shlomo Neuman, whom the arrival of his "grandfather" Anshel leads into disarray along with his entire familiar universe. Accentuated by the old man's incoherent speech, the child's queries about *the country over there* are growing steady. Facing a series of unusual circumstances, which he considers riddles, Momik is convinced that there is a hidden meaning to what he hears from his grandfather, parents or acquaintances, a meaning that only he can decipher. Moreover, when he understands that those close to him were subjected to a trauma by "Nazi beast", is convinced that he is the only person who can make things right.

¹⁵See Lilian Kramer (ed.), *Holocaust Literature. An Encyclopedia of Writers and Their Work*, vol. I, New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 481.

¹⁶*Ibidem*.

¹⁷*Hiuch ha-Gedi* (1983), Grossman's first novel, that tells the story of a young Israeli soldier – fascinated by a blind Palestinian storyteller – whose self-search is intertwined with the tragic experience of the war.

Momik's story involves three timelines. On the one hand the present, that of the late 50s, with all the realities of Israel. On the other hand the past, inaccessible to the child but persistent in the memories – repressed or not – of the adults around him: his father's nightmares, the refusal of his parents to attend Holocaust Remembrance Day, the story that "grandpa" says, Bella's allusions. This time has a more concrete and immediate character than a deeper layer of the past, the third temporal level in the novel, that the boy reaches through his readings. This is at the same time the realm of "grandpa" Wasserman's stories and of Shalom Aleichem's proses. Momik identifies himself with Aleichem's characters at a superficial, infantile level; Motl, the cantor's son, becomes his imaginary friend, along with contemporary comic book heroes. But at the same time, the boy has the intuition of the otherness represented in Aleichem's works as he discovers there images and details accidentally mentioned by his parents, for example how good the bread was *over there*. Momik even get to try to reenact, in a precise scenario, the way back from the heder in the dark and rain.

Momik is defined by his search, which is at the same time that of the alterity and of his own identity. In a scene when he wants to reveal to the "beast" *the Jew* inside Wasserman, the child still does not understand how much of that Jew is already in himself. Instead, another discovery of Momik can be considered the cornerstone of the entire search that the novel is. Trying to read one of "grandpa"'s stories, he acknowledges that it is written in a foreign language. Of course, even the child sees beyond the mere linguistic difference, Wasserman's "foreign language" signifying in fact the entire heritage of European Jewry, which the writer – for whom Momik is undoubtedly a figure – can access only indirectly, through literature. The sensitivity of the second generation is based, ultimately, on the desire to fill a void. "Spatially and temporally removed from the Holocaust itself, [this generation] has its own Holocaust which (...) exists in the realm of imaginary, which does not attempt to explore what really happened *there*, but the way what happened *there* affects us here and now."¹⁸ From another point of view, however, that "The things have happened as follows" that the novel opens with implies not only the likelihood of what is about to be said, but a more intimate desire, related to the specificity of this first part, that was intended to begin like that because it challenges all writings that claim that the truth is to be found only in description. But precisely by this alleged claim of nude rendering of reality Grossman underlines the relativity and subjectivity of any representation.

¹⁸Barbie Zelizer (ed.), *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, London, The Athlone Press, 2001, p. 176.

The other three alternatives, which Grossman puts under the pen of an adult Shlomo, will try to speak otherwise about the same drama of inaccessibility felt by survivors' children, whose exponent he is. His turmoil, shown in the first part of the novel, is generated by the silences and taboos of his parents; and the exaggerated pretext of "the Nazi beast" does nothing but to draw attention to his generation, which was denied the past. On the other hand, this inherently inaccessible past had translated into a founding narrative, which could give coherence to second generation's heritage and that was all the more difficult to be written since it disobeyed precisely the premises of legitimacy stated by Elie Wiesel.

David Grossman moves in the second section of the novel from the description of a reality populated by survivors into a surreal universe where a writer is given a second chance not to be killed for the "fault" of being "the Jew of an officer". However, the recourse to surrealism is not the most appropriate solution, since "life in the world of imagination is a refuge for life in a grotesque reality."¹⁹ What David Grossman does in the chapter *Bruno* is not an unjustified style accommodation, since one of the stakes is to correct the misconception that "[I]srael has seen its role towards the survivors of Nazism as one of rescue and rehabilitation, not one of identification."²⁰ Therefore, Momik identifies himself not with the real Bruno Schulz, but with an immortal Bruno, not with "grandpa" Anshel, but with Wasserman the writer.

If one of the criticisms that one could make about the second part of the novel was the author's identification with the subject, not the same risk is posed by the third section, simply called *Wasserman*. However, its content relates not only to Anshel Wasserman, Momik's lost "grandfather", but to a whole set of narratives for which he could serve as a center. Regarding the risk of identification with the character – Shlomo rewrites, however, the story of "The Children of the Heart" – one could really tell that the narrator's voice gets to be confused with Anshel Wasserman's, in a manner not different from the previous chapter.

Two are the writer's express intentions, and they prevail the narrative itself: evil can be repaired²¹, and the repair can be done only through art²². The last pages of *Wasserman* testify

¹⁹ Gershon Shaked, *The Children of the Heart and the Monster: See Under: Love*, in „Modern Judaism”, nr. 9, oct. 1989, p. 318, apud Lilian Kramer, *Holocaust Literature*, p. 484.

²⁰ Naomi Sokoloff, *David Grossman. Translating the "other" in "Momik"*, în Leon Yudkin (ed.), *Israeli Writers Consider the "Outsider"*, Rutherford, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993, p. 39, apud Lilian Kramer, *Holocaust Literature*, pp. 481-482.

²¹ Ranen Omer-Sherman relates this concept of repair with the one of *tikkun* from Jewish mystical thought (see Lilian Kramer, *Holocaust Literature*, p.485). Although Grossman's novel does not go

about the labor of drafting the last part. For the stake is now Kazik's own life, Shlomo refers to his own person as to an auctorial instance: "It was again forgotten that the question should be asked differently: not 'What if Someone killed on X, Y or Z?' but 'Could Someone bring them back to life? Would they be revived through his work? And could (...) that Someone be brought back to life himself, revived (...) by that someone, endlessly?'"²³

The writer's stylistic formula for the latter part of the novel fully expresses his position on the historical and aesthetic demands of Holocaust narratives. On the one hand, the first explicit information that Holocaust survivors' children got about Momik's *eretzsham* were the ones from encyclopedias. On the other hand, the systematic nature of an encyclopedia induces the feeling that, along with the complete lecture, the reader may come to possess the absolute truth, and this is the trap historiography fell into. Moreover, encyclopaedia's claim of objectivity has been projected onto all other writings about the Holocaust: the majority of memoirs are required to be lists of places, people, and deaths, the works of fiction should not exceed this factual reality, and the cinematographic and photographic representations should induce only the appropriate emotion, and all this in an accurate retake of a set of well-known moral taboos.

"In Grossman's lightfull gesture of repair, the encyclopedia entries try to redefine the fundamental concepts of the post-Auschwitz universe."²⁴ *The Complete Encyclopedia of Kazik's life. First Edition* is perhaps the most courageous of the thematic and stylistic innovations that Grossman proposes in this novel, because "the last story frames (...) all other narratives"²⁵ and this framing provoked admiration, criticism and confusion at the same time. The individual touch and the particular way of reconciliation with the past reflect the second generation specificity: to reject the "collective model representation that they inherited from their parents and cultural mentors."²⁶ The exemplarity of this novel – without which Israeli literature would not have been the same – should always be doubled, in the critical discourse, by its place in the Holocaust literature.

beyond the moral values (towards the religious ones), reading the novel from this perspective can open new perspectives on David Grossman's novel.

²² "For Grossman the magic ring is not action, but language" comments Alan Mintz (in *Translating Israel*, p. 204).

²³ David Grossman, *Vezi mai jos: dragostea*, p. 432.

²⁴ Lilian Kramer, *Holocaust Literature*, p. 485.

²⁵ Yael Feldman, *Whose story is it, anyway? ...*, p. 236.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 238.

Thus, while the reasons are different, Appelfeld's work and that of Grossman put in writing the same search of reconciliation with the past. The former attempts to reconcile with his own past and is aware that the loss which he suffered; the later, with his present and with his parents' past, united by the same absence. The former seeks a proper scriptural formula to render his own search, different from the dominant discourse of the period. The later, although writing on behalf of an entire generation, keeps a personal, exaggeratedly individual touch.

And if the first similarity between Appelfeld's literature and that of Grossman was the fact that they approached the Holocaust theme as the context of their particular identities, another similarity refers to the purpose of those written by two writers. From the point of view of the sociology of literature, a subject such as the Holocaust, the more so when it is intimately linked to the formation of self, raises two questions: why was it written and why is it still read²⁷. The first of the two questions receives, through the prose of the two Israeli writers, the same response, with the nuances already mentioned: the purpose of these writings is to illustrate a formative path. The second question is, undoubtedly, to be answered by each one of the readers, but relates with the same need to find a meaning even in the worst moments of history and personal life.

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²⁷See Aviad Raz, *Rewriting the Holocaust*, p. 26.

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