



VIA RANDOM HOUSE

## WHY I CHOSE TO WRITE IN ENGLISH

AYELET TSABARI ON GIVING IN TO THE POWER OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

March 23, 2016 By [Ayelet Tsabari](#)

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People are amused by my finding anonymity in one of the most spoken languages in the world, but that’s what English was for me for the longest time: a secret language. English was a place I fled to, and writing in English was an act of reinvention that mirrored the anonymity and freedom I felt when migrating to a new country, eliciting the same exhilarating thrill of stepping outside my comfort zone. I imagine my late father must have felt something similar writing poetry in Hebrew, a language that was his native tongue, but not his mother’s tongue. A language his parents—who came to Israel from Yemen—spoke poorly and that his mother couldn’t read. A broken link between them, as English is between my mother and me.

Hebrew was a dead language for 17 centuries. It was revived to serve a purpose: to unite Jews from disparate places who had no way of communicating but through the language of prayer. It is a sacred language, the language of God, the language of the Bible. Writing in Hebrew, therefore, comes with a challenge: one must find a way to describe the ordinary, the secular, and the profane in words once considered holy. And though it is what makes Hebrew fascinating and unique and utterly loveable, there was something in English’s relative newness, in its inclusiveness and accessibility, in our lack of shared history, that I found liberating. English was a clean slate, an amusement park, with a vocabulary that seemed endless.