

The first Berman Literature Prize
2021
is awarded to the Israeli author

MR. DAVID GROSSMAN

for his novel

LIFE PLAYS WITH ME

Swedish translation by Natalie Lantz
Med mig leker livet. (Albert Bonniers Förlag 2020)

THE JURY'S CITATION

“Grossman has illustrated a
movable mosaic of memories where
inherited traumas, family betrayals and
a love larger than life are merged into a
deeply human depiction of several
generations of Jewish life
in Europe and Israel.”

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**LAUDATIO
DAVID GROSSMAN
BERMAN LITERATURE PRIZE**

Agneta Pleijel

Translation by Alan Crozier

IT IS AN OCCASION FOR CELEBRATION when the Swedish Berman Literature Prize is awarded for the first time, going to the Israeli writer David Grossman for his novel *More Than I Love My Life*, his latest work. But let me first recall my own meeting with Grossman in Israel in 1991, during Saddam Hussein's war with the threat of nerve gas.

At a time when many people were leaving Israel, a number of Nordic writers came there to express their solidarity. From Sweden Per Ahlmark, Lars Andersson, Kay Glans, my husband Maciej Zaremba and myself. When we met Grossman in Jerusalem, he remembered a previous visit to Denmark. In his hotel room he switched on the television, where a gentle film between programmes showed fish swimming indolently in an aquarium.

After watching the fish for five minutes, it struck him, as a former radio man, that in the same five minutes he would probably have been able to report on more disasters than the Danes had experienced since the Second World War. As a hint of the mental differences between two countries, that may be sufficient.

Like many others, I first came into contact with Grossman through his admirable reportages from the 1980s, *The Yellow Wind*, telling of encounters in occupied land with Palestinians

who had grown up in refugee camps. He has continued to work as a sensitive reporter of the situation of the Palestinians, as in the book *Sleeping on a Wire*. Both books have received well-deserved international attention. They show his hallmark as a writer, his boundary-crossing empathy with the Other.

BUT GROSSMAN IS above all a novelist, and that is what I want to talk about here. How does he do it? With that question I am already in danger of failing in my task. Most fiction writers stake out a territory for themselves. A distinctive style, a personal aesthetic. Not so Grossman. All his novels are different from each other. It is as if he sets off time and time again on a new journey with an unknown outcome. As if he is triggered by an issue of profound concern to himself.

To follow him is to be forced to embark on your own inner journey. You can lose your breath in the throng of characters in his novels, in every excursus and digression, all the flashes and associations. But you can be sure that it all hangs together. Of course, you could say that his works, taken as a whole, are a story about Israel and the Jewish people, from ancient times to the present day, or from the first Holocaust survivors who managed to get there to create the state of Israel, and about the many wars. But that would say too little. Grossman writes about human shortcomings. About human loneliness. And about love as a source of power. It may sound abstract, but I will explain what I mean.

In several novels, the narrator is a little boy, born in Israel like Grossman himself. The boy-storyteller can be found in novels such as *The Book of Intimate Grammar* and *The Zigzag Kid*. He appears in the large early novel *See Under: Love*. There the boy is called Momik. He was born in Israel at a time when many

people, including his parents, had arrived as refugees from the Nazi Beast they had survived.

Momik is astute, clever and childish. He knows nothing about the Beast or even what Jews are. His parents make a threadbare living by selling lottery tickets. One day he acquires a new grandfather, who is not his grandfather, and who has spent ten years in a mental hospital in Israel before he started speaking and it was established that he was related to Momik's family. Old Wassermann is confused and helpless, and Momik becomes his new grandfather's carer and confidant. He also becomes friends with the shabby old people in the street who are his grandfather's mildly crazy pals.

The first section about Momik is followed by others. One can imagine that they were written by Momik at a more adult age. One section is called Bruno, about Bruno Schulz, the ingenious Polish writer who, after two collections of magical stories, was shot by a Nazi in the Drohobycz ghetto in 1942. Grossman's reading of Schulz is intravenous. They are truly kindred spirits through their freedom from illusions and through the way they marvel over life. And through their ability to interpret childhood, which Schulz viewed as a period of special inspiration in life (Grossman also writes children's books).

A third section tells the story of Grandfather Wassermann in a German death camp in 1943. It turns out that Wassermann, before the war, was the author of popular serialized stories about "The Children of the Heart", adventures read by countless youngsters. They were also read as a child by the Obersturmbannführer of the concentration camp, who now wants to hear more. Wassermann is the camp jester, he is called the Jew who cannot die, and it is true that storytelling does not die. The Children

of the Heart are resurrected in the fight against Nazism, led by the boy Kazik, first as a child and then as an adult.

I have never read such an unbridled, burlesque, cheeky and tragicomic story from the Holocaust, yet it conceals none of the horribly brutal reality. The last section of the novel bears the title *The Complete Encyclopedia of Kazik's Life*. The headwords here allow the novel to be read from any direction, combining the sections with each other. The stuff of the story is gigantic, enough to fill ten or fifteen novels. It is a guide to Grossman's oeuvre and to the novels that he would write later, such as *The Smile of the Lamb* and *A Horse Walks into a Bar* and others.

I CAN'T MENTION all the novels, but one that must not be left out is *To the End of the Land*. The novel is an *opus magnum* among his works. Two young boys and a girl meet in 1967 in a hospital in Israel, all of them delirious and feverish. The Six Day War has just started and they do not know whether Israel will survive the united Arab attack. The three are bound to each other, for life as it turns out. The girl, Ora, marries one of them first. But she has children with both Ilan and Avram: two sons.

In 2000, Ora prepares to go hiking in the Galilee with her youngest son Ofer to celebrate the end of his long military service. But Ofer finds that he can't leave the army now. Ora then virtually kidnaps Ofer's father Avram, with his two backpacks ready packed. He has never met his son. The plot simply consists of Ora and Avram's long backpacking trek through northern Israel, in a countryside that is beautifully depicted, punctuated by military barracks. The events, conversations and flashbacks together build an unparalleled story of five people, two sons and three parents, that allows readers to get as close to them as only a novel can do.

It is a story of a profound friendship and love between three people. And a complicated story of passion between two men and a woman. And an icy, suspense-filled account of the Yom Kippur War of 1973, and of the front in Sinai where Avram is captured and wounded and Ilan tries to free him. *To the End of the Land* is also a family story about an unusual but simultaneously mundane family and about the childhood and adolescence of two half-brothers. The novel is also magnificent as a portrayal of a woman.

Ora is the central figure. She is alone among men in an environment where the endless war affects every breath. She is torn apart by worry about her son in the army, and fears that the news of his death will come while she is hiking. She hates war. She is wiser than the men. Sometimes she is exposed to mansplaining from the two men and her sons. The portrait of Ora is a part of Grossman himself. No matter how much she hates war, she must support the defence of Israel.

Grossman has said that he started writing the novel in 2003. His son Uri was fighting Hezbollah in Lebanon and was killed in 2006. It beggars comprehension that Grossman was able to complete the novel after receiving the news of his son's death.

But he is a storyteller for whom existence and language do not have any discernible boundaries, and for whom life and words constitute a unity. His work as a writer is an act of homage to life and language, and to the indissoluble bond between life and language. He has that rare ability to celebrate life as the world actually looks. One way to express this is that he believes that the task for humans is to create meaning in their lives.

This brings to mind Abraham Joshua Heschel, born in Poland and then a rabbi and theologian in the United States, who has stated: "People of our time are losing the power of celebration.

Instead of celebrating we seek to be amused or entertained. Celebration is a confrontation, giving attention to the transcendent meaning of one's actions." And also: "Never once in my life did I ask God for success or wisdom or power or fame. I asked for wonder, and he gave it to me." (*See the web: Abraham Joshua Heschel, Quotes*).

It is not because I know anything about Grossman's relationship with the rabbi, but because he shares with Heschel a hunger for knowledge based on wonder, amazement, and the power to celebrate life. Writing the way Grossman does may express a form of hope. And what is hope? Václav Havel once wrote that hope should not be confused with optimism. Hope, according to Havel, is a state of mind. An orientation in the mind and in the heart, and closely related to meaning. Václav Havel: "It [hope] is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out."

Those words are a good description of Grossman's works. Several of Grossman's novels give women a central role, not only Ora, but also Tamar in *Someone to Run With*, about a young girl on a picaresque odyssey through the underworld of Jerusalem in search of her drug-addict brother. To brothels and gambling dens, to aimlessly drifting existences, through stench and misery. And as always without moralizing. But the novel is also a tale of goodness. Grossman is thoroughly familiar with evil, and goodness is a miracle.

MANY OF GROSSMAN'S novels are long, but he is also a master of the short format. As in the book *Falling Out of Time*, or *Falla ur tiden* as in the title of Suzanne Osten's unforgettable staging of

the work at Elverket, Dramaten in Stockholm in 2016. Grossman builds a simple and austere cathedral of grief for any parent who has gone through the worst tragedy of all: losing a child.

Another short book is *Lion's Honey: The Myth of Samson*. This is really an interpretive essay about the biblical Samson, the judge and the wise Nazarite, famous for his strength. The book begins with the biblical text. In Israel, Samson is treasured as a national hero. Countless sports clubs, football teams, companies and organizations have been named after him.

But Grossman's interpretation runs counter to the conventional one. The biblical Samson was born of a nameless and barren woman, who was one day visited by an angel, a messenger from God, who announced that she would bear a son. The son will be wise, a Nazarite, but he must refrain from alcohol and he is forbidden to cut his hair. Grossman's question now is: what does it mean to be a chosen one, in Samson's case, with the mission of saving his people?

According to Grossman, being chosen by God means not being able to have a normal relationship with one's earthly parents. Nor with any other human being. This is how Grossman reads the biblical text; the price for being chosen is loneliness. Samson never manages to reach the community he longs for. On one level, Grossman's Samson is an allegory of Israel's fate among the peoples and of the loneliness of the Jews.

The biblical myth carries a tragic historical destiny. At one point, Grossman talks of God as "the great, tyrannical bellows known as 'the spirit of the Lord.'" Being an Israeli has meant constantly having to defend Israel's existence against its enemies and being able to prevail through military force.

But Grossman interprets Samson differently. His Samson

is transformed from an allegorical figure into a contemporary human being. Being like everyone else, being part of the “people”, has long been the normal thing. But in our own time, in this age of individualism, every person is unique: in other words, chosen. Everyone has a moral responsibility for our fellow human beings. The future of the earth and of humanity depends on how everyone – Jew or goy – acts.

The price of being an individual in this way, with one’s own morality, can entail loneliness. Standing up for human value and dignity has a price. So too does defending the rights of the bullied, the honour of the hungry, being able to live among others even if one is different, the right of exiles to be covered by human rights. I see this as the core of Grossman’s writing.

GROSSMAN’S LATEST NOVEL, *More Than I Love My Life*, appeared in Swedish last year, translated by Natalie Lantz. I have not mentioned the fine translators who have rendered Grossman in Swedish. Besides Lantz, we have Sune Karlsson, Viveka Heyman, Freddie Rokem, Ervin Rosenberg, Madeleine Rosenberg Cohen, Gidon Avraham and Boo Cassel.

Let me end with some thoughts about *More Than I Love My Life*, a remarkable portrayal of women. It differs from Grossman’s previous novels in that it is based on a true story from Yugoslavia about a well-known woman, Eva Panić Nahir. In the Acknowledgements at the end, Grossman thanks her and her daughter for generously allowing him to use their lives for a fictional novel.

In Grossman’s story the woman’s name is Vera. As a young Jewess, born in Croatia, she falls in love with a non-Jew, a Serb here called Milos. They are both idealistic and humanistic communists, but when Tito breaks with the Soviet Union they are

falsely accused of being spies for Stalin. Milos is imprisoned and hangs himself in prison. The authorities want Vera to admit that her husband was a Stalinist informer and traitor.

If Vera confesses, she will be free with her daughter Nina. If she refuses, she will be put in one of Tito’s gulags, the dreaded prison island of Goli Otok. Vera refuses and is taken to be tortured on the island in the Adriatic. She thereby condemns her little child Nina, five years old, to a rootless existence, later becoming a junkie, a man-eater and a prostitute.

Both Vera and Nina end up in Israel, where Vera gets married once again, to a Jewish widower, and Nina has a daughter by his son Rafael. The novel is about two vulnerable and abandoned little girls, Nina and Gili, both betrayed by their mothers. The deeply depressed Nina abandons not only her daughter but also the daughter’s father, her husband Rafael, who has worshipped her from first sight.

The novel opens in Israel, where the family is assembled to celebrate Vera’s ninetieth birthday. It is a novel with a complex structure and many threads, with the action set in many different places, but the story that etches itself most in the memory takes place on the former prison island of Goli Otok. After Vera’s ninetieth birthday, the three women – Vera, Nina and Gili – along with Gili’s father, the filmmaker Rafael, go there to be confronted with the fate of the family and to talk. And so that Rafael and Gili can film the conversations.

How does a family like this, with a serial history of grievous betrayal and painful abandonment, achieve reconciliation? Grossman has the ability to portray the inner workings of all the characters, without illusions, mostly through their everyday observations of each other. Top-level politics is combined

with an insightful understanding of humanity. The shocking conditions in the Yugoslav gulag are revealed in a manner that shows compassion for the characters, even though we see that their reactions to each other are not always kind sympathetic.

It is a novel written with an immense love for the protagonists. Not necessarily forgiveness between the characters in the novel, but an increasingly growing understanding of each other's lives. Indeed, love.

I find it hard to imagine any writer but Grossman who could have managed a task or a theme like this. All five people are made comprehensible and worth loving. Yes, love. Like the little plant that Vera tried to save when she had become blind in captivity and was forced to stand upright in the scorching sun day after day on Goli Otok.

It is not until eight years after the joint visit to the prison island that the youngest member of the family, Gili, begins to write down her family's story. The result is the novel *More Than I Love My Life*. When I put the book down, it was with a sense of dizziness. Where was I? In the world. In this world we share, which Grossman exposes to his readers. When the book ends, Gili too has had a daughter, aged five and a half.

Gili's last words in the novel are:

"She is my speck of earth. Ours."

I will end here, with my profound thanks to the jury for awarding this prize to the great novel *More Than I Love My Life*. And with a big thank you to Thomas and Catharina Berman who have instituted the prize. And finally – with great admiration and the deepest gratitude to David Grossman for his works.

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LAUREATE'S SPEECH

David Grossman

Translation by Jessica Cohen

Good evening to Catharina and Thomas Berman, and to their sons, Jacob and Philip, and their families. I am profoundly grateful for your generosity, and for establishing a prize for such an original purpose, one that is not to be taken for granted: the encouragement and celebration of dialogue—centered around knowledge and creation—between Jewish culture and other cultures that have both enriched and been enriched by it.

I have read the fascinating life stories of Catharina and Thomas and their relatives, some of whom grew up in poverty and scarcity, but thanks to their wisdom and tenacity were able to create a new reality—for themselves, their families, and thousands of other people who benefited from their talents. These included some who worked in fashion, and others who studied literature and art. Thomas's father, Nils Berman, for example, was a writer and literary critic responsible for one of Sweden's largest book collections. Catharina's grandfather, Erik Olof Wiklund, grew up poor but went on to study Greek and Latin at Uppsala University, earned the title of docent, and became a member of parliament for the Social Democrats. Catharina and Thomas spent decades working in the international metal trade, as well as supporting the arts and engaging in philanthropy.

I like these juxtapositions: between the esthetic field of fashion

and academia. Between politics and steel and literature. And there were other professions and penchants that merged together in Thomas and Catharina's life work, which led to – among other cultural and humanitarian endeavors – the idea for the Berman Literature Prize, of which I am proud to be the first recipient.

*

I WAS BORN in Israel, six years after the state was founded, nine years after the end of World War II and the Shoah. I was a member of the first generation in a country that aspired to create a completely new Jewish identity—no longer defeated, weak or defenseless. The books I read as a young boy, which later influenced my writing, were written primarily by Israeli authors who were also born in Israel and who wrote in Israeli Hebrew, such as Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua, S. Yizhar and Yaakov Shabtai.

But my story also had an unusual dimension: my father was born in Poland, in a small town named Dynów, near the town of Przemyśl, and when he was eight years old he immigrated with his mother and sister to Palestine. My father told me almost nothing about his childhood in Dynów, but one evening, when I was eight, he came into my room looking somewhat hesitant. I remember the moment clearly. He was holding a thick book with red binding, and he had an uncharacteristically shy smile on his face. It was if the child he used to be was peering out of the grown man's face, and he said, "Here, David, read this. This is what it was like for us, over there."

I opened the book. On the first page was a black-and-white photograph of a man with a kind face and a slightly sad, ironic smile. The title on the facing page read: "The Works of Sholem

Aleichem," and beneath that: "The Stories of Mottell the Cantor's Son." I climbed up to sit on the windowsill and dived into my father's childhood—into the world of the Jewish shtetl.

The stories I read in that book took place in a reality I had not known of. They were written in an archaic Hebrew, with many words I did not understand. What was a 'matchmaker'? Or a 'drawer of water'? What is a 'pogrom' and who were the *goyim* that everyone was so afraid of?

But from the moment I entered that world, I was unable, and perhaps unwilling, to leave it. I soon devoured everything Sholem Aleichem had written, both for children and adults. Some of the stories I learned by heart. I have no idea what sense I could have made of them back then. I only remember the impact of things beyond the visible text. Because what could an eight- or nine-year-old boy understand about a detached, lost dreamer like Menachem Mendel, or a Jew like Tevye the Dairyman (also known as the Fiddler on the Roof), who was constantly hounded by his *goy* neighbors?

I imagine that I felt the way a contemporary boy or girl might feel the first time they read *Harry Potter*, when they realize it's possible that another world exists, a world very different from the one they know, with its own system of rules, its own languages and institutions, its own fears. Because even though, as a boy, I did not know that the world I was reading about—the Jewish diaspora in Europe—had been destroyed, I always had the feeling that beyond those stories full of smiles and laughter, there was a quiet note of grief and loss.

I lived the life of that world excitedly, essentially creating a sort of enclave of Judaism within the new, energetic, sovereign, militant, future-facing Israeli reality. I hid my Diasporic

adventures from my classmates, of course, because I sensed that it would not be at all “cool” for a proud Israeli boy (whose greatest wish in life was to grow up quickly and become the first Israeli fighter pilot to wear glasses) to immerse himself in the exilic, victimized, passive reality of the Jewish shtetl.

Today, sixty years after my father gave me that book, I can say that it was thanks to Sholem Aleichem that I began to guess at something of the complex—and at times, tragic—relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and moreover, between Israeli-ness and Jewishness. Between Israelis and their own sense of Jewishness. In so doing, I learned – or guessed – something no less important, which directed and shaped and magnetized my entire being in the years that followed: that the place where both life and the loss of life can powerfully coexist—is literature.

*

ALTHOUGH I GREW UP in the Middle East, a significant part of my literary inspiration came from Europe, the United States, and Latin America. Not from Egypt or Lebanon, undoubtedly because Israel was—and still is—in a state of war with most of the Arab world, and many Israelis are completely unaware of the enormous cultural richness of that world. At thirteen, when asked to choose a second foreign language to study at school, in addition to English, I chose Arabic. This was soon after the Six-Day-War of 1967, which had culminated in Israel’s astonishing victory over five Arab states, and my parents objected to my choice. They thought I should study French. “French is culture! French is literature and theater!” they declared. And I remember taking our big atlas off the shelf and showing them where we were, and where Paris was.

As a teenager, I was able to grasp the ways in which Arabic and Hebrew are sister languages, echoing each other. I am certain that my comprehension of Hebrew deepened when I studied Arabic, and I have never regretted my choice.

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A FEW YEARS AGO, I was fortunate enough to meet the Dalai Lama in Jerusalem. He told me that before coming to Israel he’d been in the United States, where he’d met with a group of Jewish writers and intellectuals. He asked them what they regarded as the most prominent attribute of Jewish thought. One professor put his hand up and said, “Diversity of opinions!” Another professor quickly jumped up and said, “I beg to differ!”

I like that anecdote because it illustrates the urge, so typical of Judaism, to offer a counter argument, to be in a position of perpetual opposition. It also embodies the suspicion of any total or decisive authority. It shows a willingness—an eagerness, even—to cast doubts, to argue, even with God.

These things I have spoken of here in brief, and other ideas that tell the Jewish story in its various tones, will surely be heard on this podium every year when the Berman Literature Prize is awarded. But the prize is primarily for literature, and I would like to use my remaining time to talk about literature, about the essence and the core of literature—of creation.

To me, artistic creation is the possibility of touching infinity. Not mathematical or philosophical infinity—but human infinity. Meaning, the infinite faces of man. The infinite strands of the human soul, the infinite consciousness and opinions, urges, illusions, greatness and smallness, powers of invention, forces of

destruction—all the infinite human permutations. Almost every idea I think of when I am writing a character opens me up to more and more of his or her possibilities—and my own. Truly, a garden of forking paths. It seems almost banal to be moved by this, but allow me today, this one time, to be moved by the notion that we – each and every one of us – are full of life, in the most literal sense of the term. In each of us there are infinite possibilities, infinite ways to locate ourselves in life, to live our life.

And perhaps it is not banal at all? Perhaps we should, in fact, remind ourselves of this truth over and over again? Consider how cautiously we avoid living the abundance that we contain, all the things offered to us by our souls, our bodies, the circumstances of our lives. See how quickly, at such an early age, we reduce ourselves into being “the one”: we each have a single “official story” that we tell, first and foremost, to ourselves, and then every time we meet someone we wish to impress, or when we are trying to earn their affection, their love, or sometimes their pity. We tell one story out of many possible ones, and sometimes, when we have told it countless times, that story begins to feel like our prison. It prevents us from noticing, for example, how much we have matured and changed since the things we keep retelling happened.

This risk, incidentally, is not only present for individuals. Whole societies, states, and nations risk becoming prisoners of the official story they tell themselves, especially if they are in conflict with an enemy that traps them—and which they in turn trap—in a stasis that leads to apathy and political fatalism. In such a place, they become the victim and even the prey of the story they tell themselves.

The essence of writing, in any language, is a movement of the soul that *refuses to give up on our abundance*, that defies reduction,

that resists the gravitational pull of our knowledge of death. As I experience it, literary creation is a subversive movement on the part of the writer, primarily against him or herself. Against his or her limitations and anxieties. A free, supple, light movement along the imaginary axis where I can, for example, move between the child I was and the old man I will be; between the man I am and the woman I could have been; between the sane me and the insane me. Between the Israeli I am and the Palestinian I might have been, had I been born three miles further to the east. Or between the Jew I am and the Jew I could have been in the small Croatian town that was the birthplace of the woman who inspired Vera, the protagonist of my latest novel, *More Than I Love My Life* (*Med mig leker livet*).

There is, as I mentioned, a political dimension to this tendency to diminish our souls. To the apathy with which a society living in a near-constant state of war hands over its fate to leaders who doom it to remain in that state because it is the only reality they know. Because they are fluent in its language. I speak here, in part, from my own personal wound. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict led to the loss of my son, Uri, in the Second Lebanon War, fifteen years ago.

Over and over again, for decades, we have heard that true peace between Israel and the Palestinians is not possible because the Israeli and Palestinian narratives are at odds and neither side is willing or able to relent. They lock horns with each other and show no flexibility whatsoever. This is an accurate depiction. When we look at the century-long conflict, we can see that a “narrative” is sometimes a human story that has become congealed, frozen, fossilized. In the frozen state that has emerged between Israelis and Palestinians, for example, we writers, men and women of the

book and the story, can help: to dissolve the narrative, to soften it, to massage its consciousness, and to turn it back into a human story. If we do this, Israelis will be able to truly feel the pain of those who are (still) our enemies, the sense of humiliation they endure under our occupation, the suffocation in which they have been living for 54 years. The Palestinians, on their part, will be able to feel Israel's existential fear, the sense of isolation and terror of a small nation whose neighbors have not truly accepted its right to exist. And echoes of the cruelty with which it was treated by other nations throughout history.

If we do this, both Israelis' and Palestinians' contact with reality will be richer and far more clear-headed. Reality will not be merely a projection of our profound fears or our untenable wishes. Reality will become, in such a situation, far more realistic. From this perspective—and from no other—there may grow understanding, tolerance, acceptance between hostile peoples, *true dialogue between cultures and nations*. And perhaps after years, once the toxins of prolonged war dissolve in the two nations' blood, there may also grow mutual curiosity, esteem, and eventually even empathy. It is hard, at present, to hope for more, but even that much would be no less than a dream come true.

I have described one possible dialogue, which unfortunately is not yet occurring. It is still wishful thinking, and its absence has a destructive effect on the lives of both peoples. It forms a worldview of life at war, a mindset that is belligerent, militant, violent and survivalist. And so I ask you: is this reality not in desperate need of literature? Does it not require the infinitude that exists so powerfully in artistic creation?

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BERMAN LITERATURE PRIZE

was established in 2020 to reward an author whose works embodies the statues of the Prize, in the spirit of the Jewish tradition and literary works aiming to explore the rich Jewish culture and at the same time “exceed times and cultures” thereby striving for the universally human. Berman Literature Prize is for ten years awarded annually and the prize sum is 750 000 Swedish kronor.

BERMAN LITERATURE PRIZE HAS THE FOLLOWING ETHOS AND DECLARATION OF INTENT

There is more than one Jewish tradition, and the tradition that the Berman Literature Prize seeks to highlight has developed in constant dialogue with other cultures and languages. This means that for thousands of years it has preserved a rich history and literature while simultaneously encountering the languages and texts of other cultures. Tradition and renewal have interacted, giving rise to a constant critical rereading of religious texts as well as literature and songs, poetry and philosophy. This is a tradition of knowledge in which interpretation, interpretative concepts and memory are at the centre, and because of historical circumstances involving persecution and discrimination, it is often written from a marginal position and from the experience of exile.

It is an ongoing exploratory discussion, and all the forms it takes have one thing in common: an impassioned and sincere belief in the ability of the literary text to transcend times and cultures, to let words convey experiences and thoughts between people. The aim of the Berman Literature Prize is to honour authors in recent years who, regardless of background or genre, have worked in the spirit of this tradition.

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BERMAN LITERATURE PRIZE AWARD CEREMONY

Eric Ericsonhallen Stockholm, Sweden

Monday October 25th, 2021

17.00

Canapés and Wine

17.45

Prize Ceremony

WELCOME Svante Weyler

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)

La soirée dans Grenade, from "Estampes" L. 100 (1903)

Roland Pöntinen

LAUDATIO Agneta Pleijel

PRIZE CEREMONY

Thomas & Catharina Berman, Daniel Pedersen

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)

Pagodes, from "Estampes" L. 100 (1903)

Roland Pöntinen

LAUREATE'S SPEECH David Grossman

SHA SHTIL

Sabbath hela veckan

FINAL Svante Weyler

FREIELECHS VON DER CHUPE

Sabbath hela veckan

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