David Grossman

Born in Jerusalem in 1954, David Grossman is among the most prominent contemporary Hebrew writers alive today. In his fiction, Grossman grapples with the place of individual identity within a collective society. His masterful delineation of endearing, even if somewhat eccentric, protagonists does not limit the scope of his work to individual psychological portraits. Rather, Grossman manages to limn the profound interconnectedness of the social and the psychic, delicately and eloquently articulating, in work after work, the powerful effect of communal trauma on the basic drives and instincts of every Israeli. Grossman’s articulation of the relevance of the intimate details of individuals’ daily existence against a larger-than-life backdrop of political conflict and historical drama, affiliates him with a struggle in Modern Hebrew fiction, from its earliest incarnation in the mid- nineteenth century, to assert the power of the individual creative imagination in an idiom which for millennia was used almost exclusively to frame collective legislative and spiritual concerns.

Grossman has written about the resonances of Holocaust culture in modern Israel in *See Under Love* (1986), about male childhood within a macho military society in *The Book of Intimate Grammar* (1991), about exploited homeless youth on the streets of Jerusalem in *Someone to Run With* (2000), and about the familial and psychic effects of serial and ongoing wars within a single life, spanning the six day war in 1967, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, and the repeated confrontations with Lebanon in 1982 and 2006, in his most recently translated *To the End of the Land* (2008). In two books of non-fiction, *Sleeping on a Wire* (1992) and *The Yellow Wind* (1987) David Grossman addresses the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in humanizing and humanistic ways.

A recent collection of personal essays on his writing life, *Writing In the Dark: Essays on Literature and Politics* (2009) contains an essay, “Books that Have Read Me” which beautifully sums up the elements of Grossman’s literary approach. In it, he discusses the impact of the works of Sholem Aleichem, an iconic Yiddish writer based in Europe and New York in the first part of the twentieth century, on his own writing about Israeli culture. These stories came to represent, for Grossman, the scars of Israeli society in the 1950s and the 1960s, which had been sutured shut by the Zionist ideologies and collective dogmas of the moment. The Yiddish language, the culture of traumatized immigrants attempting to build new lives out of the ruins of the past, all came together for him in his childhood obsession with the work of Sholem Aleichem. There, he caught a glimpse not of a lost world, but of a parallel world, which he was shocked to discover, as he aged, had been aggressively snuffed out, not just by the two World Wars in Europe, but by the aggressive repression of Diaspora identity in the early years of the modern State of Israel. Grossman’s fiction, set in contemporary Israel, probes the scars left by the past in the present.

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