

FRIEDENSPREIS

DES DEUTSCHEN BUCHHANDELS

David Grossman

2010

Speeches

Peace Prize of the German Book Trade 2010

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Certificate

The German Publishers and Booksellers Association awards the
2010 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade to

David Grossman

In so doing, the association and its members have chosen to honor one of Israel's foremost authors and an active supporter of reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. In his novels, essays and stories, David Grossman has consistently sought to understand and describe not only his own position, but also the opinions of those who think differently.

David Grossman gives a literary voice – one that is heard throughout the world – to this difficult co-existence.

His books illustrate the extent to which we can only end the cycle of violence, hatred and displacement in the Middle East by means of listening, restraint and the power of words.

In his major work “To the End of the Land,” Grossman shows the importance of language in the search for identity and warns of its increasing militarization. Faced with a reality characterized by arbitrariness, coercion and alienation, David Grossman offers us ways out of a society caught between war and peace.

German Booksellers and Publishers Association

Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Gottfried Honnefelder

Frankfurt am Main, Church of St. Paul
October 10, 2010

Gottfried Honnefelder, President of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association

Greeting

The archetypes of human culture include the act of giving and of giving in return. This does not mean the exchange of goods simply to serve a useful purpose. It is the freely offered gift born of abundance, and its response in the form of a gift in return which – so the cultural anthropologists tell us – marks the beginning of the communication that we call *culture*. Because in giving and giving in return, people face one another without killing one another, they give to one another without sacrificing themselves to one other. When that sort of thing happens, peace takes the place of combat. Because in order to be capable of giving and of giving in return, “people had to succeed in laying down their spears” - as *Marcel Mauss* puts it. It was only when King Arthur created the marvel of his court, so it is noted in the Breton *Chronique d'Arthur*, that there was “the Round Table at which the knights no longer fought”. Words took the place of deadly weapons, giving and giving in return took the place of murderous agon.

Quite rightly, the awarding of prizes has been compared to what happens with giving and giving in return, in the way *Mauss* described it. With a prize, after all, honour, recognition and respect are brought to the winner, indeed admiration and worship, and not least, the prize itself. And the donor of a prize is no less the recipient of a “gift” in turn, also gaining in standing and esteem, reputation and prestige.

When the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels first awarded a prize in 1950 with its Peace Prize to Max Tau, it was not just the giving that was important for the Börsenverein. It was the fact that after a period of ignominious conformity, the establishment of a prize embodied the resolve to make a commitment to a culture of peace. The gift in return was no less important, since with this gift, the recog-

nition was regained which permitted the Börsenverein to return to the “Round Table”.

But in the case of the Peace Prize, to call it an exchange of gift and gift in return is inadequate. Because the gift brought to the prizewinner by the Börsenverein is already, after all, a gift in return – a gift in return for everything that readers, book market and society have received from the respective prizewinner. *He* is the originator of a gift that is perceived as such by those who receive it.

With the presentation of this year's Peace Prize, the Börsenverein thanks *David Grossman* for what he, through his works and deeds, has given to all those who share in what matters to him, the cause of peace. David Grossman's gift is not inconsiderable. Because he has tried nothing less than to use the power of the word and of arguments to fathom whether there can still be a way in his divided and mined homeland to succeed – in *Marcel Mauss'* words - “in laying down their spears”.

When arguments are no longer able to assert themselves, work that does no more than tell of the fate of those affected becomes particularly important. This can be experienced impressively and distressingly by reading Grossman's latest great novel, *Eine Frau flieht vor einer Nachricht (To the End of the Land)*. The ambivalence of the real world, as the novel shows, extends equally into the use of words: because words can be signs of death as well as signs of life. On the one hand, there is the word that seeks to tell a mother of the death of her son in war – a word that would be so final, a mother can only flee from its threatened delivery. And at the same time, though, it is only the word which succeeds in ensuring this flight does not end in nowhere, and which is even capable of unlocking the silence that war and torture have bequeathed to the son's also travelling father.

It has not just been in repeated new approaches using arguments that David Grossman has tried to give reasons as to why the seemingly insoluble tensions of the present time need not end in what has become a wordless, deadly conflict. He has given credibility to the hope he places in individual personal action in a deeply moving way. After all, the news that his own son has also unexpectedly fallen victim to the conflicts of war could not silence him in working on his

great novel.

This in itself reveals *the* gift for which we want to thank him by giving him the Peace Prize: a great body of work as an essayist and writer – a work that speaks of hope because it refuses to leave the last word to the war in his country, to the war everywhere in the world, and to the war within ourselves.

Joachim Gauck

Laudatory speech

Dear Mr. Grossman,
our very distinguished guest here today,

It is truly a great honor and pleasure to have you here with us. For a long time now, you have been well-known to us and the wider world as a writer, an institution and a symbol of the peace movement. But, today, we are lucky enough to come face-to-face with the flesh-and-blood David Grossman.

This meeting has been long-awaited. Although the hosts of this award ceremony and we, their guests, might give off the impression of being accomplished and decorated, we are secretly thirsting for something. Since we are always in danger of sweltering in the deserts of our time, we crave individuals whose thoughts and words – both spoken and on the page – allow us to at least hope that the future will bring peace and justice.

The Peace Prize of the German Book Trade honors individuals who give us something that is in such short supply. And with you, Mr. Grossman, the jury has found one of these *inspiring* individuals. In you, we find a power of words that leaves us in awe. But, even more so, we find incorruptibility, courage, a willingness to fearlessly look reality in the face and a firm will to not give up where others have lost hope. For these things, we thank you and congratulate you with all our hearts!

You once said that writers are primarily born from an urge to tell stories. That sounds simple enough. But, given political realities in Israel, this unavoidably forces you to enter a darker world. When facing the risk of being killed or wounded on a daily basis, hatred and despair can easily force people to become aggressive or apathetic. You also once said that, as a writer, you feel called upon to escape the stranglehold of what Israelis call the “the situation” and to reclaim the “right to individuality and uniqueness.”

You have chosen to not respond to fanaticism and violence with fanaticism and violence, and you have steadfastly refused to don the ragged uniform of hatred. But you have also chosen to not helplessly submit to a “destiny,” and you have focused on continually securing the internal freedom to follow an alternative path, and one that is your own.

And so, ladies and gentlemen, before us stands a man whose very existence provides an answer to our endless preoccupation with whether life can succeed. That’s why having him here makes us happy. For, by coming into contact with such a unique person, we are able to believe in what we are capable of ourselves: People are not condemned to be victims of their circumstances. People have a choice. Even in the face of arbitrariness and dictatorship, people can still carve out for themselves a certain amount of freedom of action. “I discover that the mere act of writing about arbitrariness,” Grossman once said, “allows me to feel a freedom of movement in relation to it. That by merely facing up to the arbitrariness, I am granted freedom. ... The freedom to express yourself differently, innovatively, before that which threatens to chain and bind one to arbitrariness and its limited, fossilizing definitions.”

I can relate to this sentiment very well. Despite our helplessness, I, as a citizen of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), and many other people in Eastern Europe accomplished something similar: Though surrounded by lies, we lived an honest life.

After the excesses of blind allegiance and ideological infatuation, after murder, blood, disgrace and dishonor, most German just stood there like people who’d lost their way in a desert of ashes. And, after the war, in order to escape

from turning inward and thinking about things that made them feel ashamed, *they, too*, allowed themselves to once again get caught up in the zeitgeist. Only a few of them were able to salvage an old insight from the ashes: Not conforming with the many makes us strong. And it makes us happy to not construct a reality in which contradictions are blurred while some are even *shielded from our view*, a reality in which anxiety, pain and guilt are suppressed. What animates and fulfills us much more is having an openness to the world, a willingness to open ourselves to others and to be open for others, and also a willingness to honestly confront all aspects of our own selves.

Your writing, Mr. Grossman, is both a model and guide for making this journey toward others and ourselves. By taking us along on a journey into the reality of your country, you take us with you into *frightening* feelings of despair, depression and hopelessness. But you also allow us to share in the comfort and the joy when, with you, we are allowed to realize that nothing stands still, that there are ways out of every situation, that there are experiences that heal. Doing so allows us to learn to think and act in a new and different way. We can actually win – through inner freedom.

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Dear Mr. Grossman and honored guests!

It was a great hour of destiny for the Jewish people when, in 1947, the United Nations assured them that they would have their own country. Though the Cold War had already begun between their separate blocs, both America and the Soviet Union opposed any continuation of British mandate powers.

Already before this decision, Jews had started coming – a few of them legally, most of them illegally – on hastily arranged ships that the British often seized right off the coastline of Palestine. These were refugees from Europe who had survived the war – whether in the concentration camps, in the Soviet Union, in hiding, with false papers or in partisan units. There were Jews out of the camps for displaced persons in Germany and Austria, out of internment camps on Cyprus, out of Poland, out

of Romania, out of Hungary. Many of them had become Zionists only out of necessity. Indeed, not all of them were excited about going to Palestine, that much-contested land. If these people had been given visas to go to the United States, they would have chosen to go there instead. Thus, though coming to this country was only their second choice, they still came. In this new state, the Jewish people – which had been scattered and decimated – could establish a new identity, a WE.

We all need this “we.” It has to do with family, place, language, culture, religion, the nation, the state – in other words, with everything that ties us to our own people. And the more security it exudes, the less vulnerable it is. We are imprisoned by this “we.” We might renounce it, repress it or relativize it, but the fate of *every* individual member of the “we” is tied up with that of *all* its members. It sometimes happens that the wishes and longings of the individual – of the “me” – match up with those of the “we.” In 1989, we yelled “WIR sind das Volk” (“WE are the people”) in the streets and, in doing so, we succeeded in toppling the system, winning our freedom and reuniting Germany. Twenty years ago, destiny was on our side. At last, we were allowed and able to be at peace and surrounded by peaceful neighbors, as well.

When the state of Israel was founded, that was not the case. “We have waited for this moment for 2,000 years,” David Ben-Gurion said in a speech delivered on May 14, 1948, “and now it has come.” But now that the Zionist dream had finally come true, it was threatened by its Arab neighbors from the very first moments, and it collided with the Palestinians’ desire to gain their own independence. From the very beginning, it has been a tragic situation.

Ever since, the Jewish people has been fighting a battle for its survival. Will it be us or them? Will we always have to fight to secure our right to exist, or will we succeed in creating a homeland that is more than just a refuge and a fortress?

Between 1948 and 2006, there were seven wars, seven wars in which the Jewish people has been forced to secure its right to exist through violence.

“When my country is attacked,” I recently

read an Israeli psychologist say in an interview, “I have to defend myself, justify myself and battle myself, and I can’t even critically examine myself anymore.” In situations like these, there is even strengthened validity to the old saying: “My country, right or wrong.” During World War II, many officers in Germany’s military said the same thing – and they did so in a country that was not defending itself but, rather, had gone on the offensive to dominate others. Israel, on the other hand, seeks to coexist and cooperate with other peoples – but, still, it is confronted with the issue of guilt and reasonableness toward other peoples as well as with the issue of loyalty toward its own: Aren’t I obligated to show unconditional loyalty to my country since I will perish with it if I don’t? And, therefore, aren’t I obliged to let my sons and daughters go to war, even if the government is waging it using means I disapprove of?

In Grossman’s latest novel, “To the End of the Land,” one of the two main characters is Avram. When Avram is released from an Egyptian prison – his battered body covered with bruises, contusions, burns and breaks – one of the first things he asks after emerging from a coma-like state is: “Is there ... Is there an Israel?”

Then, speaking with a dry mouth, his girlfriend Ora responds: “Yes. There is. Of course.

Everything. Everything’s just as it was, Avram. Did you think we were...?”

At its narrowest point, Israel is only 15 kilometers wide. It only has a few million inhabitants. Israel is not England, and it’s not America. As Grossman says, you have to *will* Israel if it is going to exist. But Grossman’s loyalty is not self-subordination without criticism. He and other intellectuals in Israel show that, if you want to have a state worth defending, you need not only solidarity, but also freedom of opinion, disputes, democracy and justice. They believe in something attributed to the German revolutionary Carl Schurz. After the 1848/49 revolt in Baden was put down, Schurz immigrated to the United States, where he was free to pursue a career in politics and eventually became the first German-born American elected to the US Senate. In a 1872 speech to that body,

Schurz reportedly said: “My country, right or wrong; if right, to be *kept* right; and if wrong, to be *set* right.”

Loyalty and criticism are not opposites. In fact, when correctly understood, you can’t have one without the other. If only it weren’t so much more easily said than done!

David Grossman let his first son, Jonathan, perform military service. David Grossman let his second son, Uri, perform military service. Uri was deployed in the Occupied Territories, where he went on patrols, participated in ambushes and manned checkpoints, and he also fought in the 2006 war in Lebanon. “At the time,” Grossman later explained, “I had the feeling – or, rather, a wish – that the books I was writing would protect him.”¹ Like Ora, the mother of the young soldier in his most recent novel, Grossman felt like he could keep his son alive if he just kept talking about him, like he could banish death by exposing himself to its threat.

Just a matter of hours before a ceasefire ended the war, Uri Grossman was killed when his tank was struck by a missile. “When something like that happens to someone like that,” his father, David Grossman, later said, “you want vengeance, you hate and your whole range of emotions is wounded.” But, later, he felt that “whenever I yield to hatred, I feel that my son Uri is no longer near me.”

You have to *will* Israel, Grossman says, but in a way that isn’t caught up with hatred. If policies are only focused on the “Us or them?” issue, when they only emphasize winning or losing, each victory merely becomes the cause of the next defeat. Something built upon hatred, debasement and humiliation only reaps revenge. “Saying ‘no’ is not a policy,” Grossman has written, “it’s a mental fixation.”

“When two unreconciled individuals stand face-to-face with one another,” Grossman recently said, “you will see how two people who are generous and gentle and moral can become almost like two beasts. They become representatives of their people, and representatives tend to over-advocate; they advocate things that they don’t believe in, things that they hate.”

The question is: Can we manage to escape

this trap and, even in crisis situations, to realize the “I” rather than just the representative of the “we”? Do we have the courage to approach “the other” and to remain united with and loyal to him even when our “we” is aggrieved, injured or threatened and the ranks begin to close? During the war in Yugoslavia, how much strength did it take for a Serbian to not divorce his Croatian wife? And, during the Nazi era, how much strength did it take for an “Aryan” man to not separate from his Jewish wife?

Hardly any of us here in the Church of St. Paul faces the crucial test of having to live life with divided loyalties. Grossman’s “yes” to Israel – the country with which he has linked his own life and those of his children – is as absolute as it is critical. But it also leaves no doubt that his understanding of patriotism does not stand opposed to his unqualified affirmation of human rights, which instruct us to also have respect for how others think. It’s a simple command, but a very difficult one to follow.

In the novel, was the Jewish mother, Ora, asking too much when she told her Palestinian driver, Sami, to take her and her son into the military camp where “the action” of the Israelis against the Arabs was supposed to start? Later, Ora admits that “He was dying of fear” and asks “How could I have done this to him?” Sami was afraid of the cars of the Jews surrounding him, which were bringing their most prized possessions to a dangerous mission. Couldn’t they have mistaken him for a would-be suicide bomber? And Sami also feared the reproaches of his countrymen. Wasn’t he suspected of having collaborated with the Jews?

Fortunately, there are people on both sides who can transcend the enmity, the hatred and the resentment toward the other group as well as build bridges to the enemies on the other side. We are reminded of the Palestinian Ismail Khatib, whose 11-year-old son, Ahmed, was shot by Israeli soldiers in the occupied West Bank. Khatib donated his son’s organs, thereby saving the lives of five children belonging to the nation of his enemies.

We look to the Israeli psychologist who spends several hours every week talking with his Palestinian students. One of his students once confessed to him: “I used to think it was too bad that Hitler didn’t kill all the Jews. Then I spoke with you and drove to Poland together with Jews

to see what happened.” In saying that, he meant to confront the suffering of the other. In this way, he could develop some compassion that allowed him to see just how deep the fear of annihilation was in those whose air of superiority had once seemed to him like nothing but pure arrogance.

But how many people on both sides are really capable of taking each other’s thoughts into consideration? What kind of chances do peace policies have after years of increasing hardening, which sometimes leads Grossman to yearn for a king or a firm hand from outside?

“Okay,” Grossman once wrote, “it’s all very well to say, ‘If you will it, it is no dream,’ as Herzl said, but what if you stop willing it? What if you can’t be bothered to have the will anymore?” The biggest danger, Grossman says – and one that is more destructive even than the threat from Hamas – is the “a dwindling of the Israeli instinct to survive.” How long can you still will something when you’ve already lost hope? How long can you hold out when you feel abandoned and you have fewer and fewer friends?

In the novel, Ora explains to her young son how the United States is one of these friends. And England, too. She then whisks her finger very briskly over the rest of the countries in Europe. It shocked me a bit that Grossman felt that WE, that Germany, didn’t number among his country’s friends. Grossman couldn’t have missed the philo-Semitism of my generation, I thought. He must have also noticed the various efforts that West Germany made to atone for German injustices. After skipping a generation, hadn’t shame and sorrow come to our country? Survivors of the Shoah had come back and Jews had moved here from the Soviet Union. Germany – so I believe – would be the last country to renounce its support for and solidarity with Israel.

It is precisely because we care deeply about Israel, precisely because we understand what it means for a people that has been persecuted in the Diaspora – a people that Germans ultimately even tried to eradicate – to have a homeland of their own. Precisely for these reasons, we see ourselves as being particularly obligated to play an active role in securing external and internal peace for it.

But what holds true with loyalty also holds true with friendship: We cannot understand criticism as antagonism or even hostility. In fact, friendship can sometimes be more wholehearted and authentic if it doesn't shy away from criticism. David Grossman knows this; we sometimes don't. His love for the country that one has to will has numbed neither his mind nor his ability to understand the interests of others. I admire this ability. I long for this kind of wise generosity in my own life as well as in the hearts of the despairing, the aggressive and the searching in Israel and Palestine!

Though struck by personal misfortunes, David Grossman has not grown numb, not become apathetic, not been paralyzed. He has held on to his freedom of action – or perhaps occasionally even been forced to win it back. After his son's death, and after the week of mourning, he returned to his novel – and, in writing, he found an exit, a life that must go on. Despair is not a luxury that Grossman can allow himself.

As he sees it, it depends on us, on mankind, whether hatred will win the upper hand – both within us and, ultimately, in the entire world. And it depends on us whether we can overcome the many deep wounds and humiliations between different peoples by entering into a dialogue with each other. Interaction helps. Dialogue helps. Dialogue with “the other,” dialogue with ourselves. It helps us numb the hatred and resentment, to realize the suffering of others and to encounter ourselves in the other.

I don't see David Grossman as one of those naïve types who believes we can completely dispel with all enmity if we just build bridges of empathy and understanding. But even if we can't do away with this enmity once and for all, perhaps we can force it to submit to a period of inactivity, which would strengthen attempts at reaching a compromise that could result in peace.

There are no longer any alternatives but dialogue, negotiation and compromise. Ben-Gurion already said many years ago that “nothing else is left but to go forward within each other into the future. It's still too early, but we will be able to trust each other someday.”

Today, this same spirit can be found in Israel in David Grossman. And, today, he is receiving the Peace Prize for having steadfastly refused to become part of the machinery of retribution and for having borne responsibility himself in his country and in these “murky” times.

Today, there are many – particularly among the young – who are turning their back on Israel because they don't feel connected with the country anymore like people did during the time surrounding its founding. In his novel, Grossman has the young soldier Ofer whisper into his mother's ear: “If I'm killed, leave the country. Just get out of here, there's nothing here for you.” Grossman and his wife have also asked themselves what things would have been like if they had left the country. But they have decided to stay. As Grossman once said in an interview, this is because “Israel is the only place on Earth where I am not a stranger. I regard it as a privilege to take part in the creating this country. In the Mishnah (upon which the Talmud is based), there is a phrase saying the one who has experienced a miracle does not necessarily recognize it as a miracle. I recognize the miracle: We Jews do have a state.”

Today, we are praising and proclaiming those who stand their ground instead of yielding it. We praise and proclaim David Grossman as one of them.

Thank you, David.

You stand your ground before your Goliath, before everyday hatred – but not once have you done this with a slingshot, as it was before.

But you are still David.

David Grossman

Acceptance speech

Ladies and Gentlemen,

when I began to write the book *To the End of the Land*, I knew that I wanted to tell the story of Israel, which for more than a century – even before it became a state – has been in a state of war, and I knew that I would do this through the personal and intimate story of one family.

Perhaps you will agree with me that the greatest drama of humanity is the drama of the family. Each and every one of us is a participant in such a drama, for each of us is born into a family. In my view, the most significant moments in human history have not taken place on battlefields or royal palaces or the chambers of parliament, but rather in kitchens and bedrooms and the rooms of children. And in my book I tried to show how the Middle East conflict “projects” itself, its brutality, into the fragile bubble of family life, and how it inevitably alters its innermost texture.

I tried to describe how people trapped inside this conflict, or in any other long and violent conflict, struggle to preserve the delicate weave of human relations, of tenderness, sensitivity, compassion, within a situation that is all about toughness and indifference, and the effacement of the individual self. Sometimes I compare the struggle to preserve these things to walking with a candle in one’s hand in the midst of a raging storm. Please allow me to take you now into that storm, with candle in hand.

If you were to ask me, what is my greatest wish for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I would say, of course, that I want it to be resolved and come to an end, and peace to prevail. But then you might persist and ask me, “Let’s assume it won’t end for quite some time – what would be your greatest wish till then?”

And after the pang of pain I would surely feel because of your question, I would reply that I wanted to learn to be as exposed as possible to the horrors and the evils, large and small, that the conflict creates on a daily basis, without sealing myself off in self-defense.

For me, to be a human being – a *mensch* in the fullest sense of the word – in the midst of this ongoing conflict means mainly to look and to see, to keep my eyes open all the time, as much as I can – and I can’t always, I don’t always have enough inner strength – but I know that I must, at least, to insist on knowing what is going on, what things are being done in my name that I am part of, even if I absolutely do not condone them. To *see* these things, in order to react, in order to say – to myself and others – what I feel about them. To put my own names and words on them, and not be tempted to settle for the names and words that the government, or the army, or my enemy, or my own fears try to dictate to me.

And to remember – and sometimes this is the hardest part – that the one who opposes me, my enemy, who hates me and sees me as a threat to his existence, he too is a human being, with his own family and children, his own hopes and idea of justice, with his despair and his fears, his blind spots.

Today you are awarding me the Frankfurt Peace Prize, a very great honor, and I want to talk about peace. It is imperative to talk about peace, to insist on talking about peace, especially given our current reality. It is essential to revitalize, with constant effort, the spirit of the fearful Israelis and Palestinians who are paralyzed by despair, for whom by now “peace” is a synonym for illusion or hallucination, or even for a death trap.

After a hundred years of war, and decades of occupation and terrorism, too many Israelis and Palestinians no longer believe in the possibility of real peace. They do not even dare to imagine what living in peace might look like. Most of them have become reconciled to their condition, as if sentenced to live their lives in endless cycles of violence and killing.

But someone who despairs of the chance for peace has already been defeated, and has con-

signed himself to the fate of never-ending war. And sometimes – and this occasion is surely one of those times – one needs to restate the obvious: both sides – Israel and the Palestinians – have the right to live lives of peace, free of occupation, terrorism and hatred. Both deserve to live in dignity as individuals and as independent peoples in their own sovereign states, and to recover from the wounds of a hundred years of warfare. Not only do they deserve this: both peoples urgently need peace, in order to sustain their very existence.

I cannot speak about the hopes of the Palestinians for peace. I have no right to dream their dreams. I can only wish them, from the bottom of my heart, that they will soon experience lives of freedom and sovereignty, after generations of subjugation and occupation at the hands of the Turks, British, Egyptians, Jordanians, and Israelis; that they will build their state as a democracy, that they will be able to raise their children without fear. That they will enjoy those things that normal life, a life of peace, can give to anyone, anywhere.

Let me now speak about *my* hopes, my deepest wishes as an Israeli and as a Jew.

For me, "peace" is not only a definition of a situation whereby all acts of war will cease and Israel will have full and productive relations with its neighbors. A true peace, for Israel, means a chance for a new way of being in the world. A chance that Israel will slowly recover from the distortions inflicted by two thousand years of expulsions and persecution and demonization. And perhaps – a great many years from now, if this fragile peace will in fact endure, and if Israel can be confident of its continuing existence, and make the most of its great human, spiritual and cultural potential – the Jews will no longer feel, as individuals and as a people, the sense of existential strangeness and loneliness they long felt among the other nations.

If peace will come, Israel, at long last, will have *borders*. This is no trivial matter, especially not for a people who for most of its history was scattered among other nations, a condition that gave rise to a great many of the disasters that befell it. Imagine this: for 62 years now, Israel has not had permanent borders. Its borders shift their shape, expanding and receding from one decade to the next. In our world, a country without clear borders is like a person who lives in a

house with walls that never stop moving, with the ground always shaking under his feet. Someone without a real home.

Despite its great military might, Israel has not yet succeeded in providing its citizens with the natural sense of serenity that is experienced by someone who is firmly rooted in his home and his country. Tragically, Israel has not yet succeeded in healing a fundamental wound in the Jewish soul – the bitter sense of never feeling fully at home in the world.

Israel was established so there would be a home for Jews and for the Jewish people. Indeed this was the great vision that led to the creation of the State of Israel. But so long as there is no peace, and no fixed and recognized borders, and no sense of genuine security, we the Israelis will not have the home we need and deserve. We will not feel at home in the world.

By now you have surely sensed it: certain words, spoken by an Israeli Jew in Germany, resonate in a unique echo chamber, as nowhere else in the world. The things I am talking about here – the words I am using, the throbbing of the memories they arouse – emanate from the open wound of the Shoah, the Holocaust, and return again to it. Many things that take place in Israel – whether in the most intimate circles of family and friends, or in the public arena, the army or the government – are locked into a highly charged dialogue with the Holocaust, with the way it has molded Jewish and Israeli consciousness. And so the words that I speak here, in St. Paul's Church – where the first freely elected German parliament was assembled in 1848, paving the way for modern German democracy – my words too, like a carrier pigeon of the Holocaust, go back *there*, to the darkest days.

Without suggesting the slightest comparison between historical situations that are utterly different, I also remind myself that it is here, in Germany, that one may see how a nation can not only rebuild itself from physical ruin, but can also rise up from the place where humanity itself was shattered to bits, where all its boundaries and limits were transgressed, and commit itself to values of morality and democracy, and educate its youth in a world-view of peace.

Let us return to the reality of life in the Middle East. Only peace can heal Israel from the profound anxiety that flutters in the heart of its

citizens over whether the country and its children will have a future. I cannot think of another country in the world that lives with this kind of existential fear. If you read in the newspaper that Germany is planning a major national project for the year 2030, it seems logical and natural. But no Israeli makes plans that long in advance: when I think about Israel in the year 2030, I feel a sort of twinge in my heart, as if I have violated some taboo, by daring to allow myself such a large portion of future...

Only peace will give Israel a home and a future for generations to come. And only peace will allow Israelis to experience a situation – or a feeling – that we have never felt before: the *solidity* of existence.

Those who have been uprooted, persecuted and exiled during most of their history, who have wandered the earth, hovering between life and death, who have lived this way for millennia, yearn for a feeling of solid existence. The feeling of a people whose existence in its land is assured. The feeling of a nation planted in its own soil, whose borders are secure and acknowledged by the international community, whose neighbors accept its presence and weave it into the fabric of their lives. The feeling that an entire future lies before it – that finally, it is fully at home in the world.

I stand here and speak to you about peace. It's strange: I, who have not known a moment of real peace in my entire life, should come to tell you about peace? But from what I know of war, I claim the right to talk about peace.

For many years, my life, and my books, have taken place within this mixture of war and the fear of its consequences, of anxiety for Israel and for my loved ones who live there, of the struggle for the simple right to lead a private, intimate, unheroic existence in a place where personal lives are matter-of-factly nationalized by war. The storm and the candle.

And the more aware I become of the profound destructiveness and corruption of war, the more I feel a great personal need to write, as a way of staking my claim to individuality, demanding my right to say "I" and not "we."

War, by its very nature, eradicates the nuances that create the uniqueness of the private individual, the singular miracle of each human being. With equal violence, war also denies the

similarities among people, the things that make them equal partners in human destiny.

Literature – not just the writing of books, but the act of reading them too – is the opposite of all that. It is fully dedicated to the individual, to his or her right to individuality and to participation in the common destiny of mankind. Literature is an expression of infinite wonder at the mystery of the human being, his complexity, his richness, his shadows.

When I write, I try my best to redeem every character in my stories from vagueness or obscurity, from the grip of stereotype and cliché and preconceived notions. When I write a story, I struggle – sometimes for years – to understand every aspect of a single human character, to *become* that person, to understand the other from within. There is something tender, almost motherly, in the way that an author is completely attentive to the currents of feeling and sensation that flow through a character that he or she has created. There is a degree of self-abandonment in the willingness of an author to devote himself, bare and unprotected, to a character he is writing about, to give it voice. Perhaps this is the great gift that literature can give to someone who lives in the midst of war, or in any condition of alienation, poverty, discrimination, or exile, to anyone who feels that his selfhood is being relentlessly expunged: literature has the ability to restore our human face.

I began by telling you how I started to write the book *To the End of the Land*. Perhaps you know that it is the story of an Israeli soldier who goes to war, and of his mother who is so fearful that she runs away from her home so that any terrible news cannot reach her. Three years and three months after I began to write, the Second Lebanon War broke out. It began with a surprise attack by the Hizbullah against an Israeli military patrol operating within Israeli territory. On Saturday night, August 12, 2006, just a few hours before the end of the war, my son Uri was killed with three other members of his crew when a missile fired by Hizbullah hit their tank. I will say only this: think of a young man, just starting out in life, with all the hope and enthusiasm and joy of life and innocence and humor and dreams of youth. That is how he was, and so too thousands and tens of thousands of others, Israelis and Palestinians and Lebanese and Syrians and Jordanians and Egyptians who lost and

continue to lose their lives in this conflict.

The day after the *shiva*, the seven-day period of mourning, I went back to writing my book.

When a person is hit by disaster, one of the strongest feelings is a feeling of exile. You feel exiled from everything you trusted before, from everything you believed, from the entire story of your life. Suddenly, nothing can be taken for granted.

For me, the return to writing after the disaster was an instinctive act: an affirmation that writing would be the way through which I could – in a certain sense – come back from exile.

I went back to writing. I went back to my story, which in a strange way remained one of the only places in my life that I could still understand. I sat at my desk and started to reconnect the threads that were torn in the story. After a few weeks I began to feel, with a certain amazement, the joy of writing. I again found myself searching for hours for a word that would precisely fit a certain feeling I was describing. I realized that I was unwilling to be content with a different word that was not completely faithful to that feeling. At times I wondered why such minor things interested me at all, when all around me a world had been destroyed. But when I found the right word, I felt a satisfaction that I thought I would never feel again – the satisfaction of doing something properly in this chaotic world. Sometimes I felt like a man after an earthquake: he emerges from the ruins of his home, looks around, sits down on the ground, and begins again to lay one brick on top of another.

I sat and I wrote. Little by little, the pleasure of imagination and invention returned, the sense of play and discovery that fuel the creative process. I invented characters, infused them with life and warmth and imagination that I thought I no longer had. I gave them a reality and a routine. I discovered within myself a renewed desire to touch every nuance of feeling and reality and relationship, and not fear the pain that sometimes came with the touch. Once again I discovered that for me, writing is the best way to fight against arbitrariness of any kind, and against the feeling that I am its helpless victim. I learned that there are situations where a person's only freedom is the freedom to describe, in his own words, the fate that has befallen him. Sometimes, this is also the way by which a person can cease to be a victim.

This is true for the individual, and I believe it is also true for societies and nations. I can only hope that my country, Israel, will find the strength and courage to write its story anew. That it will know how to face its tragic history in a new way, and to recreate itself from within it. That we, the Israelis, may muster the inner resources to tell the difference between the real dangers that lie before us and the powerful echoes of the disasters and tragedies that befell us in the past. May we be victims no longer – neither of our enemies, nor of our own fears. May we finally – at long last – come home.

Thank you and *shalom*.

*Translated from the Hebrew
by Stuart Schoffman*

The speeches, delivered on October 10, 2010 at St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt during the dedication of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade to David Grossman, are copyrighted. The brochure with the speeches of the Peace Prize ceremony and further information on the peace price winner David Grossman will be published at the beginning of November 2010. The brochure at a price of 12.90€ is commercially available or can be ordered at serviceline@mvb-online.de, 0049(0)69-1306-550.

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