

Lithuanian literary fiction

# Devilspel

**Novel.** Tekst. Moscow 2008. 231 pages

**Publishers:** Germany - Corso, Lithuania - Tito Alba, Macedonia - Prozart, UK - Noir Press

The novel is set during the tragic few weeks in June-July 1941, when the German army in a sudden attack defeated the Red Army and within a few days occupied Lithuania. Kanovich limits the spatial horizon of his novel to a small isolated village deep in the Lithuanian heartland. After the outbreak of the war Mishkine seems to be cut off from the surrounding world with all normal connections suspended. The village is too insignificant for the Germans to maintain their presence there, and its residents are left to their own devices. Slowly and painstakingly, Kanovich investigates the spiritual depths of the characters, simple shtetl Jews and Lithuanian peasants, exposing their moral strengths and weaknesses. He lets them speak in their voices and articulate their positions, but as an omniscient narrator he guides the story the final tragic historical juncture where the age-long peaceful Jewish-Lithuanian co-existence explodes and falls apart forever. Kanovich's writing is informed by his deep native knowledge of the Lithuanian countryside where he grew up in the 1930s, but he is no less intimately familiar with the Russian and Jewish cultures. Yet his real interest as a writer is in exploring the fundamental and universal ethical conflict between good and evil, which transcends the limits of concrete space and time.

"I am no Jewish author, since I write in Russian. No Russian author, since I write about Jews. And no Lithuanian author, because it is not the Lithuanian language I engage in."

"*Devilspel* is a remarkable example of a literary work that represents a real historical situation, with all its complexities and nuances, as a philosophical parable of universal significance." *Mikhail Krutikov, Prof. of Slavic and Judaic Studies, Univ. of Michigan*

"With the publication of *Devilspel*, Grigory Kanovich will take his place amongst the great Jewish writers of eastern Europe." *Dr. Paul Socken, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, University of Waterloo*

Kanovich was born into a traditional Jewish family in the Lithuanian town of Jonava in 1929. Together with his parents he fled war-stricken Lithuania and spent years in exile in Kazakhstan and the Ural Mountains. In 1945 the family returned to Vilnius. Here, in 1953, Kanovich graduated from Vilnius State University with a degree in Slavic studies. He has written more than ten novels – a virtual epic saga – dealing with the vicissitudes of the history of Eastern European Jewry from the 19th century to the present day. Kanovich was declared a citizen of honor (2013) of his home-town Jonava. Between 1989 and 1993 Kanovich served as Chairman of the Jewish Community of Lithuania. Since 1993 the writer has lived in Israel. He is a member of the PEN club in both Israel and Russia. Kanovich is married and has two sons. He lives in Israel.



## THE AUTHOR

**translations**  
5 languages

**awards**  
National Prize in Art & Culture,  
Lithuania 2014

**sample translations available**  
full english

**other works**  
Shtetl Romance

# Grigori Kanovich