

Lithuanian literary fiction

# A Kid for two Pennies

**Novel.** Vaga Publishers. Vilnius 1989. 330 pages

**Translations:** Czech, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian

Kanovich's novel „A Kid for Two Pennies“ has lost none of its relevance even after 30 years. It was written in 1989 and describes Jews living together with Lithuanians, Russians and Germans in the multi-ethnic border area with the German Empire at Nemunas (Memel) before Second World War. Or rather their co-existence or even better the friction and resentment on all sides. With everyday poverty, the problems with the Russian state power and the deep Jewish longing for the „homeland of the grandfathers“.

At the center of the plot is the family around the stonemason Ephraim. While the daughter Zerta lives in Kiev, Ephraim's sons are all nearby and cause him problems because they are so completely different. Ephraim's youngest son Ezra hangs out at fairs and leads an unstable life with his non-Jewish girlfriend. Mixed partnerships between Jews and Christians are not welcomed by both sides. Son Shakhna lives in Vilna according to the Torah and is said to have a high position with the governor „as a studied Jew“. Son Hirsch is in prison for shooting at the governor. Hirsch thinks a machine gun is today's Torah; he fights the tsar with armed force „destroying his own house.“

As Kanovich says at the end: „The world cannot simply be divided into good and evil, into truth and untruth: everything in the world is intertwined... in every Jew there is also a Russian, in every Russian a Jew, in every Lithuanian a Polish, in every Polish a German.“



## THE AUTHOR

**translations**  
7 languages

**awards**  
EBRD Literature Prize 2020  
National Prize in Art & Culture,  
Lithuania 2014

**other works**  
Shtetl Romance  
Devilspel  
Tears and Prayers of Fools

“Kanovich makes us feel and see a world, that has long disappeared.” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*

“There is very few people who can portray life of the Eastern European Jewish communities like Grigori Kanovich.” *Brigitte*

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.

# Grigori Kanovich