

Lithuanian literary fiction

# Tears and Prayers of Fools

**Novel.** Vilnius 1983. 320 pages

**Publishers:** Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, US - Syracuse University Press

This extraordinary novel is part of Grigory Kanovich's "Litvak saga," his tribute to Jewish life before the Holocaust.

Set in a small Lithuanian town in the late nineteenth century, the story begins with the arrival of a stranger who sets everyone on edge and seems to know their secrets. Is he a messenger from God, a long-lost son, a saint, or a madman? As the stranger in the velvet yarmulke makes his rounds, we meet an unforgettable cast of characters—Rabbi Uri, the aged rabbi; Itsik Magid, the strapping young woodcutter; the resourceful widow Golda; Markus Fradkin, the wealthy timber merchant, and his beautiful daughter Zelda; Yeshua Mandel, the tavern keeper, his troubled son Simeon, and their devoted servant girl Morta. A work of realism as well as a parable, Kanovich's novel illuminates the most intimate fears, dreams, and longings of the shtetl's inhabitants.

"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." Grigori Kanovich

"'Shtetl noir' meets Hasidic legend in this deeply philosophical work. In a word, this novel is the work of an exceptional writer with a unique voice."

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, University Professor Emerita, New York University

"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 saved us, 'Jews of silence,' from forgetting our very selves during the most difficult times of antisemitism and dictatorship. The Tears and Prayers of Fools became at once a biblical parable for our time and a Chagall painting restored to life in words—the eternal flight of a free human above a tragic age."

Vitaly Portnikov, Ukrainian journalist and writer.

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**  
7 languages

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

**sample translations available**  
full english

**other works**  
Devilspel  
Tears and Prayers of Fools  
A Kid for Two Pennies

# Grigori Kanovich