

Press Release

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BERMAN LITERATURE PRIZE 2023 IS AWARDED TO AUTHOR MARIA STEPANOVA

Russian author Maria Stepanova is the 2023 laureate of the Berman Literature Prize, a sum of SEK 750,000.

The jury's motivation reads:

“**Maria Stepanova** is being awarded the 2023 Berman Literature Prize for her genre-transcending family saga *In Memory of Memory*. With winding, finely honed prose she breathes life into pictures, objects, places and documents, in a portrayal of the transformative power of memory, both for individuals and for forgotten collectives.”

“*In Memory of Memory* by **Maria Stepanova** is a wonderful book,” says jury chairman Daniel Pedersen, “in which poetic reflections, theoretical reasoning and family saga are united and ruly capture both individual and collective destiny in a remarkable literary construction”.

Maria Michailovna Stepanova was born in Moscow on 9 June 1972, and graduated from the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute in 1995. Stepanova is a poet, and as such has been published in various magazines and anthologies. She has had a major influence on contemporary Russian poetry, and has won several important Russian and international awards. Stepanova also works as a journalist and started the online magazine Openspace.ru in 2007, which she left in 2012 along with most of the editorial team when its funding ceased. Since then she has been editor-in-chief of Colta.ru, a crowdfunded online newspaper where she writes about Russian art and culture. The newspaper has now been closed down by the Russian regime. Maria Stepanova has been translated into a dozen or so languages, and in 2018–19 she was the Siegfried Unseld guest professor at the Humboldt University of Berlin. She was later invited to Columbia University as Harriman Writer in Residence. Stepanova was one of the first Russian authors to protest the invasion of Ukraine with an essay entitled "The War of Putin's Imagination" in the Financial Times. She has been living in exile in Berlin since 2022. In 2018 she published *In Memory of Memory* (*Памяти памяти* Swedish translation 2019 by Nils Håkanson, Nirstedt/litteratur). The book explores private and cultural memories in a blend of essay, travel journal, memoir and fiction – all in a personal, poetic prose. 2020 saw the publication of her poetry collection *War of the Beasts and the Animals* (*Старый мир. Починка жизни*, 2021 Swedish translation by Ida Börjel and Nils Håkanson Nirstedt/litteratur). In spring 2023, Maria Stepanova's *Winterpoem 20/21* is published by Suhrkamp Verlag, which is in Russian with a German translation.

Berman Literature Prize was established in 2020 to reward an author whose works embodies the statues of the Prize, in the spirit of the Jewish tradition and literary works aiming to explore the rich Jewish culture and at the same time «exceed times and cultures» thereby striving for the universally human.

Berman Literature Prize is for ten years awarded annually and the prize sum is 750 000 Swedish kronor. The first Berman Literature Prize was awarded 2021 to the Israeli author David Grossman. The Hungarian author Péter Nádas received the prize in 2022. The prize ceremony 2023 will take place in Stockholm, in October.

Berman Literature Prize will go to an author who, regardless of background or genre, has worked in the spirit of the Jewish tradition. Members of the jury are Daniel Pedersen, Ingrid Elam, Hanna Nordenhök, Na'ama Rokem, Thomas Steinfeld and Svante Weyler.



Catharina and Thomas Berman (©: Jonas Ekströmer/TT)

The Founders:

Thomas Berman was born in Stockholm in 1943 and grew up in Norrköping. Catharina Berman (born Wranne) was born in 1949 and grew up in Stockholm. In 2019, the Berman family began discussions about a donation to a literature prize dedicated to the Jewish tradition. In the spring of 2020, the Berman Literature Prize was founded and the organization, consisting of a committee and a jury, was established.

Berman Literature Prize has the following ethos and declaration of intent:

»KNOWLEDGE IS SOMETHING THAT CANNOT BE TAKEN AWAY FROM YOU«

There is more than one Jewish tradition, and the tradition that the Berman Literature Prize seeks to highlight has developed in constant dialogue with other cultures and languages. This means that for thousands of years it has preserved a rich history and literature, while simultaneously encountering the languages and texts of other cultures. Tradition and renewal have interacted, giving rise to a constant critical rereading of religious texts as well as literature and songs, poetry and philosophy. This is a tradition of knowledge in which interpretation, interpretative concepts and memory are at the centre, and because of historical circumstances involving persecution and discrimination, it is often written from a marginal position and from the experience of exile.

It is an ongoing exploratory discussion, and all the forms it takes have one thing in common: an impassioned and sincere belief in the ability of the literary text to transcend times and cultures, to let words convey experiences and thoughts between people. The aim of the Berman Literature Prize is to honour authors in recent years who, regardless of background or genre, have worked in the spirit of this tradition.

For more information, please contact:

Daniel Pedersen, chairman of the jury
phone: + 46 70 696 38 08 email: daniel@faethon.se

Anna Tillgren, Anna Tillgren AB, head of communication
phone: + 46 70-370 99 29 email: anna@annatillgren.se

visit **WWW.BERMANLITERATUREPRIZE.COM** for photos etc