

Death as a Way of Life – Dispatches from Jerusalem by David Grossman.
Bloomsbury 2003.

For admirers of the quality writing of David Grossman this latest collection of his non-fiction articles will be a must-read. For anyone who cares about the future of the State of Israel, and of the Palestinians, and whose approach to Israeli politics is still left of centre, Grossman's views will have many resonances with their own.

Written between 1993 and the signing of the Oslo Accords and the end of 2002, the articles trace the gruesome catalogue of events that have unfolded in the Middle East, and the wider world, in this decade. What makes them especially powerful is not only the passion and the anger with which the author views the concatenation of errors on both sides but the way in which the dove is transformed if not into a hawk then at least a very frustrated and angry bird.

David Grossman's anger is not just directed at the Israeli governments of Barak, Netanyahu and Sharon, but at the devious manoeuvres of Arafat and the extremism of the religious fanatics on both sides. What breaks the heart is the pain that the author feels at the way that each side seems to be unable to prevent the cycle of killing and counter-killing and unwilling to enter into real negotiation with each other in pursuit of a settlement.

There is a glimmer of light in this rather dark collection, the essay on the Pope's visit to Israel in March 2000; and the letter to a Palestinian friend of October 2000 which, while painful, is uplifting by reason of Grossman's honesty and courage.

Altogether, this is as powerful and memorable a collection as was Amos Oz's *In the Land of Israel*, but with an even harder edge.

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