Attn: members of the Bruno Prize Committee

Dear members:

It is with pleasure that I wish to recommend Professor Jonathan Grossman for the 2020 Bruno Prize.

Jonathan Grossman is a full professor at the Bar-Ilan University Department of Bible. His main area of research is the Biblical story and its shaping, and he is one of the most prominent researchers in this field today.

An axiomatic assumption that accompanies his studies is that one must acquaint oneself with, and understand, the modalities of design in order to understand meaning. Grossman favors the synchronic method, which holds that the main intention of a story should be evaluated in view of its final redaction. Therefore, by and large, his analyses are predicated on the final design of the text. However, he is also mindful of the diachronic approach and the various levels at which Biblical texts are written. In some of his studies, he even points to the difference in intentions between a text that seems original and that in its final design. This is manifested, for example, in his study on Micaiah the son of Imlah. Here he notes the intention of the isolated story, relating to questions of the substance and validity of the prophecy, and the new intention that the story acquires as it is inserted into the Ahab stories, for the exigencies of shaping the persona of Ahab (*Studies in Bible and Exegesis,* 2010). In his study on the banishment of Ishmael (published in *Doubling and Duplicating*), he shows that even though the story of Isaac’s birth and that of Ishmael’s banishment have separate intentions, their integration in an advanced chiastic structure lend both units an additional overarching intention. Throughout his book about Abraham (*Sipuro shel masa‘*), Grossman repeatedly discusses the intertwining of the strands of the plot—the axis of national promise, which reflects the priestly (P) school, and a moral axis external to this school (non-P). This approach recurs in his study about the redaction of the *makkot* story in Exodus (*VT,* 2014) and additional studies of his.

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Grossman has left especially important imprints in three main respects:

1. **Discussion of theoretical aspects of story design**

In his analyses of specific stories, Grossman deals extensively with the theoretical facet, i.e., the poetic principles that underlie the shaping of Biblical stories. Even in cases on which other scholars have commented, he has made an important contribution to understanding them.

1. *Associative meanings:* Grossman devoted his dissertation to the phenomenon of ambiguity as a literary device in the Biblical story (not only from the reader’s standpoint, as is accepted among post-structuralist scholars). In later studies, he expanded this aspect into additional related meanings and became a genuine pathbreaker in this context. For example, he shows how ambiguous expressions are exploited in particular in stories of deceit (*Tarbiz* 74 [2004]), and in his book *Galui u-Mutspan* (*Text and Subtext*)he examines how the narrator uses “emotional meaning,” “associative meaning,” and “disciplinary meaning” to hone the shaping of the story. He even shows how these meanings, attached to the lexical meaning of the words, make a definitive contribution to assessing the character in the Biblical story (“Associative Meanings in the Character Evaluation of Lot’s Daughters,” *CBQ* 76).
2. *Dynamic reading and surprises:* The dynamics of the Biblical story have long attracted attention (largely thanks to Meir Sternberg’s studies). Grossman shares this perception and traces the ways in which the authors/redactors of the stories mislead and “surprise” the reader. In his study on “Surprise and Stability” in the exposition of the Book of Ruth (*Beit Mikra,* 2015), he dwells on three elements that the narrator uses to shape and defeat an expectation: the texture of the words, the narrator’s focus and the order in which the details are organized, and Biblical writing patterns and conventions.

Several types of “surprises” are discussed in his studies: breaking up common phrases (*Tarbiz,* 2007); the unseen character in the Biblical story (*VT,* 2012, in which a unique literary technique is discussed: secondary characters who mount the stage at the beginning of the story and are disregarded by the narrator in the continuation even though their literary role has not ended), breaking up literary structures, and recurrent motifs (in Chapter 3 of his *Galui u-Mutspan)*,among others.

1. *Analogies and intertextual reading:* Although much has been written in this field, Grossman’s 2009 article makes an important and innovative contribution to the application of this literary technique (“Dynamic Analogies in the Book of Esther,” *VT* 59). He focuses on the kind of analogy in which characters change places within the matrix of the comparison (a phenomenon for which he proposes the term “dynamic analogy”) and claims that this should be seen as a deliberate literary device. He developed this idea in his book *Galui u-Mutspan* and, since then, additional scholars have based themselves on the differentiation that he proposed. Generally speaking, he relies heavily on intertextual readings in his literary analyses, as evidenced in the following, written in a review of his commentary on Ruth:

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1. *Demarcation of the story:* Grossman devotes special attention to fluid narrative and what he calls a “traversable boundary,” a “dynamic boundary,” and an “imagined ending.” (Chapter 4 of *Galui u-Mutspan* is devoted to these aspects; this is also broadly manifested in his other studies.)
2. *“Outer reading and hidden reading”*: Grossman devotes several discussions to examination of the outer-reading approach of the story as against a hidden reading. The existence of a difference between the more-overt messages of the story and those lurking beneath the surface has always been clear to every literary scholar. Grossman, however, was the first to point to diverse kinds of connections between these two levels of meaning that come to light in the Bible and shows that, in certain cases, genuine contradictions exist. (This stands out particularly in his book on Esther).
3. **Analysis of the Biblical story by harvesting and integrating methods from other research worlds**

In several of his studies, Grossman adopts models of scholarly thinking that is not always associated with the literary discipline and then tests the effect of this thinking on researching a Biblical story. He winds up his early book on Esther with a discussion of reading the story against the background of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories on the cultural meaning of the carnival (even seeing it as contributing the overall intention of the story, in what he calls “From ‘Literary Carnivalesque’ Genre to ‘Theological Carnivalesque’ Genre” [*Esther*, 2011, p. 233].) He developed the matter into a genuine method in subsequent studies, suggesting, for example, that the repetitions in the Joseph story be read against the background of Therapeutic Narrative Theory (*Biblical Interpretation,* 2013) and that relations among the characters in Ruth be examined in view of Donald Winnicott’s psychoanalytic theories (“Reading Ruth with Winnicott: Boaz and Naomi as ‘Transitional Objects,’” in *Gleanings: Interdisciplinary Reflections on Ruth*, 2019).

In the introduction to his book on Abraham, Grossman devotes an extensive discussion to the national perceptions that the cycle of stories evokes against the background of questions that accompany research on modern nationalism. Here he emphasizes that, notwithstanding the historical and social gap that exists between the different spheres of writing, the encounter with the ancient Biblical text in view of modern political theories yields surprising insights about the perception of nationhood in the Bible (*Abram to Abraham: A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative*, 2016).

1. **Awareness of Near East Literature**

Grossman internalized the assumption that a Biblical story cannot be examined in detachment from its historical environment. Although this is not his main area of research, his books on Genesis (*Abram to Abraham*, 2016; Creation, *Creation*, 2019) demonstrate his awareness of the importance of the Bible’s ramified relationship with Near East literature, in which he is well versed. As a reviewer of his book *Creation* wrote:

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Alongside his discussions of previously noted connections, Grossman delves into connections not yet discussed (e.g., the Hittite background of Abraham’s passing of the seven sheep to Avimelech—*Abram to Abraham,* p. 445). His article about the Tower of Babel is especially noteworthy in this context. Some of his predecessors propose that the story be read in view of the construction of the Babylonian city of Enûma Eliš. Grossman, however, reports a connection between this story and another segment of the myth that has not yet been discussed, and in this manner he explains the exegesis of the hybrid name of Babylon in the Biblical story. In this study, Grossman dwells on a pun that was made on the name of Babylon as early as in Akkadian art, whence it metamorphosed into the Biblical story (*ZAW,* 2017).

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Beyond these points of principle, Grossman stands out for his novel and creative readings of various texts, offering alternatives to basic scholarly conventions. Relating to the role of the *na‘ar* in Ruth (*JBL,* 2007), for example, he shows that the boy’s disapproval of Ruth abets the development of the plot and the shaping of the Boaz character. Tracking the motif of the pair of dreams in the Joseph story (*JBL,* 2016), he shows that it is within Joseph’s grasp to determine whether the pair of dreams has one solution—like Pharaoh’s pair of dreams—or two different solutions, as in the pair of dreams of Pharaoh’s ministers in the prison. It is in this light that the characters of Joseph and his brothers are shaped. In his article about the *Bene ha-Elohim* story in Genesis 6, Grossman proposes that these characters be identified with the *‘anaqim* who are mentioned as the story continues; it is from this perspective that he detects the meaning of the story and its occurrence on the eve of the Flood (*Biblica,* 2018). In another article, Grossman dwelled on the purpose of adding frankincense to the gift-offering in order to give non-animal sacrifices a “pleasing aroma” (*JBL, 2019*), revealing why frankincense is added sometimes and not mentioned on other occasions. In this article, Grossman demonstrates his impressive erudition in the field of Biblical sacrifices as well. In his article about David’s conquest of Jerusalem (*VT,* 2019) he proposes a new reading: the city was not conquered but handed over by consent. This explains some difficult terms that accompany the story (the *tsinor* and the role of the blind and the lame). These studies illuminate Grossman’s ability to approach texts in a professional, sensitive, and novel manner.

Generally speaking, Grossman’s literary analyses are typified by emphasis on the diverse literary techniques that come into play in shaping the Biblical story; it is through them that he probes the intentions of the various stories. As a reviewer of his book on Abraham wrote:

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In addition to everything said above, it is noteworthy that the most eminent scholars in the field cite Grossman’s studies extensively in their own work.

Finally, my many years of acquaintance with Jonathan Grossman, as part of his activity at Bar-Ilan University and at conferences around the world, allow me to attest that he is an exemplary academic colleague. His sensitive and supportive personality and his extensive knowledge of the Biblical and extra-Biblical worlds are a blessing to those around him.

With all the foregoing in mind, I wish to repeat what I said at the beginning of my remarks and warmly and confidently recommend Professor Jonathan Grossman for the 2020 Bruno Prize.