Ethics to Art: Vasily Grossman's Poetics as the Realization of His Philosophy

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines key texts from the intermediate and mature periods of Vasily Grossman's career in order to determine the relationship between his evolving philosophy and the poetics that characterize his writing. While significant critique has been applied to the nature of Grossman's philosophy, comparatively less has looked at the aesthetic and technical aspects of his writing itself; still less to the connection between Grossman's abstract concepts and his accomplished texts. My effort has been to bridge the gap between these two areas of inquiry and to ascertain the quality of their tightly intertwined and complex relationship.

I analyze four of Grossman's key texts in depth, with reference to several other writings. Of the primary texts considered in my study, two are essays from the writer's intermediate period: "The Hell of Treblinka" («Треблинский ад») and "The Sistine Madonna" («Сикстинская мадонна»);" of the two longer works, one is Grossman's multi-volume masterpiece novel *Life and Fate* (*Жизнь и судьба*) and the other is his novella (*повесть*) and final fictional work *Everything Flows* (*Все течет*). These texts were chosen for their aptness at demonstrating key features of Grossman's prosody and philosophical thinking, both those that remained constant and those that evolved over time.

The following study establishes that Grossman's writing itself, by means of the formal structures he employs throughout his works, constitutes the embodiment and realization of his ethics. Specifically, the following work considers modes of movement and generation in Grossman's writing that speak to the value he places on the individual human experience.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

State of the Current Scholarship 1

Levinas: A Comparison of "Philosophical" Systems 6

Thesis and Rationale for the Work 8

Selection of Texts 10

Biographical Background 14

Overview of Chapters 22

Chapter One: The Individual Human Being Emerges as Central and Evolves in Scope 27

1.1 The Foundations of Grossman's Thought 27

1.2 Human Beings Begin to Emerge in Their Entirety 32

1.3 Human Beings Remain Central 35

1.4 Parting Ways with Kant 40

1.5 The Concept of Infinity in the Human 45

Chapter Two: Grossman's Use of Lenses as a Means of Generating Ethically Significant Movement 49

2.1 Zooming In and Out: The Micro and the Macro as Narrative Vehicles 49

2.2 The Significance of the Title 55

2.3 Movement as Creation 60

2.4 The Limitlessness of Living Movement 65

Chapter Three: Artistic Forms Embody Abstract Ideas and Facilitate Generative Movement 68

3.1 Sistine Madonna: Experience of the "Sublime" 68

3.2 Reconciling the Individual and the Group 71

3.3 Communism: An Ideology That Denies Life 74

3.4 The Importance of Liberation from Ideology 77

3.5 The Role of Art 79

Chapter Four: Grossman Explores Identity as a Process 90

4.1 The Use of Patterns 90

4.2 Identity as a Key Theme 91

4.3 The Limiting Nature of Identities 96

4.4 The Relational Model of Identity 99

4.5 The Development of Self as Separate 102

4.6 The Self is Never Realized 103

4.7 “Names” Create Movement and Meaning 109

4.8 Personal Identity and the Fundamental Self 112

Chapter Five: The Thematics of Science: Superficial and Deep 117

5.1 Science: Bridging the Conceptual with the Concrete 117

5.2 The Problematic Nature of Technology 119

5.3 The Contradictory Roles of Modern Technology 124

5.4 Art and Science as Generators of Meaning 127

5.5 Soviet Ideology and Science 129

5.6 Ethics: The Abstract vs. the Concrete 134

Chapter Six: Pain Is a Generative Experience That Supports Movement Within Both Linear and Cyclical Constructs of Time 137

6.1 Pain: Its Evolution in Grossman's Works 137
6.2 Linear and Cyclical Time Evinced Through Narrative 145
6.3 Synthesis 150
6.4 Personalized Trauma as Defining a Life 150
6.5 Contradictions Create Meaning 155
Conclusion 158
Notes 163
Bibliography 164

Introduction

State of the Current Scholarship

Very little work has been dedicated to understanding Vasily Grossman's writing as such. In the introductions and notes to his English translations of Grossman's works, Robert Chandler occasionally makes note of a stylistic choice on the part of the author that is significant to the effect for which he is aiming or that heightens the tone or ethos Grossman is establishing in a particular passage. Observations of this kind are occasional in Chandler's commentaries and, in any case, are not central to his treatment of Grossman's work. Aside from these punctuations of interest in the poetics of Grossman's writing itself, John Garrard has focused some attention on the "architectonics" of *Life and Fate* (*Жизнь и судьба*), while the majority of his Grossman scholarship deals with the writer's biography and how his thinking was shaped by it. Natalia Leonidovna Karpicheva's (Натальия Леоидовна Карпичева) doctoral dissertation offers one example of an approach oriented toward structural and technical aspects of Grossman's texts. In general, to the extent published analysis of Grossman's poetics exists, it is dwarfed by the two far larger—and generally intertwined—categories of Grossman scholarship: his biography and his philosophy.

A majority of scholars approaching Grossman concentrate primarily or exclusively on his ethics. Indeed, in this area, a robust body of illuminating and provocative work has been done. While grounding their approach in an analysis of the ethical points made within the narrative scenarios presented in Grossman's works, most scholars extrapolate from this kind of reading to draw conclusions about larger moral questions that Grossman addresses. Some—as, for example, Ani Kokobobo—center on how these larger ethical matters relate to the socio-political context in which Grossman lived and worked; others, including Emmanuel Levinas, are

interested in how the ethical ideas demonstrated in specific fictional passages may be applied to universal concepts of ethics-oriented philosophy.[1]

Another popular approach to Grossman—and one that most often incorporates evaluation of his philosophy and general perspectival orientation—is interested in the writer's biography. Prominent examples of those who have worked in this area include Yuri Gevirgisovich Bit-Yunan and David Markovich Fel'dman (Юрий Гевиргисович Бит-Юнан и Давид Маркович Фельдман); John and Carol Garrard; and, most recently, Alexandra Popoff. Much of this biographical work has been helpful in fleshing out the context in which Grossman lived, worked, and thought. This is especially relevant to the extent that Grossman often accorded details from his own life to his characters and wrote about material drawn from his own personal experience. In addition to treating the events and influences of Grossman's life broadly, one sub-category of biographical analysis concerns the fact that Grossman was Jewish and the possible implications that this fact entails. Often writers who emphasize the role of Grossman's Jewish identity furthermore focus on ways in which this aspect was central to shaping—or even determinative of—his ethics and general of philosophical interest.

In order to understand the focus on Grossman's being a Jew, let us turn to where Grossman was born and all that sprang from that. In being born in Berdichev, Grossman started life either right in the bosom of his people or else marginalized from them, depending on one's view of his Jewishness. Indeed, the scholarship and personal accounts on this fact of his identity is divided with regard to how important it was for Grossman. Berdichev was a predominantly Jewish city in the Russian Pale of Settlement at the time Grossman was born, a city so known for

[1] It is also worth noting that a number of people, who have written more or less casually on Grossman in particular book reviewers in the English-speaking world, who are commenting on a specific text as it appears in a new translation, have tended to focus on Grossman's philosophy and to do so in a way that is both lacking in context and that oversimplifies his ideas.

being Jewish that to say one was from it was nearly the same as saying one was a Jew. And Grossman was Jewish. Where this may have been a more or less monolithic concept for his Gentile compatriots, for Grossman himself (and for many other Jews), there were nuances to this idea of a Jewish identity and varying degrees to which one might adopt it.

Unlike the vast majority of the Jewish inhabitants of Berdichev and other towns and cities in the Pale, Grossman's family on both his maternal and paternal sides were educated, affluent, and comparatively assimilated, facts that were apparently important for Grossman to acknowledge to his daughter, as he said to her: "We were not like the poor shtetl Jews (*mestechkovaya bednota*) described by Sholem Aleichem; the type that lived in hovels and slept side by side on the floor, packed like sardines. No, our family comes from a quite different Jewish background. They had their own carriages and trotters. Their women wore diamonds, and they sent their children abroad to study" (Garrard and Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev* 31). Indeed, both of Grossman's parents had studied in Europe, which is also where they met, and when Grossman himself was five, he lived with his mother for several years in Switzerland. Unlike the overwhelming majority of their fellow townspeople, the family's first language was Russian, not Yiddish, of which Semyon Lipkin (Семен Липкин) claims that Grossman knew no more than ten words; at home with his mother, Grossman often spoke French. More than this, Grossman's family were atheists, and so in his boyhood Grossman received no instruction in the religious traditions associated with his ethnicity.

Grossman's name itself reflects the lack of a straightforward answer to establishing the nature and degree of his Jewish identity. Officially Iosif Solomonovich, Grossman spent his entire life going by the name Vasily (Vasya, Vas.) Semyonovich.[2] Grossman, though, never

[2] Grossman's father likewise Russified his Jewish name from Solomon to Semyon.

made the change legal. When choosing a name for his daughter, he honored his mother by selecting her Russian name Ekaterina rather than her legal, Jewish name Malka, which she never used.

Grossman's early work does not emphasize or dwell on a Jewish theme, per se. In "In the Town of Berdichev" («В городе Бердичеве»), the commissar who is billeted with a local family in order to give birth to her child stays with a Jewish family, but nothing particularly "Jewish" is emphasized about them. As this was the town where Grossman was born and grew up, it is likely that Grossman selected the place for his story as one that was familiar and, because of its largely Jewish population, supplied Jewish characters for the story. In the course of the war, Grossman became deeply invested in researching, exposing, and understanding the Holocaust (Shoah). This is hardly surprising given that, in addition to himself, his family and many of his friends were Jewish; most significant of all, Grossman's mother was a victim of the "Holocaust by bullets" in the early days of the Nazis' programmatic killing of Jews. It appears that, in large measure, Grossman's focus on atrocities of the Holocaust may be explained by his desire to share the truth with the world when the world was either ignorant of it or willfully refused to acknowledge it. As Grossman was one of the first witnesses to the Nazis' crimes who was neither a participant in them nor a victim silenced forever in death, his need to tell was particularly pronounced. This was more so the case with his role as a journalist.

After the war, the incorporation of narrative about, images of, and themes concerning the Holocaust continued in Grossman's fiction (whereas their treatment during the war had been more documentary). At the same time—whether independently or because his work on the Holocaust served as a prompt for new associations and a new kind of overall thinking—Grossman began to write increasingly about other violations of humanity, in particular the

system of gulag camps throughout the Soviet Union and the Holodmor. In general, Grossman became interested in the cruelty and inhumanity of some people toward others and the suffering people experienced from this. As Jews were the overwhelming majority of victims in the Holocaust, it makes sense that when discussing this topic Grossman would speak of a particular Jewish suffering. Does this make him a "Jewish writer?"

As noted, one of the more robust threads of scholarship on Grossman concerns the degree to which he identified as a Jew, represented Jews, and spoke with a Jewish voice. With regard to the last point, Simon Markish writes that Grossman had "[t]he voice of a Jew, but not a Jewish voice" (46). Meanwhile, Maxim D. Shrayer asserts that, while "Grossman might have even been or become a Soviet anti-Soviet atheist [...] I suspect he was not, too Jewish was his inner core [...]" ("Grossman's Resistance" 149). In contrast to this, Benedict Sarnov speculates that Grossman used his Russified name "Vasily" rather than the Jewish name with which he had been born—Iosif—specifically in order to emphasize that he was a Russian, not Jewish, writer. Both the biographers John and Carol Garrard and the recent biographer Alexandra Popoff highlight Grossman's Jewishness as being a relevant feature of his identity and orientation to the world and his writing without ascribing it the status of being a singularly significant aspect of who he was or what he wrote. Bit-Yunan and Feldman (Бит-Юнан and Фельдман) refer to Grossman simply as "one of the most famous Russian writers of the 20th century" (5). Grossman's close friend, confidante, and biographer Semyon Lipkin writes that "[a]bove all else, Grossman is a Russian writer," and "[t]he Jewish tragedy was, for Grossman, part of the tragedy of Russian and Ukrainian peasantry, part of the tragedy of all the victims of age of total destruction of people" (11). From this sampling of prominent students of Grossman and his work, we may conclude Grossman was—being a human being—complex enough to defy a simple, straightforward

answer to the question of how his ethnic and religious backgrounds influenced and affected who he was. On this basis, I conclude that the evidence does not support pigeonholing Grossman as a specifically Jewish thinker or writer; likewise, to brush over the fact of Grossman's Jewishness as if it bore no meaning in his life is to willfully oversimply his experience and the ideas that sprung from it. That Grossman was likely able to sustain multiple, even contradictory perspectives at once or switch from one to another at different times should hardly be surprising—in fact, it aligns perfectly with his philosophy that the infinity of a human being defies explanation and description.

Levinas: A Comparison of "Philosophical" Systems

Vasily Grossman was not a formal philosopher, but as this work demonstrates, he was a philosophical writer. Because this project is concerned with understanding the development, expression, and embodiment of Grossman's ethics across the intermediate and mature periods of his career, it is fitting to consider briefly his work in relation to another thinker with whom he shares a number of key ideas in common. This short exercise in comparison and contrast will help refine our understanding of what characterizes Grossman's thinking and makes it unique as well as offer an example of another view with which it shares a number of features. Emmanuel Levinas was nearly a direct contemporary of Grossman, the former born in 1906, the latter in 1905. Both were born Jewish subjects of the Russian Empire, both receiving an early secular education. There is no evidence that Grossman ever encountered Levinas's work or even heard of him. In the later years of his life, however, Levinas was a great proponent of Grossman's writing, in particular *Life and Fate*, referring to it multiple times in print and in at least one Talmudic teaching. In this novel, Levinas found key examples that he believed illustrated his own philosophy.

Levinas, as Grossman, believes that in human existence ethics precedes everything else; as such, it is not grounded in anything else and therefore precedes logic, reasoning, language, and rationality. In addition to this, the two thinkers share the rejection of a perspective that seeks (or claims) to embrace the entirety of human existence within the confines of a total or unifying theory. Each believes in a human infinity and a counterpoint that is self-contained or total; more, each is interested in the dynamic that exists between the two. What is more, both Grossman and Levinas root their philosophies in a conception of the complete specificity of human beings. Each of these features is integral to Grossman's and Levinas's respective philosophies.

Without considering details specific to each man's thinking and work, however, we find there are significant substantive differences between their philosophies. Levinas's basic structure entails an encounter between a "self" and an "other" in order to produce meaning;[3] the smallest unit of ethical consideration is a relationship, a dialogic model. For Grossman, the core ethical concern and principle is the individual human being. While relationships are valuable for him, this is the case still with reference to the individual—authentic, unfettered relationships among people foster the realization of the individual's freedom and continual unfolding. We must always bear in mind that the individual is always the beginning and end for Grossman.

For Levinas—as for many philosophers of ethics—the ethical structure is fundamentally normative. In the encounter between a self and an other, a demand is, by the very nature of the encounter, imposed on the "I." The content of this demand aligns with most conceptions of ethical treatment: mercy, compassion, the permission to continue to live, and so forth. As we will discuss in Chapter 1, Grossman, while also working on an ethically normative level in many of

[3] As the specific meaning of the terms "self" and "other" are complex for Levinas and contested by his interpreters, we will omit a discussion here of what they denote. It suffices to say that they represent, generally, two human entities, one of which is subjectively experienced as an "I." The point is that there are two.

his plotlines, moves toward a conception that is rooted in the pure ability simply to be. For him, being in its fullest sense—i.e., infinity—constitutes the ultimate value.

It is also important to observe that the foundation for Grossman's and Levinas's respective ideas lies in a different place for each. Levinas claims the Bible and written Jewish thought in general as the basis for his philosophy. Dividing Western thought and civilization between the Greek and the Hebrew, he views the former as the rational, the latter as the ethical. It is the job of Judaism and its religious/philosophical traditions to instruct the world in the meaning and practice of ethics; it is the job of modern thinkers to draw their ethical concepts from the tradition that springs from the Jewish Bible. As we considered above, what being Jewish meant for Grossman is complex. What is clear is that his abstract and formal thinking was informed not by religious texts or teachings. As Lipkin observed, "Having seen my volumes of the Jewish encyclopedia in Russian, [Grossman] asked without much interest: "Do you find anything important for yourself here?" (11). Grossman's education and the framework for his thinking derived from a broadly humanist tradition. As a result, his universalism was not like Levinas's, which maintained that the Jewish tradition carried a universal value and benefit that ought to be taught to all people(s). For Grossman, the base from which he starts—i.e., exaltation of universal humanity—does not come with a direction or prescription, nor is it exclusive. As a result, where Levinas emphasizes doing, molding, and effecting change, Grossman is interested in exploring, experiencing, representing, and embodying.

Thesis and Rationale for the Work

As discussed above, a significant amount of work has been dedicated to understanding Vasily Grossman's philosophy as well as to contextualizing and understanding his life; a smaller body of work focuses on the formal features of Grossman's writing. What is new to my approach

and will be the focus of the following study is that I fuse Grossman's philosophy to his writing and demonstrate that his writing itself is the enactment and realization of that very philosophy of ethics. In other words, I set forth that Grossman's poetics constitutes the living concretization of his abstract ideas.

I trace the evolution of both Grossman's ethical ideas and the formal features of his art across his oeuvre. This project picks up at roughly the mid-point of Grossman's literary career, when many of the questions and concerns that inform his mature ethics first appeared in his writing. It is during this period, too, that the formal features that characterize his mature writing begin to develop in conjunction with the emergence of his philosophical model. From there, I survey, by way of selected texts, the way in which the relationship between Grossman's ideas and his art continues to evolve until the time of the writer's death.

More specifically, the following chapters demonstrate that Grossman develops an ethics of the individual human being that precedes and is greater than all else, not only in human life, but in the scheme of the universe. What this means for him develops over time, becoming more inclusive with regard to what constitutes an individual and more expansive concerning what it means to be that. I show that movement comes to predominate in Grossman's conception of the latter—ceaseless movement, endless unfolding. Through this process, the self moves toward infinity and is constantly in motion toward an ever more-expansive infinity. It is through this process that the individual is most fully realized. In opposition to this stands dogmatic and ideological systems that attempt to control, fetter, and manipulate both the physical side of human existence and—most important—human beings' psychological and spiritual lives. As we will discover, this opposition—the central tenet of Grossman's mature thinking—itself dissolves into an ultimate infinity of expression in Grossman's final work.

In conjunction with elucidating the content of Grossman's philosophy, this project considers how his thinking is enacted in writing. Specifically, I will demonstrate the structures and technical devices that mark and enable this philosophical enactment, as well as how they function within the texts. This project shows how, for Grossman, art (writing) articulates his philosophy of human movement and expansion, not only through its explication in narrative but, equally important, through form. In broad terms, this is a poetics of generation and inclusion, which closely mirrors the core principles of his ethics. This amounts to an *enactment* of Grossman's philosophy.

Selection of Texts

One may, of course, focus on an author's body of work with greater or lesser reference to the author him/herself. What interests us is how Grossman's texts provide insight into the writer's ideas and serve as structured embodiments of those cogitations, and how Grossman harnesses artistic form to enact his ideas. In other words, we approach Grossman's writing with regard to its relation to him and his philosophy rather than as objects of study in their own right. Keeping in mind that it is Grossman's thinking and its engagement with written art that is key for our purposes, it has proven not only possible but most effective to select several representative texts as points of primary investigation rather than to give attention to Grossman's entire oeuvre or some complete portion of it. In addition to promoting economy, the principal reason speaking for this approach concerns the possibility of delving deep into a small number of central or pivotal works in order to elucidate and illustrate the ideas set forth here. This may prove more effective than a survey approach that touches more superficially on a larger number of texts.

Let us then proceed by presenting the texts that have been consulted in this project. In chronological order, the principal works are: Grossman's essay "The Hell of Treblinka"

(«Треблинский ад»), published at the end of 1944;[4] his essay "The Sistine Madonna" («Сикстинская мадонна»), dating from the end of 1955 but not published during his lifetime; his novel *Life and Fate* (*Жизнь и судьба*), completed toward the end of 1960 though not published in Russian until 1988 (in 1980 in the West);[5] and his short novel or *повесть* *Everything Flows* (*Все течет),* left unfinished at the time of the writer's death in 1964 and published posthumously in 1970. In addition to these primary sources, I have occasionally had reason to incorporate analysis of several of Grossman's short stories, letters, and books. These are usually included to help establish the trajectory of the author's thinking across texts and time or to help flesh out an idea being considered in the context of a major work. I have consulted other of Grossman's writings, as well, which inform the analysis and argument of this dissertation.

It goes without saying that *Life and Fate*, Grossman's masterpiece, must be included in any project that seeks to understand the development of Grossman's philosophical thinking. Not only is it, along with *Stalingrad*, his longest work, but it is also stands as the piece that establishes the mature phase of Grossman's writing, both from the perspective of his thinking and from that of the organization and execution of the novel's formal elements. Similarly, *Everything Flows*, also a virtuosic work, must certainly be included as it serves as the capstone to Grossman's thought and writing. What philosophical concerns take center stage in *Life and Fate* and Grossman develops into a fully realized fictional portrayal of mature thought in *Everything*

[4] Published in the journal *Znamya (Знамя*), the essay was intended to be one of Grossman's original essays to the book he compiled and edited with Ilya Ehrenburg between 1943 and 1946, *The Black Book (Черная книга*), a collection of essays and reflections on the Holocaust. The book lost support and was not published in full until 1980 in Jerusalem.

[5] The history of Grossman's attempts to publish the novel; its confiscation or, as the author himself referred to it, "arrest;" and its eventual success in being smuggled out of the Soviet Union is both interesting and beyond the scope of this citation. Detailed accounts of the book's trajectory may be found in nearly any biographical work of Grossman; see bibliography for several noteworthy examples.

Flows sees to a yet more fully realized (and in some cases extreme) conclusion. Grossman's final major piece of fiction stands as his final testament to his most robustly developed thought. "The Hell of Treblinka" was chosen for several reasons. From a historical standpoint, the essay is significant by virtue of its being one of the earliest documents concerning the reality of the Holocaust and having served as written testimony at the Nuremberg trials. For our purposes, "The Hell of Treblinka" is important because it marks the beginning of a pivot in Grossman's thinking, evincing a model of socialist realist cohesion, teleology, and clearly defined categories while at the same time laying out many of the ethical questions and issues that shape his philosophy and writing in all major subsequent texts. Throughout the essay, Grossman adheres to a conventional, unnuanced line of thought but, nevertheless, outlines a space for new inconsistencies and philosophical shading that cannot be resolved by this kind of thinking. The essay's rootedness in an earlier mode, coupled with the indirect introduction of new philosophical problems, thus offers us a prime starting point for our investigations, as in examining it, we are able to establish the kind of thinking that characterized Grossman's less mature period while also pointing to the new challenges and promises the writer is here unknowingly presenting. "The Hell of Treblinka" further merits inclusion because of its introduction of the theme of identity as a central concern. This interest, which follows Grossman through the remainder of his works, is significant to this project, especially in Chapters 1 and 3. I have chosen to work with "The Sistine Madonna" in part because, as a companion essay to "The Hell of Treblinka," it serves naturally as a point of comparison between itself and its earlier sister essay. Written a bit over a decade after "The Hell of Treblinka," "The Sistine Madonna" helps elucidate the trajectory and expansion of Grossman's ideas from the relative starting point of the former essay. Aside from this reason, "The Sistine Madonna" stands on its own as a piece that

captures important transitional elements in Grossman's thinking and writing. Many of these, moreover, are distinct from the concerns found in Grossman's earlier essay and so merit their own consideration. In particular, Grossman's ethics as they touch on art will be explored largely through the lens of this essay in Chapter 2. Because a number of these features remain nascent in "The Sistine Madonna," it is in this short piece of writing that we can most readily perceive the shifts in Grossman's ethical current.

Taken together, the selections I have made are representative of Grossman's breadth as a writer. Both "The Hell of Treblinka" and "The Sistine Madonna" make valuable contributions to my work insofar as, being shorter pieces, they allow for being closely read and analyzed in their entirety. In contrast, *Life and Fate* and *Everything Flows* present broader swaths and longer threads that may be captured at a distance or examined in part in close analysis. Generically, too, these choices display Grossman's range: while two works are essays, one is intended as documentary—albeit reflective—journalism, the other as a meditation; of the two main works of fiction under consideration, *Life and Fate* is, of course, a novel, while *Everything Flows* nearly defies genre altogether and may be variously and in any case loosely characterized as a novel or *повесть*. This range highlights the fact that this project is concerned with the writer's philosophical thinking generally speaking rather than as, for example, a novelist.

Before proceeding, it is worth noting the rationale behind excluding what is arguably Grossman's other major work, *Stalingrad* (*За правое дело)*. It is clear from the lack of publication histories of the four main texts selected that the version we have received is largely, if not entirely, what Grossman himself wanted to say. The works were published either without the active intervention by the censors ("The Hell of Treblinka") or else went unpublished during Grossman's life ("The Sistine Madonna," *Life and Fate*, and *Everything Flows*)—and therefore

were not compromised by compulsory edits. Such is not case with *Stalingrad*. All published versions of the novel were heavily edited at the insistence of editors. In addition to these, there are a total of eleven extant manuscripts, of which, "[t]he first of these [is] almost unreadable because of Grossman's poor handwriting and the huge number of corrections he made to it. The next version has […] gone missing […]. The third version, therefore, is the first readable version we have."[6] As my work aims to explore Grossman's unmitigated philosophy and its artistic forms, it does not seem appropriate to include in this examination a work about which we have only a tenuous grasp on which parts of it are authentically Grossman's.

Finally, I have made the decision not to address directly the works most solidly characterizing Grossman's Soviet realist period.(e.g., his wartime novel *The People Immortal* (*Народ бессмертен*) for the reason that, while understanding the evolution of Grossman's thinking is important to understanding its mature elements, my primary interest lies in examining the features and processes of this developed period; for that reason, the earliest primary work under consideration—"The Hell of Treblinka"— is already from the middle of Grossman's career, occupying a liminal space between his earlier period and the mature one that followed.

Biographical Background

It is beyond the scope of this study to focus on Vasily Grossman's biography. As stated above, significant work has already been done in this area, and it may be consulted to further flesh out points of interest in the author's background. This section will serve as something of a post-script with the aim of helping to flesh out the context of Grossman's works and thinking for the reader before delving into the working with the texts themselves.

[6] (Chandler, *Stalingrad* 974)

While this project is concerned with the ways Vasily Grossman thought about the world and how they developed over time, it is not principally a biographical one. That said, it is useful to address ourselves to a brief overview of the writer's life by way of helping orient the reader and provide valuable background for what follows. In conjunction with shedding light on the world in which Grossman lived and the particular circumstances he experienced, this approach will offer a context for the developments in Grossman's thinking over time.

Vasily Grossman was born, an only child, to Semyon Osipovich Grossman and Yekaterina Savelievna (neé Vitis) on December 12, 1905, in the town of Berdichev (formally in the territory of the Russian Empire, now in in present-day Ukraine and represented by the Ukrainian name Berdichiv). Both of these latter facts—the date of Grossman's birth and his birthplace—are significant, both to his life history and to the way scholars and readers have considered him. We turn our attention first to the year of Grossman's birth.

To be born in 1905 in the Russian Empire meant that Grossman would experience a childhood that included the first World War as well as the toppling of his country's government in the midst of revolution; his coming of age would be characterized by Civil War. Grossman's young adulthood would be spent in a world that sought to build from scratch a new, ideal society unlike anything seen to that point; this new society would open the doors of opportunity and (official) inclusion to minority groups including Jews, to which ethnicity Grossman belonged, and also swiftly clamp down on expressions of autonomy and self-expression in all spheres of life. In his thirties, Grossman would live through the tragedies of both the Holodomor and the Great Terror. World War II (The Great Patriotic War), including the Holocaust, would be not only a period of the writer's life but even its defining experience. In his forties, Grossman would experience both Stalin's Doctor's Plot, which sought to persecute if not eliminate the Jewish

population of the Soviet Union, and its nearly miraculous reversal with the sudden death of Stalin in the spring of 1953. In Grossman's later years, he would experience the Thaw (*ottepel*) and the movement of the Soviet Union in a new direction. Grossman would die, in September of 1964, both before reaching 60 years of age and just before the ousting of Khrushchev ushered in the new Brezhnev Era. That said, it would be difficult to dispute that in Grossman's comparatively short life, curtailed as it was by stomach cancer, he experienced and was witness to an uncommon amount of social change, triumph, violence, trauma, fear, bravery, and division than most can claim. In a word, by virtue of being born in 1905 in the Russian Empire, Vasily Grossman had personal experience in one way or another with many of the most significant world and national events of the first half of the 20th century.

What are we to make of Grossman's life in the context of this backdrop? Grossman's colleague Ilya Ehrenburg wrote, "They say there are people who are born under a lucky star…But the star under which Grossman was born was a star of misfortune" (Shrayer, "Lucky Grossman"). Conversely, in the course of his acclaimed career as a war correspondent for *Red Star* (*Красная Звезда*) during the World War II, Grossman earned the nickname "Lucky Grossman." The moniker stemmed from the fact that he had avoided being physically injured during the course of the war, despite conducting his work in the thick of fighting, much of it in the middle of the Battle of Stalingrad; on one occasion, a grenade fell between Grossman's feet only to fail to detonate upon landing. This opposed view of the same life may be applied to many of that life's defining episodes and is noteworthy in considering how Grossman's ideas changed over time.

When Grossman was starting out on his career as a young writer,[7] he moved in with his cousin, Nadya Almaz, who, five years older than he, encouraged his writing and was able, by means of her social and political connections, to help him get his first articles published. This was a significant help, especially in light of Grossman's father's lack of support for his son's literary aspirations. In 1933, Grossman's cousin was arrested, having corresponded with the dissident writer Viktor Serge (pseudonym of Viktor Kibal'chich). Indeed, this dynamic of felicitous friendships and contacts turning to tragedy was not unique to Grossman's relationship with Nadya. Among the casualties of the Purges who were writers were Grossman's personal friends Ivan Kataev, Boris Guber, and Nikolai Zarudin. Grossman's own life, time and again, was amazingly spared.[8] His own (second) wife, Olga Guber,[9] was arrested in 1938, having been married to Boris Guber. Somewhat miraculously, Grossman was able to secure her release, preventing both her own demise and the removal of her two sons to orphanages. From his letter to Yezhov by way of interceding on his wife's behalf, there were no negative consequences either for himself or his family, a fact that on its own is surprising.[10] Of those relationships that were not marked directly by devastation or fear, a number nevertheless incorporated those qualities from the society around them. From a friend of his youth with whom he remained close throughout adulthood, Vyacheslav Loboda,[11] Grossman learned of the reality of the Ukrainian

[7] While still working toward his undergraduate degree in chemical engineering, Grossman knew that his interests had changed and that he wanted to pursue a literary career. Nevertheless, upon graduating, he worked for several years as an engineer, first in the Donbass and in several factories.
[8] Alexandra Popoff notes that "during interrogations Guber denied knowing anything political 'compromising' abut Grossman, which may have saved his life" (93).
[9] Married to the poet at the time of her early acquaintance with Grossman, Olga Guber left her husband (also Grossman's friend) to live with and then marry Grossman.
[10] As Grossman's friend and biographer Semyon Lipkin observes, "In 1937, only a very brave man would dare to write such a letter to chief executioner of the state."
[11] Loboda was one of two who, at Grossman's request, kept a secret copy of *Life and Fate* after Grossman's death.

famine;[12] from his friend Nikolai Zabolotsky—poet, camp survivor, and husband of Grossman's late love Ekaterina Zabolotskaya—Grossman heard the realities of the Gulag.

Removed from the sphere of major political and social events and movements, Grossman's love life was likewise fraught. Married three times, Grossman's relationships with all his major romantic partners were difficult. While still a student at Moscow State University, Grossman learned that his new wife Galya[13] would give birth to their first—and only—child, a daughter named Ekaterina after Grossman's mother. Neither of Grossman's parents approved of the match and were devastated when he told them he was to become a father at such a young age. Indeed, the marriage was not successful, and for the first several years of her life, Ekaterina (known as Katya) was raised by Grossman's mother in Berdichev, in the house where Grossman had grown up. In her childhood, Katya was visited by her father only infrequently, and it was only in her adulthood that the two established a relationship. Grossman's second marriage was likewise complicated. Grossman was not only friendly with and attracted to Olga Guber but was also friends with her husband Boris. The all-around pain and—for Olga and Grossman—guilt that resulted from such a situation were not inconsiderable. In addition to the adults involved, the Gubers' two sons experienced the pain and confusion of first their mother's leaving the family household to take up with Grossman and then their own incorporation into this new family life. Grossman's third love, Ekaterina Zabolotskaya, was also married at the time that she and Grossman became involved with each other. While she and Grossman never married and Grossman eventually returned to Olga (who he still cared for but no longer loved romantically), the two were candid about their attachment, an affection that continued until the writer's death.

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[12] Having been in Donetsk at the time and having moved throughout Ukraine generally in this period, Grossman himself also had firsthand knowledge of the Holodomor.

[13] His first wife's official name was Anna Matsyuk, Ganna in Ukrainian.

As before, this relationship was characterized by guilt toward their spouses; in addition, the two suffered from their inability to come together fully. Without conducting a full survey of Grossman's apparent romantic preferences and his relationships, it is fair to say that his love life was both sustained and difficult throughout his life.

The war stands as an episode of extremes in Grossman's personal life. From one side, we see that it was because of the war (specifically the Holocaust) that his mother—one of, if not the single most important person in Grossman's life—was barbarically killed. Her murder happened in such a way that, as a war correspondent who firsthand saw occupied territory in the wake of the Nazis' retreat and interviewed locals about what had happened, Grossman could always vividly imagine and never properly lay to rest the cruel violence of her end.[14] Because of the war, Grossman saw death, destruction, violence, and inhumanity at every turn for four years. These years were also the time when Grossman would see uncommon examples of bravery, selflessness, valor, and commitment. His writing about these positive acts was not merely a rhetorical position adopted to appease the Soviet authorities—Grossman truly believed in the spirit of millions of individual Soviet people coming together in the fight against fascism. It was in these years that Grossman found his voice as a writer and began to take up questions and themes that would develop into a complex and meaningful world view as expressed in his writing. As Grossman's editor at *Red Star*, David Ortenberg, said: "This period was Grossman's 'golden moment.'" Confirming this, Grossman wrote to his father, "I have no desire to leave here. Even though the situation has improved, I still want to stay in a place where I witnessed the worst times." He wrote this immediately after spending "two months inside the most intense

[14] Among Grossman's possessions discovered after his death was a photograph of slaughtered Jewish women and girls in a pit. Another item he kept was a child's toy block he recovered from Treblinka, a visceral connection to the humanity of the lives that were lost.

sustained close combat of the entire war" (Garrard and Garrard, "Free at Last: Vasily Grossman and the Battle for Stalingrad" 25).

In 1951, Stalin instigated the beginnings of what has come to be known as the Doctor's Plot, investigations into a false claim that Jewish doctors were committing malpractice with the aim of assassinating Soviet leaders. From here, it was a small step to the claim that all Jews were anti-Soviet and needed to be handled accordingly. In October 1952, *Stalingrad* was nominated for the elite Stalin Prize. When in January of 1953, *Pravda* ran a piece on the so-called Doctor's Plot as its lead story; however, not only did Grossman's chances to win vanish, but he himself became *persona non grata* as his editors and publishers moved away from him and the media attacked the novel that had only just recently been receiving the highest praise. Prepared for what he believed to be his imminent arrest, Grossman was shocked to be spared this fate by Stalin's sudden death on March 5, 1953. His chances for glory were dashed and his reputation was irreparably compromised, but Grossman had, once again, evaded disaster.

Beginning his attempts to publish *The Black Book of Soviet Jewry* (*Черная книга советских евреев*)[15] in 1944, Grossman's ability to publish his work became progressively more difficult. By the end of his life, his work was not published at all—most of it not appearing in print until years after his death. The reason for this shift in Grossman's publishing fortunes is tied to the unfolding of a dual dynamic. The Soviet Union's victory in the Battle of Stalingrad in early 1943 proved a decisive turning point in the war. As this triumph, along with other developments in the war, made it clear that Germany would not succeed in the long run, it no longer fit Stalin's plans to promote (or simply tolerate) writing that exposed the enormities of the Nazi regime against Soviet Jewry. When the result of the war still hung in the balance and

[15] Often shortened to *The Black Book* (*Черная книга*).

especially with Germany having the upper hand, Stalin calculated that the benefits of so revealing the depredations of the Soviet Union's enemy outweighed any detriment that might be incurred by special reference to Jews. In exposing the horrors committed by the Nazis against Soviet citizens, not only would the overall morale be boosted, but so too would the atrocities of the Soviet state appear mild and benign in comparison. Once the tide of the war changed, however, Stalin became concerned with emphasizing the suffering of the Soviet people collectively without regard to any unique suffering any particular group may have experienced. Moreover, he sought to suppress the uncovering of Soviet collaboration with the Nazis and any of the other nuances and complexities of the war that did not align with the official view of the German regime as absolutely evil and the Soviet one as unequivocally just. This suppression of history, fact, subtlety, and anything that questioned the Party's status quo extended, naturally, to all areas of life including especially those topics to which Grossman was increasingly particularly drawn. Where Grossman had spent his youth writing stories, articles, and novels that were relatively Soviet Realist, in the course of the war and for the remainder of his life, his work matured to incorporate complex philosophical questions and reflections on life as it really was—not merely how it was promoted in the official media. What is more, Grossman became less compromising over time. If *Stalingrad* could be published in 1952, it was because Grossman agreed to substantial cuts and revisions. By the time editors demanded that he excise a passage on anti-Semitism in his last work, *An Armenian Sketchbook (Добро вам!*), in order to publish it, Grossman would not capitulate on even this one point.

Both *Stalingrad* and *An Armenian Sketchbook* were, in any case, not only submitted for publication (as *Everything Flows* never even was) but were allowed to be put into print in the event that certain conditions were met. This was not the case with Grossman's masterwork *Life*

and Fate. Completed in 1960, Grossman submitted the novel to *Red Star*'s editor Vadim Kozhevnikov for publication. In turn, the latter submitted it to the KGB, who promptly confiscated all versions of the book. The "arrest" of his greatest work—as Grossman put it—was for him like a death, as he explained in his unsuccessful appeal to Khrushchev. From this point on, Grossman's health began to suffer and he became depressed. That said, it is worth observing that Grossman's personal fate in conjunction with his attempt to publish *Life and Fate* was notably mild given the candor and honesty of the novel and the degree to which it exposed the state's moral transgressions.

What emerges from these windows onto the key events and relationships of Grossman's life is that the same one may be seen as simultaneously fortunate—often uncommonly so— and unfortunate—often tragically so. In addition to the many lucky reprieves Grossman was granted in the midst of apparently unavoidable disaster, Grossman's good fortune sprang, in many ways, from his great misfortune. The pain of his life—along with the unexpected good that would spring out of nowhere in it—informed and sharpened his philosophy and became the stuff of the narratives in his writing. Whether one views Grossman's life as one that was "lucky" or "unfortunate," he would not be the writer he became were it not for a combination of the two.

Overview of Chapters

Rather than consider each work separately and present my findings according to the chronological principle of when each work was written, I have pursued an approach that treats a particular aspect of Grossman's prosody—technical and/or thematic—in each chapter. Accordingly, the structure of each chapter represents an arc that deals with multiple texts as they address the chapter's specific concern over the course of Grossman's career.

The ordering of the following chapters has been loosely organized around the corresponding chronological emergence of the chapter's given topic as an area of interest or concern for Grossman. Thus, in Chapter 1 we examine the emergence of Grossman's overt interest in an ethical approach to (the) human being(s) and their relations with one another. In this context, we find the concurrent development of a focus on the individual human being as the fundamental object of consideration and care in Grossman's philosophy. It is with the individual simply as such that we find meaning in Grossman's orientation. We see, furthermore, that for Grossman the key feature both to understanding and giving expression to the human being is its infinity and, by association, its endless motion of unfolding, development, and thought. These twin conceptions—that the individual is paramount simply by virtue of being and that that being is characterized by movement without end—form the basis for all other aspects of Grossman's philosophy, art, and the relationship between them.

It is to this relationship that we turn in Chapter 2. The emphasis of this chapter falls on "The Sistine Madonna" as a vehicle to understand how art becomes for Grossman not simply a tool by means of which he is able to express the tenets of his philosophy but, rather—in addition to this—it embodies this philosophy by virtue of its own qualities. As such, by engaging in the artistic process, Grossman realizes both the description of his philosophy (i.e., the exaltation of the infinite and ceaseless in the human) and the process this entails. This is significant because it elucidates the nature of Grossman's writing, shedding light on its characteristic forms and features and why they are so. From here, we move to several chapters that consider Grossman's enacted philosophy by means of examining particular structures he employs throughout his mature writings. In particular, we focus on ways in which Grossman employs content to maximize artistic process (in accord with the infinite animation of the human being).

In Chapter 3, we explore one of the structures that become not just characteristic but also important carriers of narrative content in Grossman's mature works. Here, we turn our attention to Grossman's use of scope as a formal device that facilitates motion, again in *Life and Fate*. In the movement between broad phenomena, events, and abstractions (i.e., dilation) and focus, the specific, and the individual (i.e., contraction), we find a rich resource for Grossman's ethics of (artistic) movement. In addition to being a highly productive kind of movement—one that, as is true of the fragmentation/unification variety we examined in Chapter 3, which, by endless alternations may continue indefinitely—we discover that, for Grossman, playing with scope serves as a tool to help focus the reader on his ultimate point of interest, that is, the individual person. Via an examination of several key narrative arcs in *Life and Fate*, we find that an inverse relationship exists between generality (history, society, etc.) and the amount of text that is devoted to it; this inversion applies likewise to the amount of writing accorded to broad social projects of infrastructure, In other words, the broader and more remote from specific human beings is a passage or narrative thread, the smaller the space it receives in the novel. Conversely, a direct relationship exists between engagement with specific human beings and the space and depth of text they are given.

In Chapter 4, we explore Grossman's characteristic use of motion between cohesion and fragmentation, specifically as it plays out in his engagement with identity in *Life and Fate*. We discover that Grossman rejects the restrictive view of identity that seeks to name a person or group by means of descriptive categories. Instead, he develops a more plastic conception, one that stems from the earliest relationship with the mother, and that requires alternating psychic movement toward (an)other(s) in an act of abstractly coming together and retreating into the self. The dissolution of self into (an)other(s) or its opposite—the moral and social isolation of self

from others—stunts the development of identity and, relatedly, its moral element. We find that it is the back and forth between greater and lesser unity or porosity, which may carry on without ceasing, that generates endless possibilities for the expansion of characters' selves within the text and for the writing of text itself. Moreover, we note that this dynamic yields the best moral results in a Kantian conception.

At this point, we shift our attention from structural elements that demonstrate Grossman's philosophy in his mature prose to a central theme that accomplishes the same. We demonstrate, in Chapter 5, that Grossman makes use not only of formal elements but also of narrative/thematic ones to demonstrate and emphasize process as an ethical construct. In this chapter, we investigate the role of science—considered in several of its facets—as a topic and a theme in Grossman's narratives. This survey spans his treatment of the field as it relates to history, philosophy, and society. We find that "science" means many things to Grossman, both positive and negative depending on their relation to humanity and the latter's degree of agency with regard to the former. In its most affirmative guise, science—specifically its most abstract forms—by its nature facilitates the freedom and continued evolution of the individual thinker, his continual expansion and liberation from ideological constraint, and his ability to generate new meaning. As such, it simultaneously furthers the vital intellectual movement of the scientific characters (i.e., Grossman uses science to demonstrate his ethics) and provides a vehicle for Grossman to expand his writing, both through his characters' narratives and through his own extra-narrative musings (i.e., he uses science to enact his ethics). We conclude by noting the ways in which the development of a scientific idea from the individual who conceives it creates a moral vector that is independent of the thinker in a way that mirrors Grossman's philosophical emphasis on sheer development itself.

The final chapter looks at Grossman's increasing interest in and portrayal of pain both structurally and thematically, demonstrating how the two work in concert both to construct a late kind of writing that is characteristically distinct from that which proceeded it and to represent the writer's late philosophy. To help toward this end, Chapter 6 explores Grossman's dual conceptions of time—linear and cyclical—and how they relate to experiences and depictions of suffering. It emerges that the potential for process—experiential and written—correlates with the experience of suffering. We conclude that for Grossman pain becomes a generative experience and, therefore, a positive one. In this analysis, we discover the writer's incorporation of contradictions and oppositions, the most pronounced of which concerns his eventual acceptance of the stultifying and potentially deadly ideologies against which he has spoken throughout his life as an inherent feature—and therefore valuable—feature of life itself.

Chapter One: The Individual Human Being Emerges as Central and Evolves in Scope

1.1 The Foundations of Grossman's Thought

However we approach Vasily Grossman's writing, it is evident that the artistic exposition of a conception of ethics is at the center of his work. This ethical perspective, comprising several integrated components, forms the foundation for any meaningful engagement with his work and especially with the basis for his reputation as one of the greatest Soviet writers, the epic novel *Life and Fate* (*Жизнь и судьба*).[16] It is the aim of this project to elucidate the characteristics of this ethics not only *within* the context of Grossman's major works, but also *as* the works themselves. In order to do this, we must begin by understanding the center of Grossman's ethical orientation, the simultaneous beginning and end of his ethical universe.

According to Grossman's understanding, in the beginning was simply the individual human being.[17] Indications of this foundation for all of his thought can be found in work as early as his breakthrough short story "In the Town of Berdichev," published in 1934 in the prestigious *Literary Newspaper* (*Литературная Газета*). Here, the birth of Commissar Vavilova's son draws the grandmother with whom she is staying to strain forward into the birthing room, as "she wanted to hear the voice of forever victorious life" («В городе Бердичеве» 3). In fact, this

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[16] *Life and Fate* is the main focus of this study. While other writings, both pre- and post-dating the novel are also discussed, they are considered primarily in reference to contextualizing and better understanding Grossman's vision in his longest work, the one in which his ethical view comes to maturity and is most fully realized.

[17] As the Russian «человек» that the center of Grossman's universe is not preceded by an article, it is interesting to consider the implications of choosing the indefinite "a" or the definite "the" when rendering it in English. While some instances unambiguously call for one or the other, many others would be equally well suited to either. In fact, both capture a particular dimension of Grossman's human being-centered ethics, "a" emphasizing one particular instance of human life, "the" capturing the ethical category of the universal Human Being. Both articles, then, will be used going forward, depending on the context.

child's birth—especially in spite of his mother's attempts to abort him by, among other things, drinking various concoctions and purposefully scalding herself in the bathhouse—is the real victory of the story, not the Civil War battles in which Vavilova takes part both before and after the action to which the reader is admitted. This notion of the "victory" or "triumph" of life will come to be a dominant one all the way through Grossman's latest writing.

By the time Grossman wrote "The Hell of Treblinka" in 1944, the centrality of the human being to his ethical world was firmly established, where it had previously been consistently implied in his choice of character sketches as his central focus in most of his early stories. Indeed, his favoring the short story or even vignette form—a preference that continued to find expression through *Everything Flows*—itself supports his belief in a human life as being its own world, one worthy of being expressed in its own narrative.[18] Not a short story, "The Hell of Treblinka" is explicit in its declaration that the individual human being is the greatest "valuable" (драгоценность) in existence[19] («Треблински ад,» 2). From this point on, not only is this focus consistent in Grossman's writing (which, as we have seen, was implicitly the case all along), but it is also regularly made explicitly so; it is clearly the reason for his writing, and he is not interested in diverting his reader's attention from this bald fact.

What a "human being" meant for him, however, was not fixed. In conjunction with the development of his style of writing, Grossman's view of the human being evolved—or rather the

[18] In this respect especially, Grossman may be seen as more closely linked to Chekhov than to Tolstoy, with whom he is most often compared. A number of references to the former even suggest Grossman's own desire for this comparison to be drawn, particularly as Chekhov features in a literary conversation between Viktor and fellow intelligentsia evacuees in Kazan, in *Life and Fate*.

[19] In "The Hell of Treblinka," Grossman alternates between emphasizing the supremacy of the "individual" («человек») and exalting collective "people" («люди») or the more abstract "human life" («жизнь человека»). This alternation, with several other terminological variants accumulating along the way, appears in his subsequent major works. In fact, Grossman is repeatedly explicit and unwavering in his conviction that it is the individual person who is at the moral center of his ethical universe. That he does switch between the individual and the collective, however, is not without significance, and it is important to note the trend early on, especially as we will recur to it in other contexts.

former developed—in conjunction with the latter. Just as "The Hell of Treblinka" saw the crystallization of Grossman's conception of the human being as the greatest good, the yardstick by which all else is measured, so too did it find its author in a crisis of logical expression that was absent in his earlier work that was not explicitly concerned with the Human Being per se. Whether or not Grossman was aware of the conceptual problems he faced and did not resolve in his testimonial essay either at the time of writing it or after the fact is impossible to say. What is apparent, however, is that, while by the time he wrote what may be considered the "sister" essay to "The Hell of Treblinka," "The Sistine Madonna" («Сикстинская мадонна»), in 1955, he was on his way to solving them in a way that was compatible with the ethics he was developing; it was not until *Life and Fate* that we find true resolution. In "The Hell of Treblinka", Grossman maintains a stark binary throughout. The victims of the extermination camp (overwhelmingly Jews, though he also mentions Gypsies, Bessarabians, and Poles) are human beings; the Germans who worked there are, among other things, "beasts" («звери»), "creatures" («твари»), and "reptiles" («рептили»). In other words, they are subhuman, not embraced by the term "human being." This position may be defensible and is especially understandable in light of Grossman's personal connection to the Holocaust.[20] In the context of the essay, however, it faces logical problems that boxed in Grossman in his attempts to promote the idea of the triumph of the human spirit.

A principle intractable problem is that, insofar as the SS men he describes are "creatures" and "beasts," they are morally inculpable. Grossman himself demonstrates this in a comparison between woodland animals and the camp guards: "Near the Germans' barracks a small menagerie was built. In its cages sat harmless woodland beasts—wolves and foxes—while the

[20] Vasily Grossman was himself, of course, Jewish. In the fall of 1941, his mother Ekaterina Savelievna Grossman was killed in the Nazi massacre of Jews in Berdichev.

most frightening and pig-like predators that ever existed on earth walked about in freedom, sat on little birch benches, and listened to music" («Треблинский ад,» 3). If a beast is innocent, it is because it acts on instinct and is, therefore, not morally culpable. Thus, by reducing the SS murderers to this level, they are, in fact, absolved; it is only by acknowledging them as people that the fully egregious nature of their actions may be called into account. In fact, Grossman himself seems to acknowledge this implicitly by naming everyday activities in which the Nazis took part. Beasts do not listen to music; they do not sit on benches. It is only Man, who possesses the range of cognitive and emotional faculties to participate in both beauty and baseness, creativity and cruelty, who does. Nevertheless, though seeming to understand this problem, Grossman holds to his binary throughout the essay.

In any case, this rigidity limits the interest of "The Hell of Treblinka" as a piece invested with a moral dimension, which its author clearly wishes it to be. Even years later, when he wrote *Life and Fate*, Grossman allowed for the possibility of someone who is truly, inveterately deviant. In profiling several extermination camp workers, he includes a short chapter—hardly more than a page in length—in which one man reflects, by way of free indirect speech, on his work and how he feels about it. Much of his thinking is a comparison between himself and a fellow worker named Zhuchenko,[21] whose job is to seal the doors of the gas chambers. Unlike the man making the comparison, Zhuchenko takes an unusual pleasure in his role, "experienc[ing] a happy excitement going out to his morning shift […]" (1213). In concluding the chapter, a more enlightened, outside narrator steps in, stating, "[Khemlkov] didn't understand was that it wasn't Zhuchenko's greater guilt that made him so disturbing. Zhuchenko horrified

[21] Zhuchenko's last name indicates that he is a Ukrainian collaborator, not an ethnic German. This is relevant as it indicates a move away from the characterization in "The Hell of Treblinka" of the depravity of the Holocaust as having arisen from specifically German qualities.

him even more because a terrible, innate monstrosity excused him—whereas Khemlkov himself was still a human being" (1214). It is possible, then, even in what we may call the "ethically mature" phase of Grossman's writing, for a subhuman person—someone so deviant from basic human norms that he can no longer be grouped with those who have even a flicker of them—to exist. This is, however, an exceptionally rare exception. It is so rare, in fact, that this figure, featured on no more than two pages of a more than 800-page novel, is the only instance of such a figure in all of Grossman's writing after "The Hell of Treblinka." In the latter, however, this type is the norm: All the Germans at Treblinka are subhuman "beasts."

With this comes not only a moral but also a narrative block. If someone is purely evil, they are completely devoid of any kind of complexity that would be interesting to write about. Dante understood this in writing *Inferno*, a piece to which Grossman refers multiple times in "The Hell of Treblinka." Throughout the circles of hell, even down to the lowest levels, people's stories are told, accounts of weakness, malice, cruelty, and so forth, but all in the context of plausible human figures. Once Dante and the reader reach the lowest level where Satan resides, however, there is—quite literally—nowhere to go. As the ultimate, unmitigated evil, Satan is necessarily the end point of the narrative. Similarly, aside from recording facts about the structure and events that happened at Treblinka, there is very little Grossman is able to write from the moral position he has assumed.

At one point early on in the text, after reading that "[n]one of these beings possessed anything human. Their distorted brains, hearts, and souls, their words, acts, and habits were like a ghastly caricature […]," we are then told that "all these monstrous dragons and reptiles evolved from the germ of traditional German chauvinism" (1). This last phrase—"traditional German chauvinism"—contains the seed of a philosophy that Grossman would mature into much later—

that abstract ideologies and dogmas are a kind of disease to which human beings fall prey. Implicit in it is the notion that these SS men who worked and killed at Treblinka were indeed human beings, people whose ideas and moral compasses became unbelievably perverted by what Grossman here calls "Hitlerism," but nonetheless people. However that may be, for the time being, Grossman does not develop this thought; for now, deplorable people are no people at all.

Nearly ten years later, in "The Sistine Madonna," we see suggestions of a change occurring in Grossman's thinking on what constitutes a "human being." Here, Hitler himself is characterized as a painter. It is true that, immediately after, he becomes "the ruler of Europe [who] could not meet [the Madonna's] eyes, nor […] meet the gaze of her son," for "after all, they were people" (2). Nevertheless, it is not insignificant that the paragon of cruelty and depravity is at first characterized as being a member of not only a human, but even a humane profession before being excluded from the category of human being.

1.2 Human Beings Begin to Emerge in Their Entirety

By the time we come to *Life and Fate*, Hitler makes an appearance not only as a "ruler of Europe," but more strikingly as a man with insecurities and common human feelings. In fact, though his position as a murderous dictator is always implied, when we encounter him as a character in the text, it is exclusively as a person more or less like any other. Having just learned of the loss of Stalingrad, "[a] man of average height, wearing a grey raincoat, was walking down a path between […] tall trees" (1324). This man, Hitler

> is alone in the forest, which at first had soothed him, but was now beginning to frighten him. Alone, without his bodyguards, without his usual aides, he felt like a little boy from a fairy-tale who had entered into a dark, enchanted forest. Yes, he was like Tom Thumb; he was like the lost little goat who had wandered into the forest, unaware that in the dark the wolf was sneaking up on him. And out of the thick darkness of decades past his childhood fears surfaced, the recollection of a picture from a children's book—a little goat standing in a sunny forest glade and, between the damp, dark trunks, the red eyes and white teeth of the wolf. He

> wanted, as in childhood, to scream, to call for his mother, to close his eyes, to run. (1325)

This portrait of the architect of World War II and the Holocaust is remarkable enough in its own right. What makes it astonishing, however, is that Hitler's fears being filtered through recollections of a scary fairy tale are directly parallel to the experience David—a young Jewish boy who was a victim of Hitler's Final Solution at Auschwitz—had. Much earlier in the novel, we read that

> On David's birthday, December 12, his mother had bought him a book of fairytales. A small grey goat was standing in a forest clearing; next to it the darkness of the forest seemed particularly sinister. Among the dark-brown tree-trunks, the fly-agarics and the toadstools, you could see the wolf's red jaw with its bared teeth and its green eyes. Only David knew about the now inevitable murder. He banged his fist on the table, he covered the goat with the palm of his hand, but he understood that there was no way he could protect it." (909-10)

Later, as he is walking to the "bath house" before being killed in a gas chamber, the fear he felt from looking at this picture merges with all other things that terrified him, including "his first irrational night terror that had made him scream desperately for his mother" (1222). The unmistakable comparison of an almost identical experience does more than just affirm Hitler's basic humanity; it suggests that, in terms of the possible feelings and impressions he experienced (regardless of which he chose to cultivate or act on), he was every bit as human as his victim, a small, helpless child. A far darker reading suggests that somewhere inside the unrealized life of David lurked a potential Hitler, someone who, despite these human feelings and experiences, wreaked havoc for millions of people across multiple continents. Though everything in the reader may protest that the innocent David is infinitely more a human than the demagogic dictator who arranged for his murder, Grossman challenges the exclusive claim to the title in what may be the most extreme contrast possible.

His last major work, *Everything Flows*, presents us with the complete elimination of the category of non- or subhuman. This inclusion of all people within the concept of human being attends a more general broadening of the "pity for people" Grossman cited in his 1962 letter to Khrushchev as one[22] of his motivating reasons for writing *Life and Fate*. On the final page of the unfinished last novella, the returned camp inmate Ivan Grigoryevich reflects that "[p]eople did not want to do evil to anyone, but they did evil their entire lives. And yet people were people. And the wonderful, marvelous thing is that—whether they wanted to or not—they did not allow freedom to die, and even the most terrible of them cared for it in their terrible, deformed, and yet human souls" (*Все течет* 37). Grossman has ceased to exclude any person from the category of human being that was the heart of his thought and writing; in the end, every person, without exception, is a human being, with all of its potential and actual good, bad, and incidental qualities. If one person is human,[23] so must all be, for to claim otherwise is to impoverish the very concept.

Grossman did not only circumscribe what constituted for him a "human being," the value that oriented all other considerations. He also made forays into an expanded conception of the ultimate valuable. In several late stories, he experiments with increasing the scope of the "greatest valuable" that is human life to include other types of life. In "The Dog" («Собака», 1961) and "The Road" («Дорога», 1962), the narrator enters into an animal's perspective, imbuing it with a kind of sacred personhood. It is precisely in the fact that the animals are fairly straightforwardly anthropomorphized rather than sanctified according to their own animal nature,

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[22] The other reason cited is "love for people" (*Бит-Юнан and Фельдман, Василий Гроссман: литературная биография в иторико-политическом контексте* 112).

[23] It is worth noting that Grossman is always speaking of the uncapitalized «человек». Though his abstraction of this word as a moral category lends itself well to the capitalized form «Человек» ("Human Being"), his avoidance of it speaks to his conception of a person's exalted value as being based—paradoxically—on his totality, flaws and all. In a sense, the form of this crucial word itself that he used foreshadowed from very early on the endpoint he worked through intellectually and emotionally in his writings.

however, that we conclude that Grossman's idea of the supremacy of specifically a human life remains unaltered. Already in *Life and Fate*, though, we see the introduction of Grossman's playing with expanding his idea of what kind of life constitutes the fundamental basis for his model of ethics.

Toward the end of the novel, Chepyzhin speaks at length to Viktor about his theory of evolution. The sympathetic former head of the Institute where Viktor works describes a trajectory according to which a general notion of "life" («жизнь») progresses from basic forms to those more complex and also from a small part of the matter in the universe to the dominant one, in both cases as an expansion of the good. As Chepyzhin says in expounding his theory:

> One day man will be endowed with all the qualities of God [...] But, having achieved equality with God, man will not stop. He will begin to solve problems that were too much for God himself. He will establish a connection with rational beings from the highest level of evolution, from another space and another time to whom all of human history seems merely an instant, dim flash. He will establish a conscious connection with the life of the microcosm whose entire evolution is merely a brief moment for humans. It will be then that the complete destruction of the space-time abyss will occur. Man will finally look down on God. (*Жизнь и Субьба* 1354-55)

The idea is clear that, however evolved humanity becomes, it will still be this altered, omniscient and omnipotent Man (with both a capital and lower case "m") that is central to all ethical considerations.

1.3 Human Beings Remain Central

We are left, as before, with the human being at the center. This does not change with subsequent writings and experiments in how Grossman is willing to expand the boundaries of his fundamental unit; insofar as he is willing to expand his moral inclusivity, it is because he has broadened his conception of human nature. If this passage from Chepyzhin's monologue is noteworthy because it highlights the significance of *human* life for Grossman, it is also important

because it underscores that it is human *life* that is paramount to him. God does not exist within the realm of life; He stands outside it.[24] It is irrelevant what position God stands in relative to humanity—superior, inferior, or otherwise, His position is static. Human life is movement; it is the precise opposite of a superlative. Chepyzhin's assertion that mankind will overtake God in omniscience and omnipotence at some distant point in the future attests, ironically, to the antithetical nature of that which is superlative to human nature.

To this point, God has represented the totality of all things possible and positive; nothing can surpass Him. Should human beings evolve beyond Him, however, they will have shown that expansion and movement are potentially infinite, and, therefore, resist the stasis of a superlative status. For Grossman, as expressed here through Chepyzhin, the ceaseless movement of human beings effectively both rejects the concept of value relative to perfection[25] and dismantles the foundational principle of a telos.

As before, when we considered the limitations Grossman faced in characterizing some people as beasts by virtue of their absolute evilness, here, too, we find the same problem at work in the other direction if we return to "The Hell of Treblinka." If all of the SS are purely evil, the victims are portrayed as wholly good. Grossman tells of hopeless attempts on the part of mothers to save their children; of children trying to comfort their parents with "divine wisdom;" of valiant attempts of unarmed victims fighting their armed executioners; and so on (2). He takes

[24] While Grossman was himself a nonbeliever, he occasionally references an essentially Judeo-Christian "God" as metaphor. Exceptions to this are when he is giving voice to a particular character's beliefs, as in the case of the holy fool Ikonnikov's treatise.

[25] Once again, it seems that Grossman has backed himself into a logical contradiction: even as he highlights the incompatibility of superlatives to human life, his moral structure is hierarchical, with the human being at its apex, and, therefore, as its superlative of value. This is not a contradiction that he resolves. Whether or not he was aware of it, in any case it fits nicely with the purposeful working in of contradictions throughout his mature writings, as will be discussed in the body of this thesis.

his exaltation as far as to describe a "naked young woman, like a goddess from an ancient Greek myth, fighting alone against dozens." This is not a human being; it is an archetype.

On the one hand, Grossman's idealized characterizations limit his ability to speak the praises of true *human* resourcefulness and willpower. In describing the uprising at Treblinka in the summer of 1943, his prose is less a factual, if sympathetic, account than a heroic tale. He speaks of "superhuman" («сверхчеловеческие») effort (4). In many contexts, this may be viewed as simple hyperbole; within that of "The Hell of Treblinka," however, amidst the overall emphasis on the preservation of that which is specifically and uniquely human, the significance behind that prefix denies those who took part in the uprising their proper due as highly motivated people.

Conversely, this stylized exaltation of the victims implies a limit on the author's inclusion of the comparatively weak within his exalted human fold. As moving as these sketches are, they conspicuously exclude accounts of those who were *ig*noble or cowardly in going to their death. In the face of so much heroism, the suggestion looms that pettiness or despicable behavior renders one less than fully human. Grossman, however, does not allow that this kind of behavior occurred at all. In effectively deifying the victims he portrays, he unintentionally ironically renders them less human, devoid of the morally ambiguous complexities that characterize the fully human experience. He was certainly an astute enough observer of human nature and behavior to know that a single response to anything, let alone something as weighty as imminent death, is unrealistic. Nevertheless, his unidimensional "black" portrayal of the SS murderers logically demanded an equally "white" characterization of their victims. What we discover is that in the aesthetic view that structures "The Hell of Treblinka," one that contains its own logic, we are looking at two sides of the same coin—if anyone is not human, no one is.

Many, if not most, writers on Grossman's work have noted—and in many cases focused on—his enduring interest in moral questions.[26] This emphasis is not misplaced, even a cursory reading of Grossman's work makes plain the author's fascination with what is moral and its opposite. Occasionally, he reverts to explicit critique. While the short Chapter 42 in Book 1 of *Life and Fate*, for example, begins in the style of a historical passage about the war, its tone soon deviates from one of neutrality to a moralizing stance similar to that employed in much of "The Hell of Treblinka." As in the latter piece, this chapter focuses on the Fascist effort to eliminate European Jewry. In other words, there is nothing controversial (and for that reason, particularly compelling) about Grossman's position in this and similar passages scattered throughout his works. A far richer area of exploration may be found in Grossman's more frequent incorporation of his moral inquiries into the fabric of his fiction and other types of writing (as in "The Sistine Madonna"). Not only are these explorations subtler, more complex than his overt assumption of a moral position, but they are also just that—explorations rather than assertions. This is, indeed, a rich area for the scholar who would seek to expound on Grossman's moral position insofar as it fits into the Kantian tradition, particularly regarding the two writers' common interest in free will as it relates to moral issues.

Indeed, the vast majority of the scholarship concerning Grossman's ethics considers his thinking through a broadly Kantian lens. This model of scholarship engages with the characters and events in Grossman's texts, concerning itself with the morality of the choices, circumstances, relationships, and so forth as appear in the narrative. Invariably, the moral assessment is made from the perspective of a moral platform that invokes the ideas of "good" and "bad" as concepts

[26] See, for example, Alex Danchev's work on Grossman's concern with "senseless acts of kindness" as representative of one common model of interpreting his moral position. Robert Chandler, too, has devoted a considerable amount of his exegesis on Grossman's writing to consideration of "the good" within his oeuvre.

to which human beings are beholden in thought and action. From there, most often, this kind of research extrapolates from the moral it has found within the text to a value that can be applied in conversation regarding a real historical context (e.g., the Holocaust, the years of Stalin, etc.) and to Grossman himself. Something more fundamental than a ubiquitous moral concern about "right" and "wrong," however, anchors Grossman's mature thinking and, therefore, his writing.[27]

Those who stop at the Kantian level fail to recognize the ways in which this superficially apparent orientation is anathema to Grossman's ultimate view of the supremacy of the human being *as such*. In the first place, Grossman is aware of the full implications of stepping beyond the bounds of the moral tradition rooted in Kant and is willing to bear the full weight of them. From "The Hell of Treblinka," with its caricatures of "good" victims and "evil" murderers, he arrives in *Everything Flows* at a position that embraces each person as such, regardless of what he himself would categorize as immoral behavior. In the latter, Chapter 7—written as a drama with speaking roles for four "Judases" as well as a Prosecutor and Defense Counsel—speaks to Grossman's almost painful extension of inclusivity of all on the grounds that beneath the debris of circumstance and acculturation is the spark inherent in each, however more depraved one may seem than the next. He concludes, "But why is this so painful? Why does our human obscenity make us feel such shame?" While Schopenhauer looks to original sin to explain and excuse the so-called "obscenity" of human existence, however, for Grossman, the question is rhetorical; "good" and "bad," though they exist for him, are reduced to a neutrality of balance that characterizes the entirety of an individual human being's existence. It would be going too far to suggest that "good" and "evil" are qualitatively tantamount in his schema, but they are,

[27] I will not attempt to determine whether Grossman's view and how he worked with it was consciously considered or otherwise beyond reiterating that he himself states, in his letter to Nikita Khrushchev, that he wrote *Life and Fate* out of "love for people," not love for their qualities, their moral conduct, etc. (*Бит-Юнан and Фельдман, Василий Гроссман: литературная биография в иторико-политическом контексте* 112).

paradoxically, of equal value insofar as they are both human. The binary of righteous Good Will and its opposite(s) thus breaks down under Grossman's valuing the wholeness of a person by virtue of its being just that.

1.4 Parting Ways with Kant

The parting of ways between the Kantian tradition and Grossman's position applies likewise to the directionality from which morality proceeds according to each. Whereas, Kant asserts that

> [j]ust as pure mathematics are distinguished from applied, pure logic from applied, so if we choose we may also distinguish pure philosophy of morals (metaphysic) from applied (viz. applied to human nature). By this designation we are also at once reminded that moral principles are not based on properties of human nature, but must subsist *a priori* of themselves, while from such principles practical rules must be capable of being deduced for every rational nature, and accordingly for that of man [,]. (*Kant: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals by Immanuel Kant* 24)

Grossman's unwavering insistence on the *a priori* position of the individual necessarily reverses the directionality of the former's proposition. In fact, abstraction away from what is inherent in the nature simply of being a person is consistently suspect throughout all of Grossman's major works. As he considers, through the voice of Viktor Shtrum in his final appearance in *Life and Fate*, "Everything is insignificant compared to the truth and purity of one small man—even the kingdom stretching from the Pacific Ocean to the Black Sea, even science" (1489). That which is rarefied and may be codified is precisely that which threatens to undermine that which is human in an individual and, therefore, the individual himself. Just as Kant relates mathematical precision to moral development, so too does Grossman, arriving, however, at a different valuation: "The century of Einstein and Planck was also the century of Hitler. The Gestapo and the scientific renaissance were children of the same age" (812). For Grossman, anything that

hints of an ideological imperative—let alone insists upon it—must necessarily be rejected as limiting the natural infinity of the individual.[28]

What does it signify that Grossman veers off one of what are arguably the two fundamental paths of Western moral thinking?[29] His work is not thereby deprived of a moral telos. By embracing the entirety of human possibility, the scope of that which may be aimed for is expanded—if also correspondingly complicated. In opposition to this is the rejection of alternatives to the full realization of the human individual. This schema grafts neatly onto the title of Grossman's most significant work, *Life and Fate*, structuring from the outset the way the reader ought to make his way through it. Though the conjunction "and" joins the two halves of the title *Life and Fate*, it functions as a marker of contrast between the two. On the right side is that which is predetermined, outside the purview of meaningful human engagement; it is consequently bounded and insipid when not lethal. However, what is on the left—Life—is unbounded by a moral program that aligns with any standard schools of ethical thought. By rejecting a particular philosophical road, Grossman opens up an almost dizzying field of possible movement for that about which he is primarily concerned—human beings. It is to this movement that we now turn.

As previously stated, for Grossman, each human being is that which is most valuable. As each person is possessed of the basic "human" spark, there can be no degrees of humanness. Once we have established this, what else can we say about the infinitely precious construct that

[28] For a formulation of this thought in the author's own words: "Freedom is not, as Engels claimed, 'the recognition of necessity.' Freedom is the direct opposite of necessity; freedom is necessity overcome" (*Everything Flows* 179).
[29] The other being Utilitarianism, which is, of course, completely foreign to his views and beliefs.

is at the center of Grossman's ethics? In fact, it turns out that we can say very little; the essence of the unassuming "human being"[30] turns out to be provocatively elusive in Grossman's world.

In "The Sistine Madonna," Grossman begins to focus in earnest on the idea of "the human in man" («человеческое[31] в человеке[32]»), a phrase that itself evolves through the course of his mature works. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the essay is a kind of moral ekphrasis of its eponymous painting; that is to say, it may follow naturally that Grossman homes in on his formulation of "the human in man," which renders all human beings paramount, within the context of considering a visual image. The writer constructs a narrative in which "[t]hat which is human in man meets its fate, and for every epoch this fate is distinct;" the painting itself, however, simply is (1) It wordlessly asserts something pure, a young Madonna whose "body and face […] are her soul," and in which representation lies "something inaccessible to human consciousness" (1). Thus, it is in the Sistine Madonna's mute assertion of the human essence that captivated Grossman that he seizes on the root that grounds his whole orientation. What had previously been rather nebulous or only tangentially mentioned crystallizes into the central "human" value; it does so, somewhat ironically, around a wordless visual, something so nebulous that it is "inaccessible to human consciousness."

[30] The word "soul" may be a more readily meaningful choice to describe this concept and is one that Grossman himself uses from time to time. As he overwhelmingly formulates his thinking in terms of the individual person («человек»), however, and because "soul" carries certain connotations that are absent in Grossman's thinking, I have chosen to use the less typical but more apt "human."
[31] It is significant that the word is the morally neutral «человеческое» rather than «человечность». Whereas the latter implies a moral system in which there is a standard of goodness upheld as an ideal, the word Grossman chooses indicates simple human existence as itself the good. This is an important distinction. A typical reading of Grossman grounds his ethical position in the fundamental goodness of people. Though it is clearly true that kindness and human goodness were of great importance to Grossman, his choice of «человеческое» in what is one of his central concepts attests to an ethics not of human goodness but, rather of the human being *as* goodness. This interpretation is supported by Grossman's later focus on more general [human] "life."
[32] The translation of this phrase in English is difficult. Because it is the least clunky option, as well as the one that maps onto the original most elegantly, I have gone with "the human in man." Here "man" should be understood as each individual person rather than as an abstract concept; however, as always, Grossman is interested in the aggregate only insofar as it is comprised of individual persons. In this sense, it may be more appropriate to translate the phrase as "the human in a person."

That the absence in writing of what is essentially "human" is neither a matter of Grossman's carelessness nor inadequacy as a writer, but is instead substantive emptiness, a positive blank, showing itself with ingenious structural elegance in the conclusion to *Life and Fate*. The novel ends with two characters—unknown to the reader until the last, incongruous chapter—pausing in their silent walk through the woods, standing together in silence. It is impossible to render «молчали», the word that concludes the entire epic, in English.[33] In Russian, the verb is active, signifying an assertion of silence. It is not at all the same as the quiet stillness that is characteristic of capitulation and death, as expressed in Anna Sergeyevna's account of the Ukrainian famine in *Everything Flows*:

> And a day comes when a hungry man crawls back into his hut. This means that hunger has won. The man is not afraid; he lies down on his bed and stays there. And once hunger has won, you can't raise him again, and not just because he doesn't have the strength but because he doesn't care; he no longer wants to go on living. He just lies there quietly and wants only to be left alone. (24)

In harmony with the forest's own silence in which the couple stands and in which "you could hear both a cry for the dead and the furious joy of life…" this final «молчали» is vital and vigorous (*Жизнь и Судьба* 1516). It is the characters' pure engagement with their lives—past, present, and future—on the cusp of some generic world-in-general's conscious awakening when, "soon the doors and shutters [will] be flung open, the empty house [will] be filled with children's laughter and wailing, with the hasty steps of a dear woman, and the sure tread of the master of the house" (1516). It can be no coincidence that the author chooses these two virtual unknowns to make this mute declaration of purely being; unfettered by biographies and fleshed out narratives, they may simply exist as two humans for the reader.

[33] Robert Chandler, translator of the English edition of *Жизнь и судьба*, translates the final sentence «Они стояли, держа кошелки для хлеба, и *молчали* [emphasis added]» as: "They stood there, holding their bags, *in silence* [emphasis added]" (*Life and Fate* 871).

This last verb, «молчали», parallels the active nature of the absence of writing beyond it. The novel does not so much conclude as it simply breaks off into wordlessness. Arguably, the text—what we might analogize as the skeleton—ends here, whereas the meat, the ineffable human stuff the words of the novel have merely attempted to structure, continues on all around it. We note the perfect accord between the structure (and conspicuous elimination thereof) and the content (ditto) here; how the one informs the other. This realization of meaning through form is at the base of Grossman's ethics.

Indeed, at crucial moments throughout *Life and Fate*, the author makes plain that words are unnecessary or even impossible for true understanding. This is as true for the romantic love Novikov feels toward Evgenia and that Viktor and Marya Ivanovna share for each other as it is for the maternal love Sofia Levinton feels for David; it holds true for the real meaning behind what is spoken in social situations, as in the entire scene in which Getmanov spends an evening with friends and family in Ufa before setting out for the war; it applies, too, in the case of betrayal and loss, as when Viktor realizes that a wordless exchange with his wife has laid bare her acknowledgement of his love for her friend and his own confirmation of it; it is the case for traumatic experiences, as when the soldiers in House 6/1, having witnessed Germans' burning gypsies to death, cannot discuss it precisely because it is so significant.[34] In one particularly neat example that considers the elusiveness of the "human" in a meta way, Alexandra Vladimirovna receives three letters—one from each of her daughters and one from her granddaughter. Each relation speaks of practical matters and the trivia of their lives, while sharing very little of substance. Reading between the lines, Alexandra Vladimirovna arrives at the certainty that each

[34] This inability to put into words the most profound human experiences is highlighted nicely by contrasting the soldiers' reticence about this witnessed atrocity with, in the same scene, their eagerness to engage in a long and detailed discussion about the physical appearance of Katya, the young radio operator who has recently arrived. The conversation is superficial; it focuses on the finite, crude details of her body parts and characteristics.

one of them is suffering by what is omitted from their writing; it is not in what they share that the truth of their present lives is understood, but, rather in what is covered over in silence. Each of these examples highlights the impossibility of grasping a particular experience that is fundamental to what makes people human.

In a more general sense, Grossman conveys the impossibility of pinning down what is human through his characteristic use of ellipses. Employed for a variety of purposes, particularly in *Life and Fate*, ellipses are frequently inserted at moments of particularly heightened perception, moral struggle, and emotion. Here we enter into the relationship between the unknowable and the infinite. In the nebulous realms of unmitigated experience beyond language exists the potential for infinite nuance of perception and feeling. Ellipses, as is true also of other kinds of break offs in the text such as the one that ends the entire text of *Life and Fate*, serve as points of departure into the infinite. If the reader cannot read what is human, he can be conducted into his own lived experience of it via elliptical suggestion. Once again, we are aware of the close relationship between content and form.

1.5 The Concept of Infinity in the Human

This conception of infinity in the "human" dates from at least "The Sistine Madonna" and becomes more of a focal point in the course of Grossman's mature period as a writer. In conjunction with this is the evolution of the concept of "the human in man" into a more abstract focus on "life." Grossman works with several recurring phrases—variations on "life[35] is freedom" and "freedom is life," for example—that largely just lead us in frequently tautological

[35] Grossman's use of the word "life" («жизнь») can be tricky. Though primarily focused on human life, he positions it as the vanguard of ever evolving life more generally. Thus, when we encounter "life" in his assorted aphorisms, in many cases a simultaneous dual reading is appropriate; very often the meaning implied is both specifically human life and simultaneously the phenomenon of living evolution (i.e., the symbiosis of increasing complexity and freedom), of which human beings are the most advanced example.

circles. This is not freedom of the sort Ivan Grigoryevich discusses with his landlady and eventual lover in *Everything Flows*, however progressively inclusive his notion of it is. He reasons:

> I used to think that freedom meant freedom of speech, of the press, of conscience. But freedom is the entire lives of all of the people, meaning: You have the right to sow what you want, make boots or a coat, to bake bread from the grain you've sown and to sell it or not sell it as you choose. And whether you're a locksmith or a steelworker or an artist—live, work as you like and not as is dictated to you. (15)

It is not that Grossman considers these types of freedom trivial; indeed, he strongly advocates for them in almost all of his important work. They are, however, secondary to the fundamental freedom that grounded everything for him, that is, the freedom that is the state of being a person pure and simple.

If the most important value for Grossman is the Human Being, and if the nature of what this is—essentially inaccessible to conscious apprehension or expression—as expressed through his stance of active silence in referring to it, how are we to proceed in understanding him as a writer and a thinker? Indeed, what is there for him to write about if that which is most important to him is, according to his view, ineffable? This project argues that Grossman's work is an elaborated, complex form of periphrastic expression and it will demonstrate the writer's *enactment* of content (that is, the elaboration of what is the explicitly inexpressible root of human life) *through* the form itself. We will see that the value of the human being is demonstrated in action rather than description at the base of Grossman's mature writing, and that the movement (verb) of form is at the crux of what (noun) he aims to promote.[36]

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[36] In "The Sistine Madonna," Grossman notes that while "as yet we are unable to conceive of […] the materialization of energy [… In Raphael's painting] a spiritual force—motherhood—has been crystallized, turned into a meek Madonna" (1). His conception of the process that Raphael has rendered visually parallels what he aims to do verbally.

Before proceeding in that venture, however, it is necessary first to elaborate on what the nature of Grossman's form and periphrasis are not. Regarding the former, his is not the "*form [that] creates for itself its own content*" [emphasis in original] («форма создает для себя содержание») of Viktor Shklovsky (24). While it is true that for Grossman, as for Shklovsky, "*[a]rt is a means of experiencing the process of creation*," [emphasis in original] («искусство есть способ пережить деланье вещи»), the second part of the statement, that "*the artistic creation itself is unimportant*," [emphasis in original] («сделанное в искусстве не важно») does not hold true for him (6). In Grossman's work, the creation is important precisely because it is an expression of creativity. Whereas for Shklovsky, the experience of process is valuable insofar as it sharpens the reader's attention and, in conjunction with this, heightens his feelings of "estrangement" toward the content represented (whatever it may be), for Grossman, the process is itself demonstrative; it does not serve a function ulterior to self-revelation. We note the difference between the "estrangement" so central to Shklovsky and the emphasis on revelation in Grossman: While the former seeks to complicate, the latter wants to elucidate. If for Shklovsky the principle value lies in the technique, for Grossman, the subject of the human being remains paramount, with technique working in its service.

The desire to demonstrate rather than "estrange" then, suggests a will to make plain what he is trying to express—that is, the nature of being human. That he wants to express himself clearly and yet employs a circumlocutionary approach suggests two possibilities. For one, we may be led to assume that Grossman is simply an incapable writer; try though he might, he cannot express what ought to be capable of being captured in words. As we have seen, however, he believes that one of the inherent characteristics of the human is its elusiveness to verbal expression. His periphrasis is not, then, a kind of aphasia; he does not stab about ineffectually

with words in an attempt to pinpoint his meaning. On the contrary, knowing the futility of that goal-oriented exercise, Grossman's approach approaches without reaching as an end in itself.

A second possibility concerns a kind of religious periphrasis in the tradition of the Jewish imperative against saying the "God" explicitly. In his study on the *Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature*, J. Abelson discusses the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of God in the Old Testament, with the former being most prominent for its writers. There may be something of a parallel to this conception in Grossman. Present and literally embodied (as everyone living can attest) while simultaneously inaccessible to the conscious, linguistically representational mind, the human "soul," "spirit," "essence," etc.[37] exists on several metaphysical planes at once. This view certainly elevates Grossman's conception of the human being far above the already lofty position we have seen it occupy. Though it may be useful to note the potential parallel between the two discourses for the additional honor accorded to Grossman's subject by association with none other than God, I suggest that it is not in the interest of understanding the writer's project to take the relationship too far. As we have seen above, Grossman accords a special place to the human being, however advanced he becomes, precisely because he is not the perfection that must be God. Grossman's periphrasis is the joyous imperfection of endless movement His writing is itself his testament to his ethical embrace of the pure nature of the individual human being.

[37] That there are so many abstract words to try to capture this concept attests to its slippery nature.

Chapter Two: Grossman's Use of Lenses as a Means of Generating Ethically Significant Movement

2.1 Zooming In and Out: The Micro and the Macro as Narrative Vehicles

As we read *Life and Fate*, one broad pattern of motion that emerges is that of ceaseless zooming in and out with regard to scope and scale throughout the narrative. The ways in which Grossman accomplishes this are varied, including not only greater or lesser attention to the content with which he is dealing but also shifts in genre (e.g., from fiction to historical or philosophical prose), greater or lesser degrees of narrative omniscience, and the significant use of such devices as metonym (most notably in the case of Stalingrad's representing the entire war). Moreover, as S. I. Sukhikh observes, the scale Grossman employs for one structure within his text may be at variance with that he makes use of for another. This is most prominently seen in the juxtaposition of his vast spatial scope—stretching from "the Stalinist Gulag" to "Hitler's extermination camps" and back again to "wartime Moscow"—with his focus on a small time frame, such that "all the events of [*Life and Fate*] are collected, concentrated in a few months—the time of the defense of Stalingrad. Everything is pulled to this center" (Sukhikh 338).

A number of the broad thematic guises in which these shifts occur across the novel concern the ethical stratum that is informed by the Kantian tradition. Likely the most immediately apparent example of this kind of movement from the large to the small and vice versa appears in the basic tension between the broad historical level of consideration and the personal. This kind of zooming in and out between the spheres is most fully realized in *Everything Flows*, in which it constitutes the major structural device of the novel and results in a near collapse of the distinctions between the two; in *Life and Fate*, too, it plays a meaningful

role. Grossman is not, of course, the first to posit the two spheres in relation to one another. Tolstoy, one of the two writers with whom Grossman is most directly engaged in *Life and Fate,*[38] famously employs roughly the same technique in *War and Peace*, and he, too, does so as part of the illustration of his philosophical position.[39] Because the basic structure of contraction and dilation between the historical and personal that characterizes Grossman's *Life and Fate* so closely aligns with that of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, it is easy to fall into the trap of reading the technique in the former through the lens that informed the latter's use of it. Tolstoy, by his own account, wrote his novel in the spirit of objective historical inquiry. His approach, while distinct, stems from the model of the historical novel as developed by Sir Walter Scott, the first Western writer to formulate fictional writing in such terms. This tradition, which is based on a back and forth between known historical events and figures and fictional characters who interact with them does indeed find resonance in Grossman. For one, Grossman, as Scott, constructs characters whose "task [it is] to bring the extremes whose struggle fills the novel, whose clash expresses artistically a great crisis in society, into contact with one another" (Lukacs 36). In so doing, he is able to raise moral questions and debates, more about which will be discussed below.

Whether Grossman can be considered a writer of "historical fiction" at all, however, is problematized when we consider the temporal proximity of the events about which he writes to that of his writing itself. Without doubt, Grossman understood that the war years—years in which he himself had been an active participant and observer—had made a mark of deep cultural and historical significance. They were not, however, "historical" in the way that those periods

[38] The other being Chekhov.
[39] For a compelling analysis of this aspect of *War and Peace*, see Andrew D. Kaufman's essay "Microcosm and Macrocosm in War and Peace: The Interrelationship of Poetics and Metaphysics."

referenced in, say, *War and Peace* or the Waverley novels were; that is, they constituted a period that was nearly simultaneous with the time in which they were portrayed by Grossman, the difference between 1945 (as the date marking the end of the war) and some point in the 1950s (marking the time Grossman began working on the novel). In consequence, Grossman negates the possibility of his work's following the standard course of the historical novel, which takes the opportunity afforded by a position of historical remove to view history as a process (and, by implication, the subject of progress). In other words, even the basic possibility of a teleological reading on the basis of the historical novel model is curtailed by Grossman's subject matter. In fact, the Hegelian model on which the historical novel was traditionally predicated is anathema to Grossman's philosophy. Whereas

> Hegel […] sees a process in history, a process propelled, on the one hand, by inner motive forces of history and which, on the other hand, extends its influence to all the phenomena of human life, including thought; [whereas] [h]e sees the total life of humanity as a great historical process for Grossman, something fundamental about the individual human being remains independent of history—or, perhaps paradoxically—any kind of philosophical treatment.[40] (de Groot 25)

Expressing himself through the voice of Sokolov's brother-in-law Madyarov, who holds forth at one of the informal salons Viktor attends while evacuated to Kazan, he says as much:

> After all our Russian humanity has always been sectarian, intolerant, and cruel. From Avvakum to Lenin our humanity and freedom has always been partisan, fanatical, and has ruthlessly sacrificed the individual to an abstract idea of humanity. Even Tolstoy, with his preaching non-resistance to evil, is intolerant—and this is important—he proceeds not from man but from God. […] Chekhov said: let God step aside; let all these so-called great progressive ideas stand aside, and let's begin with man. Let's be kind and attentive to the individual, whoever he might be—a bishop, a peasant, an industrial magnate, a convict in the Sakhalin Islands or a waiter in a restaurant. Let's begin such that we respect, pity, and love the individual or we'll never get anywhere. (*Жизнь и судьба* 983)

[40] In fact, it is plausible that one chief reason Grossman chose the backdrop that he did for his narrative was to demonstrate the triumph of the individual even amidst the greatest historical cataclysms.

If history, then, is a telos/ideology, Grossman is interested in its opposite, namely the freedom of one person's life itself. By playing with and defying generic conventions, Grossman thus orients his reader to his focal point.

There are other kinds of regular dilations and contractions that pulsate throughout *Life and Fate*. Among these are the regular movement between the individual in everyman and the everyman that exists in each person[41] —from a pole of receptivity to one of circumscription in the human psyche[42] and from a broadening to a diminishing—and vice versa—of moral scope, whether of a particular character or in general. For the reader to engage with the novel's content in these ways, using the motion of broadening and constricting as a kind of guide, is not a trivial matter for Grossman. Indeed, the frequent tension and even anxiety that pervade the work attest to the writer's own investment in the subjects he's addressing; they are not mere placeholders for a formal exercise or idle concerns with which to populate his characters' lives and minds. They are also, we note, unresolved beyond asserting more or less explicitly the supreme value of the free individual person. This lack of resolution may serve as a clue as to the deeper significance of the kind of movement described above, one which, as we shall discover, constitutes a philosophical end in its own right.

Because, as Hayden White reminds us, "Common opinion has it that the plot of a narrative imposes a meaning on the events that make up its story level by revealing at the end a structure that was immanent in the events all along" (20), it stands to reason that examining the end of *Life and Fate* may be useful toward the goal of better understanding the deep structures of thought that form it. This may be true all the more so given the notable length of the novel: is it not the case that the end of a particularly long narrative is all the more instructive for its

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[41] See, e.g., *Life and Fate*, p. 47-8; 91-2; and 152-4.
[42] See, e.g., *Life and Fate*, p. 255; 270; 330; 521; and 814.

appearing finally where at so many possible points previous in the text it had not? In order to provide a point of comparison to help us appreciate whether the overarching tendency of the novel is toward a contraction or a dilation, let us look also at each novel's beginning. Several paragraphs from each should suffice. *Life and Fate* begins:

> Fog hung over the ground. On high-voltage cables stretching along the highway shone the glare of headlights.
>
> It hadn't rained, but the ground became damp at dawn and, when the stop light flashed, a blurred red spot appeared on the wet asphalt. The breath of the camp was felt for many kilometers—cables, highways, and railway tracks all gathered and stretched toward it. This was a space full of straight lines, a space of rectangles and parallelograms cutting the earth, the autumn sky, and the fog.
>
> Distant camp sirens gave faint, long-drawn-out wails.
>
> The road drew alongside the train tracks, and a column of trucks loaded with paper bags of cement went for a time at the same speed as an endless freight train. The truck-drivers in their military overcoats did not glance at the wagons traveling alongside them, at the pale spots of human faces inside them.
>
> The camp fence appeared out of the mist—rows of wire stretched between reinforced concrete posts. The barracks stretched out, forming broad, straight streets. Their uniformity expressed the inhuman character of the enormous camp. (743)

The novel's ending, already discussed at some length in a previous chapter, is:

> They walked as before in silence. They were together—and because of that everything around them was good. And spring arrived.
>
> Without consideration, they came to a stop. Two fat bullfinches were sitting on the branch of a spruce tree. Their thick red breasts seemed like flowers that had blossomed on enchanted snow. The silence at this hour was very strange and marvelous.
>
> This silence contained the memory of last year's leaves and noisy rains, of abandoned nests, of childhood, of the joyless works of ants, of the treachery and robbery of foxes and kites, of the world war of all against all, of evil and good born together in one heart and dying with this heart, of storms and thunder that made the souls of hares and the trunks of pine trees tremble. In the cool half-twilight, under the snow a departed life slept—the joy of a lovers' meeting, the hesitant chatter of April birds, the first meeting with a stranger who then became a close neighbor.
>
> The strong and the weak were asleep, the brave and the timid, the happy and the unhappy. In an empty and abandoned house there was a final farewell to the dead who had now left it forever.
>
> But in this cold forest spring felt more intense than on the lit, sunny plain. And there was a greater sadness in this woodland silence than in the silence of

> autumn. In it you could hear both a cry for the dead and the furious joy of life…
> It was still dark and cold, but soon the doors and shutters would be flung open, the empty house would be filled with children's laughter and wailing, with the hasty steps of a dear woman, and the sure tread of the master of the house.
> They stood there, holding their bread bags, and were silent. (1515-16)

The opening of *Life and Fate* is all but devoid of a human presence. The first people who can perhaps be described as "characters," are anonymous beyond their designation as "truck-drivers;" the "pale blurred faces" in the wagons are even more marginalized and anonymous by being snubbed by these very drivers. The subjects in this introduction to the novel are inanimate objects: roads, railway tracks, cables, the camp itself; the "howling" is done not—as one might expect—by the human beings crammed into train cars, but, rather by sirens. In case the emphasis is not sufficiently clear to the reader, Grossman underscores it by noting the scene's "inhumanity" («бесчеловечность»).[43] Whether the infrastructure that is the focus of the novel's opening constitutes a broad scope or a narrow one, however, requires a point of comparison to determine.

Now, in order to make this comparison, let us turn to the novel's end. In the final scene of Grossman's masterpiece, the reader meets with points of reference that are completely foreign to those in the opening scene of the same work.[44] "They," the two unidentified persons who are the

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[43] We note the double significance of this word choice, one that links conceptually two distinct phenomena in a way that is crucial to the novel: The camp and its environs are "inhuman" in the simple sense that they do not possess human qualities (i.e., they are too uniform). Not simply in addition to this, but indeed *because* of this kind of "inhumanity," the inhumanity associated with moral transgressions also obtains. Independent of the specific nature of these violations and misdeeds, the fundamental uniformity of them itself renders them inhuman.

[44] If there is any common thread between the two, the most likely candidate is in the general guise of nature and its phenomena. The imagery is, however, used to different effect in each scene. While the novel's first grammatical subject is "fog," electric light *reflects off* it in its second sentence. Paired with this is the book's second image of more electrical lights reflecting on the asphalt made wet with dew. Nature here is not an agent; rather, it is imposed upon by mechanical processes. Conversely, at the end of *Life and Fate*, the natural world exists easily and even symbiotically with human beings, as reflected at the formal level in which the text bleeds seamlessly between a "past [that contained] the joy of lovers' meetings, the hesitant chatter of April's birds, people's first meetings with neighbors who had seemed strange at first and then become a part of their lives." We note, however, the symmetry between the inanimate nature of damp and mist and the lights that reflect off them, the network of roads and barracks they engulf versus the "furious joy" that characterizes the active quality of living being in nature, of which the two human figures are themselves a part. In other words, imagery drawn generally from nature in both scenes is

final subjects of the novel, are not anonymous in the same way the truck drivers and doomed train passengers are at the beginning; though no one is named at either of the text's poles, this omission signifies something different in each place. Whereas the figures in the novel's opening scene serve as placeholders of sorts for a particular mechanism of the infrastructure that overwhelms them, those at its end represent the individual human being in its most basic sense—simultaneously discrete and universal.[45] A cursory treatment would seem to suggest, then, that Grossman aims for the effect of a broad, impersonal perspective narrowed down to one that is microscopic, individual[46] at his novel's end. In one sense, this view accords with Grossman's emphasis on the supremacy of the individual human being: given that such is the case, it seems appropriate that he might zero in on his chief concern, separating the wheat from the chaff, as it were, in the course of his writing, until only the central concern remains in its purest state. While not an incorrect reading, this assessment operates only on the superficial level, on the same that accords with the Kantian reading of Grossman discussed in a previous chapter.

2.2 The Significance of the Title

In fact, *Life and Fate* concludes with a philosophical position that is broad enough to envelop all that precedes it within it, albeit in a less than obvious way. That the novel makes significant use of changes in the breadth of its respective narrative lens not only to stylistic effect, but—far more important—to perform some of the philosophical work it is trying to bring to light should hardly be surprising even to those who have not read a page of it. The title itself tips the would-be reader off to this dynamic within the pages of each text. What are we to make

used primarily to offer stylistic support to the broad and diametrically opposed qualities of each rather than to unify the two.

[45] This general kind of dual designation of a possibly paradoxical nature will be explored at length elsewhere as it represents one of the most significant features of Grossman's ethics of movement.

[46] Again, with many oscillations in scope throughout the pages in between.

of the two main title words in Grossman's masterpiece as clues regarding directionality of scope and authorial inclination? A close reading reveals that the opening scene aligns approximately with the second principle word in the title *Life and Fate* and moreover helps clarify what the concept "fate" meant to Grossman. He expresses the meaning of "fate" in its most banal sense through the narrative itself. In the opening paragraphs cited above, the scope and degree of inhumanity that pervades the environment speak to a world beyond the power of man to influence. People being driven inexorably and against their will toward a point not of their choosing is as manifestly rooted in the concept of fate as one could hope for an example of its essence. Thus, fate is linked conceptually through the narrative with the «бесчеловечность» (in both its senses) that is the scene's signal quality.

Moreover, the basic lack of volition of the people on the train is compounded by their literal enclosure in cattle cars, by their elimination of space. This narrative immobilization is mirrored in the broader structure of the text itself. Immediately following these first few paragraphs, Grossman writes:

> Among a million Russian village huts there are not and never could be even two that are exactly the same. Everything alive is unique. It is unimaginable that the identity of two people, or two rose bushes, should be identical…Life stalls where violence strives to erase its singularity and unique qualities. (743)

In fact, it is not what he has written, but rather what he has not written that is telling. Having described the uniform infrastructure of a concentration camp, having followed this up even with a counterpoint stating the uniqueness of living beings and those things that are a product of their living effort, Grossman finds that nowhere remains for that trajectory of text to explore. A concentration camp itself (to say nothing of its inhabitants and the goings-on between them) is, as Grossman points out, boring by its inert, uniform nature; even a *description* of its alternative—life—proves ultimately to be a dead end.

Thus, the strictures on choice and removal from the equation of the human that constitute fate represent for Grossman a hard stop in the possibilities of expression or meaning. Once he has established what fate signifies to him, i.e., inhumanity, there is nothing left for him to do with it by virtue of its remove from that which is human.[47] Note that this is not a choice for Grossman, but, rather, according to his philosophical view, a necessary conclusion. Now, then, we have a linkage not only between fate and inhumanity on one level, but also between it and stasis, calcification. Unable to do more with fate than what he already has, Grossman reflects on the possibilities contained in the specificity of living structures and beings, concluding that without the uniqueness he outlines, "life itself must suffocate." Here he begins to establish the link between "life" and movement: while addressing the topic of life within the narrative, its meaning as a state of motion is reflected the writing itself by allowing said writing to continue on. As if to underscore this connection, Grossman brings his position to a head with the remaining paragraphs of the first chapter of *Life and Fate*:

> The attentive yet careless gaze of the grey-haired driver followed the flickering of concrete columns, high masts with rotating searchlights, and concrete towers, where within a glass lantern a guard could be seen at a mounted machine gun. The driver winked at his assistant and the locomotive gave a warning signal. An electricity-filled cabin flickered past, then a line of cars beside a striped level-crossing barrier and the red bull's eye of a traffic light.
>
> From the distance the beeping of an approaching train were heard. The driver said to his assistant, 'Zucker's coming. I recognize him by the whistle. He's unloaded and now he's taking the empty wagons back to Munich.'
>
> The empty train roared as it met the train going to the camp. The torn air crackled, grey gaps flashed past between the wagons—and suddenly the torn space and the morning light of autumn came together again from the torn flaps into a smooth canvas.
>
> The assistant driver, taking out his pocket-mirror, looked at his smudged cheek. With a motion of his hand, the driver asked if he could borrow it himself.

[47] It is not that Grossman chooses to avoid further reflection on the subject of concentration and/or extermination camps that he has begun to touch on in his first few paragraphs. Indeed, many of the most significant and most memorable scenes in *Life and Fate* take place in one of these circumstances. It seems likely that this may be so in part because of the high tension between the "fate"/expressionless scene itself and the author's insistent imposition of "life"/expression on this most resistant of contexts.

> ‘Honestly, comrade Apfel,’ the assistant said excitedly, ‘we could be back home in time for dinner and not at 4 o’clock in the morning after having used up all our energy if it wasn’t for this disinfecting the wagons. And it’s not like they couldn’t be disinfected back at the junction!’
>
> The old driver was tired of this endless conversation about disinfection. ‘Give a good long toot,’ he said. ‘We’re being put straight through to the main unloading area. (743-44)

Rather than attempt disingenuously to cherry pick what constitutes (legitimate) “life”—and, therefore, spontaneous, unique expression—Grossman asserts it *per se* as a condition of it having any meaning in his rounding out of the first chapter of his masterpiece. In this, he shows significant philosophical maturation from his thinking as displayed in “The Hell of Treblinka.” Rather than delve into the camp life that will shortly become the focus of his narrative, Grossman accords the first opportunity to demonstrate his principle of life as specific and as movement *to two Nazis.*[48] They are not important to the work as characters; in fact, aside from the material quoted above, they do not appear in *Life and Fate*. The reason they are significant is that they capture the essence of Grossman’s philosophy. As stated above, one prong of this concerns the inclusivity of the value of individual human life—to allow two Nazis the first meaningful personhood in *Life and Fate* indicates as much. The other prong concerns the movement that is inherent in life and, as a parallel, in a text. These men are not engaged in anything apparently remarkable at the moment captured in the narrative: one acknowledges the characteristic sounds of his colleague; the other gives voice to the universally shared experience of wishing to expedite work in order to return to one’s private life and leisure time. Even the most mundane glimpses are enough to catch into an exchange with human interest. Essentially, two characters who—by almost any accounting—must necessarily be Grossman’s adversaries,

[48] Or, at any rate, two persons enlisted by the Nazis, more or less sympathetic to their cause.

have allowed the writer's work to "live" by moving the text forward and capturing the reader's interest.

But it is rather what they are not than what they are that allows them to do this. The reader understands from the context clues that these two men are engaged in the work of transporting people to their doom. All the indications are there, but it is not on this that the writer chooses to focus. In fact, the exchange between the men is so apparently insignificant and their business at the moment, to which the reader is admitted, so banal that it is possible nearly to forget their official capacity. In this brief glimpse, then, Apfel and his unnamed colleague are two human beings, nothing more nor less. They have all but shed their Nazi (i.e., ideological) shells at this moment. In observing this fact, we are moving toward another association in the array of linkages that comprises Grossman's worldview: life and its associated movement are conceived as a kind of nakedness of orientation. By implication, any ideology or "-ism" that one embraces in fact encases him, binding him even to the point of suffocation.[49] Grossman is explicit about this antithesis between systems of thought and the individual farther in the novel, where through the mind of Viktor Shtrum he asserts

> Man and Fascism cannot co-exist. If Fascism conquers, man will cease to exist and there will remain only man-like creatures that have undergone an internal transformation. But if man, man who is endowed with reason and kindness, should conquer, then Fascism must perish, and those who have submitted to it will once again become people.

To the extent an ideology suffocates someone, it eliminates his spontaneity, his potential for movement; in brief, it suffocates his life. While this may not apply in the literal sense, its moral implications are readily apparent. This reading of Grossman is accurate and compelling as far as it goes as a matter of parsing the content of his writing. Grossman goes a step farther,

[49] That this may happen to a text itself is evident in many of Grossman's early pieces, when he was still writing according to the Party line and, as a result, produced thoroughly unmemorable work.

however, and turns the text itself into a moral object. For him, as for most realist writers, the character represents a stand-in for a real person. Insofar as a character exists only to the extent he is written and insofar as anything that circumscribes limits the possibility for expression, the extent to which a character can be written is a moral matter. Grossman's characters occupy a wide range of positions on the spectrum of how ideologically invested they are, and exploring the implications of these and how they may resolve themselves constitutes a large part of his project. Beyond this, however, his project is addressing his own position and how it may resolve itself through the act of writing.

2.3 Movement as Creation

The more movement with which he can endow his creations, the more movement he is creating on the page itself; the more he writes, the more he realizes the possibilities latent in his own infinitude, thereby acting out through art his particular philosophy.

Let us look at a particular example of the ideas at work in *Life and Fate*. A number of narrative threads following the basic model we will examine appear throughout the work. Because it is the most well-developed, and, arguably, the most emotionally significant to the author himself, however, we will consider the narrative arc that unfolds in two parts across roughly 350 pages in the approximate middle of the novel, starting with Chapter 42, Book 1 and concluding with Chapter 51, Book 2. Chapter 42 consists of one page detailing the general military disposition of the German army in the late summer of 1942 and the decree of September 12th of that year that transferred the jurisdiction of European Jews from the ordinary courts to the Gestapo, thereby initiating what became the Holocaust. One page, that is, covers a period of weeks over an entire continent covered by numerous participants in the human drama of the war. That which is most general is highly contracted. From there, Chapter 43 introduces a new

character, Sofya Levinton, locating her, after a brief sketch of who she is, in one of the cattle cars bound for an extermination camp. It is in this cramped space that she meets the young boy David, with whom, as the reader will learn, she will share the final moments of both their lives. The passengers in the cattle car are fleshed out further in Chapters 44 and 46. Chapter 44 introduces us to the accountant Naum Rozenberg, whose one life is afforded about two and a half pages of text, more than twice that allotted to the broad historical swath painted in Chapter 42. A brief profile of Natasha Karasik, who is the subject of Chapter 46, rounds out the zooming in Grossman employs for this portion of the narrative. In the space of two chapters and a matter of a handful of pages, then, we have zoomed in from the global, nearly abstract level, to that of several discrete and individualized characters who are the subjects and therefore victims of the decree dispassionately referenced at the end of Chapter 42. At this point, David returns to the narrative in Chapter 47. In this and the following two chapters, the reader is let into the life David had before finding himself crammed into the hostile space of the cattle car. Time, before the sheer facts of Chapter 42 balloon out, creates space beyond where the general, the factual, the inhuman(e) stop. Chapters 50 and 51 present general reflections before the narrative shifts entirely in Chapter 52 to the thread concerning Novikov and his tank corps. Perhaps, after all, this has been the extent of these characters' storylines; throughout *Life and Fate,* Grossman introduces a character in highly specific and occasionally even exquisite detail only to part ways with them entirely a matter of pages, paragraphs, or even lines later.

In fact, Chapter 44, Book 2 returns us to David and Sofya Levinton as if the intervening several hundred pages had not interrupted them. Just as the narrative expands with the introduction of an elaboration on a particular character and the thread associated with him or her, so too does it simultaneously tighten the seamlessness with which Grossman brings us back to

the Sofya Levinton and David narrative indicates his view of a related whole. Even as new individual universes pop up and proliferate endlessly, so too do they interact in a deeply interrelated web of connections, causes, and effects.[50] When we are reintroduced to the Sofya Levinton/David thread, it is at first on general terms: "It was the last day of the journey. The wagons creaked, the brakes grated, and it became quiet before bolts began to rattle and the order '*Alle heraus*!' was heard" hearkens back, in its ineluctable elimination of human volition or voice, to the novel's beginning. (1216) Rapidly, however, once again asserting the supremacy of even the most disempowered individual, human subjects repopulate the text and propel it forward. "The people emerging from the wagons" rapidly become "an old woman with white hair streaked over her white face, […] a curly-headed man who had gotten down on all fours and was drinking by the handful from a puddle, [and] the hunch-backed woman lifting up her skirt to adjust the torn elastic of her underwear" (1216). With the introduction to Chapter 46, we are squarely back with Sofya and David and the others we have met along the way who have shared their journey.[51] From here, Grossman declares that "Sofya Levinton had no future, only the life she had already lived," and that "[f]or a moment this sense of her particular, distinct, lived life

[50] Occasionally, these connections that are not always readily apparent become explicit;, as, for example, when we learn in an offhanded way that Sofya Levinton was friendly with the Shapashnikov family during peacetime. He is also fond of using narrative and/or ideological parallels between seemingly unrelated—or even apparently opposite—characters. On the narrative model of this device, we find, for example, Sofya Levinton and Jenny Genrikhovna (the Shaposhnikovs' old German nanny); on the ideological model is, for example, the pairing of SS theoretician Liss and Lubyanka inmate Katsenelenbogen. The model of tying people and events together that we are considering here, however, involves Grossman's choice of placement and replacement of his narrative threads. The fact that Novikov's tank corps is introduced without segue or explanation on the heels of the first half of the thread concerning Sofya Levinton and David hints at the author's view that the suffering endured by the latter (and victims of National Socialism in general) is the reason for the commitment and valor of the former (and Russian soldiers in general). This kind of interpolation of seemingly discrepant threads pervades the entire text and allows Grossman to create a coherent structure out of what may otherwise have been overwhelming amount of distinct kinds of material.
[51] Note that for Grossman, even this most unwilled journey and its culmination do not constitute a "fate" in the sense that this word figures into his philosophy. While constituting a horrific experience, they do not negate the individuated personhood of those thrust into them. It is this perseverance of spontaneous life, if experienced only internally, that represents for him a movement incompatible with the experiential paralysis characteristic of "fate" in his thinking.

blotted out the present […]" (1221). He mentions Sofya specifically, but his meaning is more generally applicable to all those waiting to be killed. This assertion, however, belies his belief in the movement of experience that persists so long as one lives, a belief that is reflected in the continuation of the passage to new experiences. As she walks along to the showers, Sofya reflects on a particularly pleasant memory from two years before the war, thinking to herself that no matter how enviable it may have been, "at the same moment, burning her fifty-year-old heart, she felt forcefully that she would give up everything if only in some shabby, dark, low-ceilinged room she could be hugged by the arms of a child" (1223). This wish comes to fruition only now, in the desperate present. So, too, with David. Whereas he has walked along, becoming numb to the world around him, retreating into memories of his mother and the fears that dotted his past, in a sudden, spontaneous gesture, "[n]ot knowing why, he took the little box with the chrysalis [that he had been carrying with him for the entire journey] out of his pocket and, without saying goodbye to it, flung it away. Let it live!" Apparently trapped in a static past and without freedom, David makes the choice in the miserable present to save the one life that can now be preserved. These are moments of grace, pinpoints of triumph in an environment that seems stripped of these possibilities; most important for Grossman, they are evidence of continued human experience even on the threshold of death. This sentiment is reiterated in the changing room, where the full cast of train passengers persist in human responses, showing humor, modesty, fear, resignation, and so forth according to their nature. It is in Chapter 48 that the characters in this narrative thread are killed. They enter the gas chamber in a chaotic press until they are packed in so they can no longer move. Grossman has constricted his narrative to its limit in multiple senses. He has, literally, limited space as much as possible. Ostensibly, he has also constricted time, as he insists once again that there is no future for these people. Several paragraphs later, however, even

as the gas has begun to flow and snuff out life, the narrator insists that "[David] still needed his voice […] He still needed his thought. […] This world, where a chicken could run without its head, where there were frogs he could get to dance by holding their front feet and there was morning milk—this world continued to preoccupy him" (1231). As long as the human mind experiences, then, time cannot cease (and, by extension, the narrative space devoted to its documentation cannot stop). In these final scenes, David and Sofia Levinton are the two sole remaining perspectives, ending with Sofia's alone. In this sense, too, Grossman has constricted dramatically from the mention of Kleist's Army Group that began this narrative thread to two individuals—and then one individual—life as it is lived in its final moments. Sofya Levinton's final thought: "'I've become a mother.'" As we know from "The Sistine Madonna," this one experience itself constitutes an infinity. But Grossman persists: "But in her heart there was still life: it contracted, ached, and pitied you, living and dead people […]" (1231).

The vitality that is the basis of Grossman's value system transcends the cerebral and, therefore, the logical. Finally, "she became dead, a doll" («стала мертвой, куклой»). The very last experience Grossman depicts is one of becoming. That he begins the next chapter by reflecting on the transition from freedom to slavery that characterizes the moment of death shows us that Grossman is not seeking to romanticize death or dying. Rather, his characterizations underscore the perseverance of the most basic grain that is at the root of human life in the face of all. His approach of paradoxically contracting his subject range and dilating his text speaks to his views on the relative degrees of motion afforded by the broad versus the individual. In parallel with this, the text itself triumphs insofar as it is expanding without end with the movements of life (the characters') and as a movement of life (the author's).

2.4 The Limitlessness of Living Movement

We have seen at work Grossman's philosophy of living movement not only as a subject of content, but also and more fundamentally as an action itself, something that cannot be explicated, as to explicate is to limit. If writing itself is the realization of the philosophy, what are we to make of the end of the novel, when it and its associated movement necessarily ceases? At first glance, it appears that Grossman is employing a kind of microscope to focus intensely on the individual human being that lies at the heart of his philosophy. In fact, it has become clear that he, too, telescopes broadly from beginning to end of his work. From the rigid, impoverished point of stasis that marks the beginning and "fate pole" of *Life and Fate,* he moves out to the infinite potential of the "life pole" that is its end.

As discussed previously, the work does not conclude, properly speaking; instead, it simply asserts a silence that is itself active. In support of this reading, we may consider the one-page Chapter 51, Book One. In fact, a reflection comprising no more than four paragraphs, the chapter is included by Grossman as a stand-alone piece within the broad narrative arc, starting with his statements about the adoption of the policies that would lead directly to the Holocaust and culminating in Sofya Levinton and David's deaths. Extolling the capabilities of machines, Grossman reflects that "[i]t is possible to imagine the machine of future ages and millennia. It will be able to listen to music and appreciate art; it will even paint pictures, compose melodies, and write poems" (919). He then ponders, "Is there a limit to its perfection? Can it be compared to man? Will it surpass him?" His answer is constituted by a series of phrases naming general and apparently unconnected human experiences and flowing together along a chain of ellipses. He concludes, "The machine will be able to recreate *all* of this! But the area of the whole earth will not be enough to accommodate this machine; the machine's dimensions and weight will

continually increase in order to reproduce the peculiarities of mind and soul of an average, obscure human being" (919-20). So, too, do we see this idea mirrored in Chapter 49, Book 2, a chapter marking the final reflection at the end of the narrative arc concerning Sofya Levinton and David and the historical forces that moved them to their deaths. This, too, is a one-page chapter. Here Grossman reflects on what happens when an individual person dies. For him, it constitutes a "cross[ing] over from a world of freedom to the kingdom of slavery" insofar as "[l]ife is freedom" (1232). What is the nature of this freedom? No less than a distinct universe (i.e., infinity) that is the nature of each individual person.

For him, though one person's universe

> is astonishingly similar to the universes still reflecting within millions of heads," what "[makes] this Universe even more astonishing is the fact that this [particular person's] universe had something in it that distinguished the sound of its ocean, the smell of is flowers, the rustle of its leaves, the shades of its granite and the sadness of its autumn fields both from those of every other universe that has ever existed and exists within people, and from that of the universe that exists eternally outside people. In its originality, in its uniqueness one finds the soul of an individual life, its freedom.

Thus, in Chapter 51, Book 1, we see Grossman reflecting on the infinity of quantification; while in Chapter 49, Book 2, he considers the infinity of qualification of the individual human being. In other words, an infinite expansion of moving experience is what is means to be human, whatever the axis being considered. And just as infinity may stretch on in an endless proliferation, it may also be captured by the silence of zero, an apparent emptiness that in fact is no less an infinity than its flipside. If Grossman must conclude his novel, he succeeds in finding a way to do so that does not betray his conviction of ultimate meaning being found in the infinite, free movement of bare human life.

So it is that we discover how Grossman uses different scopes and scales as he moves through his narrative in order not only to reflect on his philosophical position but also to

demonstrate it. What initially appears as an ultimate constriction from the general to the specific individual person is, in fact, an act of progressive dilation. Through the nearly rhythmic exchange of contraction and dilation across a variety of narrative and conceptual planes, Grossman addresses his thematic concerns. Beyond this, even as the content of his written exposition underscores his philosophy, its highest principle—that of individual life realized through endless movement—is in fact enacted through the movement of the text itself. Even in stopping the movement by breaking off the writing, Grossman does so in such a way that movement may be felt beyond its periphery in the infinity of experience that lies beyond accounting.

Chapter Three: Artistic Forms Embody Abstract Ideas and Facilitate Generative Movement

3.1 Sistine Madonna: Experience of the "Sublime"

Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* has been the subject of much thought and ink in Russia no less than elsewhere in Europe. Writing his personal reflections on the work in an essay of 1824, Zhukovsky initiated the trend for his countrymen to make the pilgrimage to see the piece in its Dresden home as well as to record their own impressions. While the line he established became so well-trodden that, "[b]y the 1870s it had become almost customary for Russian travelers to express openly their disappointment in the *Sistine Madonna*," he also popularized what became one dominant mode of considering it (Pearson 368). For him, "[t]his [was] not a picture, but a vision: the longer you look[ed], the more deeply you [became] convinced that something supernatural [was] taking place before you." He declared, "I began to feel distinctly that my soul was spreading out" (349). This would contrast with the subsequent utilitarian (and therefore generally unflattering) lenses applied to the painting by social critics including Chernyshevsky and Belinsky; likewise, would it stand apart from the line of interpretation based on ideals of aesthetics and their moral implications, as found in, for example, Pushkin's thinking on Raphael in general. Zhukovsky's reaction, whether spontaneous or studied, finds echoes close to a century later in Bulgakov's reported response, according to which, "the canvas of the Sistine Madonna caused the convinced Marxist to dissolve in tears and break down in prayer"[52]

[52] Bulgakov's reaction itself resonates with Decembrist Mikhail Sergeevich Lunin's conversion to Roman Catholicism in large part, on his own reporting, on the basis of viewing the *Sistine Madonna*.

(Evtuhov 44). For these viewers, then, the initial viewing marked a change in their internal state or orientation to the world.

Grossman, too, as we shall see, entered into a richer and more mature phase of his philosophical orientation upon his one and only viewing of the *Sistine Madonna*, on May 30, 1955. His was not a conversion experience in anything like the stark example found above in Bulgakov. A nonbeliever, Grossman stated subsequently in his essay "The Sistine Madonna" his belief "that this Madonna is a purely atheistic expression of life, human and without divine participation" (1). He was, however, with many of his co-viewers, also engaging with an experience of the sublime, though what this meant for him bears exploration in order to position the text that sprang from his viewing in its proper context. While participating in a Romantic tradition of subliminal experience that is then translated into reflection, Grossman's relationship with that tradition is not straightforward. We are immediately confronted with the lack of correspondence between the notion of sublimity with regard to reason as outlined by Kant and Grossman's experience in front of the painting. Whereas for the former the central quality (and value) of a sublime experience lies in its inherent engagement with reason, Grossman argues that the power in what he beholds is even "inaccessible to human consciousness" (1). This is not a mystical assertion, as a bit later he grounds the experience firmly in the human emotional realm, claiming that "[t]here is something new, a feeling that has never been experienced before. It is a human feeling, a new feeling [… The painting] gives birth to something new, as if an eighth color previously unknown to the eye has been added to the seven colors of the spectrum that we already know" (1). This qualification, then, while disengaging with the reason of Kant's sublime, links Grossman's conception of it to a key tenet of the phenomenon as conceived by both Burke and Kant—engagement with something beyond the scope of human apprehension. For the

Romantics, this something most often takes the form of vastness and, in particular, infinity—so too for Grossman. For the former, the object sparking a sublime experience is external to the person experiencing it, and here we find a fundamental divergence between them and Grossman. Kant concludes "that true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the [subject] judging, not in the natural Object" (*Critique of Judgment* 19), thereby fundamentally situating—along with Grossman—the experience in the human psyche. For Kant, it is a human judgment upon an absolutely external object that sparks the sublime experience; i.e., the mind's capacity for expanding itself in the sublime state is contingent upon an initial prompt from an external something that is quantitatively or qualitatively expansive. For Grossman, however, the movement toward the infinite that the sublime allows for is a matter not of one variety of vastness inspiring another kind, i.e., an instance of external greatness inspiring expansion of the mind. Rather, he conceives of the cause and the effect as being one in the same: the confrontation of life with its own infinity results in a sublime experience of endlessly expanding recognition. This is possible because of Grossman's developing ideas of an approximate overlap between human life and art. While Grossman does in places refer to Raphael's artwork as a painting, elsewhere he reveals his view of it as a living entity, citing its "immortality" (1), its "inexhaustible life," and so forth. It is this correspondence that allows for the reflexive rather than parallel relationship that structures Grossman's conception of the sublime, which itself, in turn, establishes a mode of endless recursiveness.

In other words, Grossman's experience of the sublime in viewing the Sistine Madonna opens a view for him of a potentially endless feedback loop of self-engagement with the self-infinite. As we will see, this quality of the infinite—both as content and as means—becomes essential to Grossman's mature art. Thus, we find in "The Sistine Madonna" (written the same

year in which he viewed the work) several crucial developments in his thinking leading, in turn, to the period of his maturity as a writer.

3.2 Reconciling the Individual and the Group

"The Sistine Madonna" begins on the same note found in its "sister"[53] essay, "The Hell of Treblinka," written nearly ten years previous in 1944. Beginning with, "[t]he victorious forces of the Soviet Army, having defeated the army of Fascist Germany, took paintings from the Dresden Art Gallery back to Moscow," Grossman gestures to the same kind of propagandistic bombast of the earlier piece and establishes a demarcation of "us" and them," "right" and "wrong" (1). While even in his most polemical piece, "The Hell of Treblinka," he tugs at the limitations of this dualistic approach, summing up in his concluding thoughts that "[t]oday we need to speak about the responsibility of every nation and every citizen of the world toward the future," his thinking to that point is not fully developed enough to resolve the strain it feels on its own limitations (5).

Early on in "The Sistine Madonna," however, we perceive an opening that will complicate—and ultimately liberate—the binary mode on which Grossman's previous writing had progressively uncomfortably hinged. He notes that "twelve generations of people—a fifth of the generations of man who have lived on earth since the beginning of recorded history" have viewed Raphael's painting (1). Here, then, we find a space of inclusivity by way of universal participation in an artistic experience. Whereas previously Grossman has employed his characteristic approach of fleshing out a group by identifying individuals within it by disparate and apparently random characteristics—"[m]illions [of Jewish] workers, artisans, doctors, professors, architects, engineers, teachers, artists, and people of no particular profession, along

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[53] A term used due to Grossman's references in "The Sistine Madonna" to the same subject matter as that found in "The Hell of Treblinka," in addition to direct quotations from the latter in the former

with their families, their wives, daughters, sons, mothers, and fathers" in "The Hell of Treblinka," for example—here he uses the same technique but without the exclusivity or exclusion on the basis of group; these are simply the generations of humanity (1). After enumerating qualities and professions included therein, however, he returns to his bifurcated viewpoint, concluding that "[g]ood and evil people have looked at it" (1). Nevertheless, this thinking has reached a new landing stage, as these "good" and "evil" people are not such on the basis of belonging to a particular group, but, rather, are simply so as individuals.

Several pages later, we find a paired example of apparent slippage that further attests to Grossman's developing thought in "The Sistine Madonna." In the same vein as "The Hell of Treblinka," Grossman denies Hitler the ability to meet the gaze of the Madonna and her son, as "after all, they were people" (2). Just above this, however, he describes "a painter named Adolf Hitler" who "stood before her in the Dresden Art Gallery" (2). Here we find the seed of an idea that finds full expression in *Life and Fate*, where an entire chapter is given to Hitler from his own perspective as an individual person, and in *Everything Flows*, as we see in the allowance of personal perspective and humanity accorded to even the most morally dubious "Judases." Moreover, the hinge between the two irreconcilable sentiments—between Hitler the inhuman murderer of millions and Hitler the private person who participates in the same experience as any one of us in viewing the work of art—becomes clearer. It suggests a further crystallization in Grossman's thinking about the relationship between the freedom of individual Life that became the non plus ultra of his philosophy its opposite, the strictures and calcification of ideologies, which crush spontaneity and dictate Fate. In fact, a close reading reveals the relationship laid out in nascent form that will apply throughout his mature work. "And a painter named Adolf Hitler stood before her in the Dresden Art Gallery; *he was deciding her fate*," (emphasis added) leads

directly into, "But the ruler of Europe could not meet her eyes, nor meet the gaze of her son—after all, they were people." That which is human in Adolf Hitler (we note that here Grossman identifies him simply by his full name) becomes paralyzed by an ideology that strips his free humanity until he is no more than the "ruler of Europe" (2).

This, for Grossman, is—here as a burgeoning concept—the essence of his real concern. As he makes clear, for all their endless pain and suffering, and for whatever imposition of fate a Hitler may inflict on them, the mother and child will be all right; they represent what is fundamentally human, and "[t]he power of life, the power of what is human in man, is very great [;] even the mightiest and most perfect violence cannot enslave this power; it can only kill it" (2). Death for Grossman, then, is becoming a matter of concern not in its literal sense,[54] but rather in its figurative sense, which is to say that mode of thinking that stultifies the free play of human experience and thereby "kills" one though he may continue to live and breathe. Grossman also sets down here an early example of the close relationship he perceives between the ideological strangulation of the individual and the literal death or other suffering this former "death" leads to.

As a companion passage to that touching on Hitler, Grossman later writes, "With his slow soft stride, wearing his low-heeled kid-leather boots, Stalin went up to the painting and, stroking his grey mustache, looked for a long, long time at the faces of mother and son. Did he recognize her? He had met her […] But we, people, recognized her, and recognized her son" […] (2). On the one hand, we read this is as a step back for Grossman toward his "in/out" view of those who may be considered human and those who cannot (as opposed to, as we have seen him explore above, a model that allows for an absolute common humanity that may, in any individual, be

[54] And with this dovetails his relative (though by no means absolute) lack of concern about fate with a small "f."

compromised or even straitened to the point of paralyzing that humanity by dogma and calcification of free movement of experience). His introductory "But" that opposes Stalin's experience of viewing the painting with what "we" see, coupled with the qualification of "we" with "we *people*" (emphasis added), subtly yet unmistakably excludes Stalin from the group that is "us," which is to say "people." Be that as it may, however, Grossman is here developing another strain of his thought that finds full expression in *Life and Fate* and, most especially, in *Everything Flows*.

While he is excluding Stalin from the circle of humanity, he is also beginning to work through ideas that will lead him to an all-inclusive view in all its uncomfortable shadings by the time he gets to his two major novels. To this point, Hitler and Fascism, and its adherents have constituted for Grossman the one evil "other" in opposition to which has stood the righteousness of the Soviet Union. In suddenly categorizing the leader of that righteous entity with those whom he has previously stripped of their right to be called human beings, Grossman breaches a radical boundary that begins to dissolve the distinction between any notion of "good" and "evil" on the basis of category. We find ourselves, once again, focusing more closely and exclusively on the individual human being.

3.3 Communism: An Ideology That Denies Life

Moreover, Grossman is beginning to confront the possibility of moral complexity in the continuity between "good" and "evil," a necessary next step once no one category may stand as the exclusive representative of one or the other. This removal of a moral boundary between entities being attended by a reevaluation of what is good and evil finds its fullest reflection in *Life and Fate*, in the exchange between the old Bolshevik Mostovskoy and SS Obersturmbannfuhrer Liss. While the former remains intractably and rigidly committed to his

conviction of the righteous of Bolshevik thought, the latter nevertheless persists in trying to impress on him the essential sameness of Bolshevik and Fascist ideologies and means. The experience is so taxing on Mostovskoy, in fact, that though he never capitulates, he longs for physical violence instead of the challenge to think in a new way to which he is subjected. But the inability of Mostovskoy—who, in an ironic nod to his name, is unable to "bridge" apparently distinct categories—to reconcile his perspective to nuance, continuity, or overlap, his unremitting insistence that the word "[e]nemy! [is such] a simple and clear word," leads yet more direly to his actual death, beyond which threshold there is no possibility of discarding or amending stultifying views (*Жизнь и судьба* 1084). Falling in with a group of fellow-Communists in his concentration camp who aim to mount an uprising against their captors, Mostovskoy initially uses his own judgement, believing and asserting that a fellow inmate, Yershov, can be trusted as a pivotal and instrumental leader of the group. Another member, Osipov, however, opposes this view, decisively concluding, "'We have one comrade who was sent here by Moscow. I can tell you his name: Kotikov. It's his view of Yershov, not just my own. His guidelines are law for us—communists; they are party orders, orders from Stalin himself in exceptional circumstances'" (1018). This establishes the dogmatic track that Mostovskoy is ideologically obliged to follow; as a result, "Mikhail Mostovskoy began to feel that the unbearable, torturous sense of life's complexity was disappearing. Once again, as in his youth, the world seemed clear and simple, neatly divided into friends and enemies" (1018). While it may be taken as a historical given—and most probably one in the world of the Grossman's novel, as well—that any attempted uprising would in this unnamed camp, as everywhere else, fail in placing his mind completely in the hands of the organization to which he subscribes. Mostovskoy denies himself the possibility of dictating the terms of his own failure, or, in other words, dying with dignity. He

makes himself a pawn rather than a player. He eliminates for himself, furthermore, the possibility of removing himself from a group with which his own views do not correspond, thereby perhaps escaping death. In any case, the entire narrative thread concerning Mostovskoy concludes in the middle of the novel—having been dropped for some time before—with the unsettlingly open-ended epilogue stating:

> Soon after the end of the war a dossier was found in the archives of the Munich Gestapo of investigative case materials on an underground organization in one of the concentration camps of Western Germany. The final document stated that the sentence passed on the members of the organization had been carried out and their executed bodies had been burnt in the crematorium. The first name on the list was Mostovskoy's. (1211)

Mostovskoy's fate, dictated by the Fate he subscribes to, is not the death of an individual man, but, rather the bald recording of a name on an equally ideologically dictated piece of paper.

Abarchuk—Lyudmila's first husband and, by the time the events in *Life and Fate* take place, an inmate in a gulag camp—is a parallel case to Mostovskoy's. A virulent Old Bolshevik, he is so committed to his received philosophy that he denies his son the right to bear his last name on the grounds that the boy's mother cannot be trusted to raise him to be ideologically pure. Having kept quiet on the occasion of a murder in his barracks as behooves his instincts of self-preservation, he longs for his interrogator to persuade him along the lines of: "'Listen, comrade Abarchuk, after all you're a Communist. Today you're in the camp, but tomorrow we'll be paying our membership fees together. Help me, as one comrade to another, as a party member'" (896). This is not the approach he experiences, however, instead having his thoughts interrupted with the brusk accusation: "So you've fallen asleep, have you? I'll wake you up" (896). Even still, Abarchuk readily relates the details surrounding the murder and who he believes (in fact, essentially knows) to be its perpetrator. That he does so with a "hoarse voice" suggests his awareness that doing so is dangerous to his life. In attempting to collude with the

Party member whose ideological approbation he desires above all other considerations, Abarchuk has almost certainly set the stage for his own murder in the nearest future. Nevertheless, the need for ideological identification and validation is so strong that it even makes him "[…] happy. He had won a victory over himself. He had retrieved the right to judge" (897).

3.4 The Importance of Liberation from Ideology

Krymov is the exception in the triad of fleshed out characters in *Life and Fate* who are staunch Communists. Evgenia's former husband and, at the time of the events in the novel, a commissar attached to the Red Army, Krymov, similar to Abarchuk, has alienated his entire family on the grounds that they are not ideologically motivated, observant, or pure enough. Already at the reader's introduction to him, however, there is a crack in the ideological armor, though he himself seems scarcely able to formulate beyond pondering what he thinks of as being a "stepson of the time" (80). When, following the circuitous, offhanded relay of a remark Krymov made years previous about the value of one of Trotsky's essays, he is arrested and imprisoned in the Lubyanka, the narrative points the reader to conclude that this chain of events can culminate only in an undesirable fate for the character: prison camp or execution. Being interrogated in prison, Krymov "no longer felt himself to be a man of principles, strong, clear-minded, ready to go to the scaffold for the sake of the Revolution. He felt weak and indecisive […] In his theoretical views confusion reigned" (1432). In Grossman's mature view, this apparent defeat is in fact a moment of liberation and therefore triumph. For him, as we have seen, free thought—and its corollary doubt—is the hallmark of the fluid, free individual; in other words, Krymov's confusion—which is itself possible only by freeing his mind from the ideological grip that restricted it to specific, prescribed tracks of certain thought—represents the greatest value in Grossman's ethics. Having escaped the capital-F Fate of a mind that has been told what and how to think and now armed with this humanity,

Krymov thus goes forth to meet his lowercase-f fate in much the same manner as the Sistine Madonna and her son go to meet theirs. In fact, the parallels continue, as Krymov is shortly thereafter subjected to torture; in much the same way, Raphael's Madonna, though "[p]erhaps [with her son] see[ing] the hill of Golgotha and the dusty, rocky road leading to it, and the monstrous, short, heavy, rough-hewn cross that will lie on this shoulder which now feels only the warmth of the maternal breast"[55] («Сикстинская мадонна» 1); nevertheless, "will go forward to meet her fate […]" (2). Furthermore, as Grossman makes explicit in his essay—and implies in *Life and Fate* in the narratives of Krymov, Sofya Levinton, and David, among others; as well as in *Everything Flows*, mostly notably in the respective and overlapping narrative threads concerning Ivan Grigoryevich and Anna Sergeyevna—"That which is human in man meets its fate, and for every epoch this fate is distinct. […] What these fates have in common is that all are forever painful" (1). Thus, we see Grossman establishing in his reflections on the Sistine Madonna both the subject of his mature ethics and work—i.e., the unfettered individual—and the trope through which he will more effectively explicate and explore its dimensions and meaning—i.e., the imposition of pain and strife upon it in order to highlight its indestructibility and perseverance. Just as the capital-F Fate of ideological imprisonment is in opposition to the small-f fate to which all living things are subject, so too does the testing of how bound one may be in the literal sense demonstrate the ultimate unboundedness of the human spirit below this superficial trapping.

As we have seen, Grossman dissolves boundaries and gravitates toward a view of the free individual as the ultimate value in the "The Sistine Madonna," so too are we here able to see him beginning to grapple with some of the moral questions that spring from these platforms. Most pointedly, toward the end of the essay, he asks: "Why has life been so terrible? Are you and I not

[55] Grossman is in fact correct. In its original placement as the altarpiece for the church of San Sisto in Piacenza, Raphael's Madonna and child would have faced a crucifix attached to a choir screen placed in front of the painting.

to blame?" («Сикстинская мадонна» 2). He will take up this question vigorously in his two major novels, nowhere more robustly than in Chapter 7 of *Everything Flows*, which begins: "Who is guilty? Who will be held responsible?" (*Все течет* 10), and explores the limits of sympathy, compassion, and mercy through the trial of ever-more (ostensibly) reprehensible Judas-informers. These kinds of questions are, by their nature, complex if not irresolvable, and, as such, lend themselves to the kind of broad underlying modes we will see Grossman favor across his mature writing, most notably alternations between contraction and dilation, fragmentation and unification, and the endless pendulum swing of expressed contradictions. The "Sistine Madonna" essay itself, however, is discrete, comprising a clear and straightforward beginning, neatly explanatory middle, and unmistakable end. As a contrast in structure (to say nothing of length) to Grossman's two mature novels, the "The Sistine Madonna" stands more in the group of the author's earlier, more conventional writing. As structure and meaning are inextricably linked for Grossman, we find too that the deep philosophy that will come to take up the concerns discussed above—themselves developed cogently for the first time in the "The Sistine Madonna"—has not yet emerged. There is reason to believe, however, that the dialogue in which Grossman put himself with Raphael's painting sparked the evolution in Grossman's thinking that not so much upended the foundations of an existing philosophy as crystallized that which undergirded all of his mature projects.

3.5 The Role of Art

In a general sense, specific instances art—whether high or low—may be embraced or rejected by specific characters as a means of more fully elucidating their values, preferences, and sensibilities, as well as homing in on discrete personalities. This is an uncomplicatedly positive role for Grossman, in accordance with his penchant for personalization and rounding out the

individual in the individual. Thus, we find recurring references to Chekov's story "The Bishop" throughout *Life and Fate*, learning that whereas Novikov is indifferent to it, Viktor appreciates it; while Lyudmila hardly remembers reading it as a child, it is among the few books Viktor's mother takes with her when she is forced into the ghetto.[56] In addition to providing one more clue to the individuality of each of these characters, the story, considered as it is across apparently discrete narrative threads and unrelated characters, allows Grossman to bridge the gaps between them and highlight an underlying commonality. Thus, art may not only distinguish but also serve as the means of coming together, another—albeit secondary—value of Grossman's. Insofar as unfolding his narrative and developing his characters is concerned, then, art serves as a useful device for Grossman. Moreover, he sees the potential of art to heighten and bolster one's being or to provide a salve in times of personal crisis, as when he acknowledges in the "The Sistine Madonna" his "tears and joy" upon first reading *War and Peace* when he was 15 years old and his being touched when he "listened to Beethoven during a period of particularly somber, difficult days in [his] life" (2). The ability of art to speak to that which was free and living in the individual and to bring both that unfettered live-ness and awareness of it to the fore for the person artistically engaged was, not surprisingly, a great value to Grossman.

Be that as it may, however, Grossman evinces a wariness about art as a value in relationship to that of human beings. As Sofya Levinton and others are crammed into a cattle car, she hears one young woman complain, "'Today's Germans are savages […] They haven't even heard of Heinrich Heine,'" only to be rebuffed by a man in the corner of the wagon, "'But in the end these savages are driving us like cattle? How has this Heine of yours been of any help to us?'" (*Жизнь и судьба* 902). In the same scene, the narrator notes: "The language of Goethe

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[56] If we want to create a cross-novel dialogue among characters, we may also note that Judas Ii, in *Everything Flows,* "had wept many times over [it]" (*Everything Flows* 61).

sounded ghastly heard at night at a Russian way station […]" (903). Grossman is all but explicitly making the point that art is meaningless in comparison to the human beings who create and engage with it. In the face of human beings' destruction, art is void of value. Similarly, in *Everything Flows*, Anna Sergeyevna, in recounting the horrors she witnessed during the Holodomor, decries: "'That day I bought a Moscow paper and read an article by Maksim Gorky about how children need cultured toys. Is it really possible that Maksim Gorky not know about those children, that they had been dumped in landfills? Did they really need cultured toys?'" (24).

Conversely, in the face of a human being in whom the fundamental human spirit has been crushed, even high artistic sensitivity is meaningless. On reading Professor Stahlgang, chief architect of an unnamed death camp, says to Liss and his fellow inspectors that "[e]ven when he's inspecting the most mundane of industrial installations, […] our beloved Hitler, as you know, doesn't forget about architectural form" (*Жизнь и судьба* 1157). The reader is left not simply unmoved but even chilled by the inability of the latter quality to bridge what is missing in the absence of basic humanity. For Grossman, then, art and the desire to engage with it are not unmitigated goods. Aside from this critique, Grossman is aware that the tools used for literary art—which is to say words—are of limited value in their service to what is his greatest concern—that is, people. Nowhere is this more poignantly suggested than in Anna Semyonovna's letter to her son Viktor, written from the ghetto in which she's been imprisoned on the eve of her murder. That the latter is to some degree a stand-in for the author and Anna Semyonovna represents Grossman's mother, whose murder in the Berdichev massacre was the basis for the mother in the novel, makes the letter's markers that much more significant. In what is one of the most deeply personal passages of *Life and Fate*, Anna Semyonovna writes to her

son Viktor with the certain knowledge that her life is about to be cut short. In addition to reflecting eloquently and at length on her new circumstances and the people she is amongst, it is her omissions that stand out. Having hardly begun her letter, Anna Semyonovna writes: "It's difficult, Vitya, to really understand people…" (*Жизнь и судьба* 800). Here it is an ellipsis that captures the limitations of comprehension and verbal expression. Several pages later, she is more direct in stating that she "can't convey in words" the essence of people's kindness (806). Toward the end of her letter, she says: "Vityenka I want to tell you…no, not that" (810). Again, an ellipsis stands in as a marker to show the limitations of verbal expression. The fact that Anna Semyonovna starts and stops in a written letter within the text suggests not only Grossman's, but also his character's desire to highlight the inadequacy of language by way of its inclusion. Finally, at nearly the conclusion of the letter, Viktor's mother asks: "Are there human words capable of expressing my love for you?" (811). The question is, of course, rhetorical; for anyone who has ever loved, the patent answer of "no" is so conclusive that it could hardly be anything but. We find, then, in this testament to one of the most significant relationships of Grossman's life (and that of his character Viktor Shtrum), a simultaneous testament—likely *because* of how strong the relationship was—to the deficiencies of language, the very medium in which Grossman worked. Just as Anna Semyonovna knows she is incapable of expressing herself adequately to her son, Grossman knows that he is incapable of rendering in the language of his prose the only thing that really matters here: love and loss.[57]

These, then, were the not insignificant limitations and drawbacks of art, in particular written/verbal art, for Grossman. That art was central to Grossman's personhood and worldview

[57] Among Grossman's belongings at the time of his death were found two letters he had written to his mother after her death. That multiple letters exist, in both literary and standard epistolary form, suggests Grossman's awareness of the inadequacy of language to express himself and a possible struggle with this fact. That multiple attempts exist also, however, suggests Grossman's philosophical compulsion to continue to express himself, as is explored below.

is plainly evident, however, in the bald fact that he chose to dedicate his professional efforts and perhaps even the lion share of his personal ones to it. Not as a specific work or collection of pieces, but as a *concept*, art speaks to what is most fundamental in his philosophy and its realization. Toward the end of *Everything Flows* (and, therefore, toward the end of his life), Grossman's abstract narrator, who may be taken to be synonymous with the writer himself by this point in the text, reflects on the great value of human freedom.

This sort of reflection has, of course, been a central feature of Grossman's work, in explicit form as far back as "The Hell of Treblinka." He is more explicit here, however, as to what this means: "Freedom is not the recognition of necessity, as Engels thought. Freedom is the direct opposite of necessity; freedom is necessity overcome" (*Все течет* 31). This conception of freedom as lacking in necessity is crucially linked to his project as a writer. In order to understand the relationship between the narrator's assertion in *Everything Flows* and Grossman's views on art, as well as how the two fit together in his philosophical view, it is necessary to consider what, if any, moral value he attributed to art and in what that value lay. Was Grossman, for example, an autonomist, that is to say, did he believe that "an essential differentiating feature of art is that it is separate from morality?" (Carroll 127).

This is the view in which art exists for its own aesthetic sake. Independent of the evidence, which plainly suggests this was not his position —we need only consider the fact that none of his ekphrastic exposition on the Sistine Madonna concerns its aesthetic qualities or merits; it is concerned exclusively with the psychological and, by extension, moral dimensions of the work—any attempt to understand the definition of a moral object through a lens that denies any moral dimension is logically problematic. Having rejected the possibility that Grossman views art as an aesthetic venture exclusively, two traditions concerning moral views of art

present themselves. We can dismiss out of hand the notion that Grossman was a Platonist—someone who saw a negative moral value in art by virtue of the fact that "all art is by its nature aimed, in one way or another, at the emotions and, thereby, undermines the righteous reign of reason in the soul" (128). This leaves the possibility that he may have aligned with the school that Carroll calls "utopianism"—a view that art, by its very nature, "is always morally uplifting" (129). In this tradition, Schiller views art as valuable because it forms the basis for moral and political autonomy; it is through aesthetic expression that the ideal state, and thereby human freedom, is brought into being. Here is one conception in which art and freedom are linked. So too, for Herbert Marcuse and Ernest Bloch: "art is essentially liberatory by virtue of the ways in which artworks, ontologically, are distinct from mere real things. In virtue of this contrast, art […] is always on the side of freedom […]"(Carroll 129). Echoing these sentiments, Sartre "thought that prose fiction writing was so indissolubly linked to freedom that he claimed it would be impossible to imagine a good novel in favor of any form of enslavement" (Carroll 129). To the extent art is capable of helping people imagine alternative realities and modes of existence and thereby in fact help bring about these changes in the real world they inhabit, it serves a moral good. For these thinkers, then, the morality of art is linked, if not synonymous, with its perceived utility. This view is anathema to Grossman's position, as implicit in the idea of utility is an ideological (political, social, religious, etc.) conviction to which the object (including in an abstract sense) in question is in service. This distinction appears straightforwardly in Grossman's 1961 letter to Khrushchev, in which he states early in his appeal: "My book is not a political book. In it I spoke […] about people, their grief, joy, delusions, deaths; I wrote about love for people and about compassion for people" (Бит-Юнан and Фельдман, Василий Гроссман: литературная биография в иторико-политическом контексте 112). As his narrator

has stated, his concern is with precisely the opposite of utility: freedom is constituted of a *break* with necessity, not by compulsory service to a particular goal or ideal. We thus find Grossman occupying a liminal position in his approach to the moral value of art. Clearly not subscribing to the school that rejects a possible moral dimension in art, he nonetheless eschews those traditions that conceive of this morality in a utilitarian light. His emerges as a hybrid conception. It is, ironically, by virtue of its remove from all practical and useful spheres of human concern that art possesses human moral value.[58] Only that which is least oriented toward a particular good or goal can be said to be unnecessary and, by extension, free.[59] This conception of a form that has moral value in its own right beyond any question of utility or movement toward a goal finds its nearly direct parallel in Grossman's conception of the value of the individual;[60] in fact, the two are so interrelated that *Life and Fate* is, he claims: "as dear to me as honest children are dear to their father. To take away my book is the same as taking away a child from its father" (113).

Here Grossman is breaking with Hegelian tradition, rejecting a teleological view of human (individual and collective) existence. Or, rather, he is not rejecting the idea of a telos outright, but is, rather, conceiving of it in radically different terms from those in which is

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[58] As such, propaganda, however cleverly conceived and executed, cannot be considered "art."

[59] Grossman did not reject the idea that art could play a fundamental role in projects of bearing witness and was, in fact, an early proponent of what, while he was alive, was still a nascent concept let alone scholarly or social field. His "Hell of Treblinka" essay attests not only to this commitment, but also to the effective use to which bearing witness may be put, as it was submitted as evidence in the Nuremberg Trials (factual errors, which at the time were likely unrecognized, notwithstanding). This valuation, however, constitutes a concern of secondary importance to him and does not represent that foundational basis for his most accomplished works.

[60] The closest thing we find to a "goal" in Grossman's thought is that of being kind («добры»). This is the culminating conclusion *Life and Fate*'s principle protagonist Viktor Shtrum reaches at the end of his narrative thread. Having betrayed his own convictions, he concludes: "Every hour, every day, year after year, [I] must fight for my right to be a person and must be kind and pure Grossman never explicates a precise definition of "kindness," though its importance permeates through the background of much of his writing. Yet more important for him than even a lofty quality, however, is the simple fact of being a person. This is captured on the last page of *Everything Flows*, as Ivan Grigoryevich reflects: "People did not want to do evil to anyone, but they did evil their entire lives. And yet people were people. And the wonderful, marvelous thing is that—whether they wanted to or not—they did not allow freedom to die, and even the most terrible of them cared for it in their terrible, deformed, and yet human souls" (37).

conventionally understood, almost to the point of paradox. His narrator in *Everything Flows* continues his reflection: “Progress is essentially the progress of human freedom” (31). For Grossman, then, the orientation point and goal toward which we (must) move is toward an ever-greater divestment of any order or goal as an expression of that freedom of the human spirit most fully realized. Art may play a great role in this unusual “telos,” as both an extension of and proxy for the free human being. Indeed, Grossman has faith in the possible one-to-one correspondence between art and life, as becomes plain when he asserts of the Sistine Madonna that “the body and face of the young woman are her soul” (“The Sistine Madonna” 1). It is certainly plausible that the inspiration he found in looking at this artwork helped shape his views on the possible ideal relationship between art and life, a model to which he might aspire. If art is at least parallel and may actually overlap with the individual’s freely lived experience, however, it may assume a variety of forms for achieving this. It is in the “The Sistine Madonna” that Grossman gives indications of his working through the form his own mature art would take to most effectively put into praxis his philosophy, or, in other words, to best approximate the experience of free human life.

That Grossman engages in written form with a piece of visual art proves fertile for the development of his ideas. Positing the two, prose and painting, in relation to one another, he almost certainly would have experienced a heightened aware of the phenomenon that “[s]omething happens to content when it enters a form” (Friedman 197). As a painting, the Sistine Madonna declares itself in its entirety all at once (however long it may take a given viewer to take it all in). In this immediate and full declaration, is a kind of stasis, but not of the kind Grossman abhors as being inherent qualities of ideological systems and any mode of thinking divorced from spontaneous, free human experience. On the contrary, it stands as a

model of infinity, as recognized by Grossman in his immediate apperception upon first seeing the painting. His first reflection on Raphael's work itself, having already provided the briefest sketch of the context in which he was able to view it, is the simple statement: "As soon as you set eyes on this painting, you immediately realize one thing above all: that it is immortal." This, then, is Grossman's entry point into the painting and the aspect of it that grabs him most deeply. It is also early expression of the immortality/infinity of the free human spirit that Grossman is explicit about from this point forward and is now being established as central to his philosophy. While in "The Hell of Treblinka" Grossman makes passing reference to an "immortality of spiritual strength" (2), it stands out in his later essay because of its placement at the outset of his reflections and argument as the central feature of both the painting itself and the piece that is being written about it.

It appears, then, that Grossman is exploring what it means to capture a particular phenomenon—in this case, not just any phenomenon, but the one that is becoming most central to his philosophical outlook, i.e., the untouchably transcendent experience of the free individual—across several media. As such, it is the organizing observation of the following essay.

Springing from this observation is a work of ekphrasis, but not in a conventional sense. It is not concerned with describing the artistry or artistic characteristics of the work even in relation to other concerns; it does not, in fact, make mention of any visual features of painting beyond noting, for example, that the Madonna and child's faces are "serene and sad" ("The Sistine Madonna" 1). When he does note these physical qualities, it is with a view to their psychological import. Grossman is thus not concerned with an ekphrastic exercise of the exterior (which many would argue constitutes the entire object in the case of a painting), but, rather in its interior

implications, specifically the way in which the artwork is not simply an expression of painted figures (divine or not) but is a living embodiment of live human beings.[61] More than this, at times we nearly lose the ostensible subject of the essay altogether, as Grossman shifts his focus to contemporary tragedies (in particular Treblinka) and makes reference to the Madonna in an abstracted form as a representative of all those who have suffered and will continue to do so. While we feel his reverence for the painting, we simultaneously sense that his interest in engaging with it is less founded on his valuation of the work itself than on his interest in the value of timeless humanity it has captured that he, too, aims to express in art. Nevertheless, his expressions of admiration for the Sistine Madonna are far from in vain. Grossman's ekphrastic musings demonstrate the limitations that trying to capture that kind of expression in writing entails while also pointing the way to modes and devices that are now establishing themselves as the cornerstones of his method. More fundamental is the possibility that Grossman may, in putting written art in conversation with visual, have experienced a heightened awareness of the work that medium/form does not only in embodying a meaning but also in being that meaning itself. If his central idea is simply the exaltation of the unbridled human being, how can fictional prose writing not simply convey it but, as closely as possible, be that sacred value and its celebration? The Sistine Madonna's power lies in its mute assertion of immortality by virtue of its being a painting; mother and child bear the same expressions without end as they forever continue to meet their same suffering fate according to the circumstances of each new time and place. Grossman, meanwhile, is able, by contrasting the forte of that medium with his own developing project, to better home in on the strengths of his art form, prose, and how best to utilize it to embody his philosophy. Where the Madonna, as a painting, is an infinity of

[61] We may consider this to be true in a literal sense insofar as the figures in the painting are effectively mirrors for the viewer himself.

constancy (by analogy, we may think of the number zero), Grossman is able to turn his work of narrative writing into an infinity of proliferation (i.e., the usual kind of infinity that springs to mind when most people consider the concept).

This ceaseless movement not only suits his medium, but, indeed, is aligned perfectly with his view of the free individual as endlessly generative, in motion, and, simply, engaged in the endlessly varied state of existing. The next several chapters will look closely, in turn, at several of the most productive modes Grossman employs to provide a structure for this movement. While the modes themselves are helpful keys to understanding Grossman's work, and the effects they produce are often worthy of discussion, it is important to keep in mind that it is always the movement itself that is paramount to the writer.

Chapter Four: Grossman Explores Identity as a Process

4.1 The Use of Patterns

It was crucial for Grossman's realization of his philosophy in action that he sustain the movement of his narratives. This requires, naturally, the regular injection of novel elements including the introduction of new characters and narrative threads. He also favors attention to (often unnecessary) detail at times, a technique that appears to have been particularly dear to him as evidenced by the care with which he renders it. Along with these characteristic features, we find his narratives structured at a deep level according to a number of cyclical patterns. These patterns are highly conducive to Grossman's vision of free experience proliferating within a narrative prose form. For one, structured by their very nature as patterns though they are—and therefore potentially suspect as means to capture the spontaneity of unbridled life—they constitute deep, organic cycles that are intrinsically embedded in both the natural world and the human psyche. Moreover, these patterns appeal by virtue of the fact that, by their very nature, they recur without end. At some point one may stop tracing a pattern, but, once established and set in motion, the putative "end point" is in fact only a suspended ellipsis. As we have seen, this is precisely what Grossman achieves at the "end" of *Life and Fate*.

Let us now give close consideration to two of these pattern models in order to see through the texts themselves how Grossman brings about his realization of free life through art. As we will see, not only do these patterns facilitate the enactment of the writer's philosophy; they also, in turn, inform it. One of the most productive and entrenched patterns Grossman uses throughout his mature period is the basic back and forth between fragmentation and unification, the discrete and the porous. There are a number of ways in which this aspect of his poetics manifests itself. The structure of Grossman's texts, for example, becomes increasingly complex. Not only

narratorial viewpoints but also genres splinter even as they relate and hang together as a coherent whole. Indeed, by the time Grossman writes *Everything Flows*, he is writing more a collection of related vignettes that loosely cohere than a proper novel. Not only are the episodes fragmentary, but they also appear in a multiplicity of forms including short story, drama, and philosophical and political tracts. On the level of narrative, one mode of exploring the possibilities of fragmentation and unification emerges in particular as being of central importance in Grossman's work. Because Grossman's inquiry into identity most thoroughly explores the dynamic of separation and union that he employs throughout his mature work, we will use our investigation of it as a narrow lens through which to view Grossman's general philosophy in action.

4.2 Identity as a Key Theme

What is most immediately striking about Grossman's approach to identity is what is antithetical to the way in which he values it. Those measures that most readily come to mind when we talk about "identity"—according to one's ethnicity/race, religion, profession, and so forth—are considered at length by Grossman; their treatment under his pen, however, reveals not only the limitations he perceives in them but also the ways in which they are problematic constructs in his philosophy of free movement. It is through the narrative concerning Viktor Shtrum, Grossman's single most developed character in his entire oeuvre, that we see these issues most saliently and thoroughly explored. Viktor, a rough proxy for Grossman himself, occupies the role of central hero of *Life and Fate* insofar as the novel can be said properly to have one. His first thoughts appear as two short chapters that bookend his mother's letter. In the first of these, Viktor reflects on the exhilarating progress of science from the Euclidean to the world of quantum theory. Without a doubt, he believes "no one in the world could be happier than a scientist…" (*Жизнь и судьба* 800). We note first that Viktor's first thoughts concern an

identity and that this identity is as a scientist. Moreover, we find another of Grossman's characteristic ellipses, used here to give expression to the ineffable expansion of joy and possibility in the mind of one utterly and freely engaged in the work this career entails. The concreteness of the former, juxtaposed immediately against the openness of the latter, sets up a moral model relating to stasis vs. movement in the context of identity that he will subsequently explore in depth. However this joy may be, the chapter concludes abruptly on a pessimistic note of doubt, which segues into Anna Semyonovna's letter. Indeed, the letter establishes a new tenor not only of mood, but also regarding the locus of mental orientation. Presumably having just read the letter (along with the reader), Viktor reflects that: "[n]ever, before the war, had [he] thought about the fact that he was a Jew, that his mother was a Jew" (811). His first thought, then, is one concerning identity. Moreover, this thought is positioned in response to an indirect interaction with his mother. The idea that Viktor's ruminations on his Jewish identity are linked specifically to his mother are, however, quickly dispelled, as we learn that "[h]is mother had never spoken to him about it—neither during his childhood, nor during his years as a student." Further, "[n]ever while he was at Moscow University had one student, professor or seminar leader ever talked to him about it. Never before the war, either at the Institute or at the Academy of Sciences had he ever heard conversations about it" (811). As we see, Viktor's sense of a Jewish identity is an emergent phenomenon, one that, while internally acknowledged, is imposed on him from outside. If "[t]here is something active about identity, […if] it isn't 'just there', it's not 'a thing', it must *always* be established," the agent of action of creating this new ethnic[62] is made plain just after Viktor reflects further that never once in his professional career had his being a Jew been mentioned nor had he felt the need to discuss the fact with his daughter (Jenkins 17). Fascism,

[62] Not religious, as Viktor, mirroring Grossman, is a nonbeliever.

Viktor considers: “has rejected the concept of separate individuality, the concept of ‘a man,’ and operates instead with huge aggregates” (812). In other words, fascist ideology contracts the infinite complexity and elusiveness of the individual person into a type, in Viktor’s case, the Jew.

Grossman thus portrays the imposition of an ethnic identity as a violent and jarring thrust from outside oneself. Throughout his major works, he returns repeatedly to the way social arbiters of ethnicity implement the identifier as a political unit in order to provoke or carry out violence. Once established as part of oneself, however, how does it function in that individual person in the writer’s view? Grossman shows, on the one hand, the denigrating effects of absorbing a social degraded identity. Having been accused of “Talmudic abstraction” (1266) in his work and beginning to see the anti-Semitic policies that are taking hold at his institute, Viktor comes to stand in front of his superior “no longer a professor, a doctor of science, a famous scientist who had made a remarkable discovery, a man who knew how to be arrogant and indulgent, independent and strident,” but rather as “just a stooped and narrow-shouldered man with a hooked nose and curly hair, screwing up his eyes as though awaiting a blow on the cheek” (1250). Grossman also comments more obliquely on the potentially destructive nature of ethnic identification. In Kazan, to where Viktor and his colleagues have been evacuated at the beginning of the novel, Viktor establishes a social circle that comes to include Karimov, a Tartar translator. When we first encounter Karimov, Viktor observes to himself that, whereas “there were people, even old friends, in whose presence he particularly felt alone,” with his new friend, his “inner world suddenly cease[d] to be mute and solitary” (972-73). It seems, then, that Viktor has found at least one lifeline out of the alienation and despair into which he has been sinking since we are first introduced to him. Whereas in our first glimpses of his life Viktor is sunk in depression from estranged and broken relationships, here is a first movement toward

togetherness from a state of fragmented relationships. This connection between scientist and translator is in no small part based on the shared experience of a like kind of grief: while Viktor has lost his mother, who was caught behind the German lines, Karimov, too, has been separated from his wife and daughter. Since his family became stranded in the Crimea by the war, Karimov has heard no news of them and is left to entertain the worst possibilities. In the first conversation the reader witnesses between these men, their shared understanding of a distracted mind incapable of work or direction forms the basis for an unexpected connection and camaraderie. From different professional, ethnic, and geographical backgrounds, Viktor Shtrum and Akhmet Usmanovich Karimov nonetheless share a fundamental and mutually valuable human connection. In a subsequent conversation, however, the mood has changed. Before a conversation even begins between them, the reader is primed to regard the following exchange with regard to its (ethnic) identity implications, as Viktor reflects to himself that it is only by paying close attention to Karimov's face—particularly his wide nose—that he is able to detect in it a different background than that of a pure Slav. In the same vein, he considers, it is often through subtle cues and features that he is able to identify a Jew. In the conversation that launches from this point, Karimov describes a recent encounter with a Tartar soldier who escaped German captivity in the Crimea and has told him about the relatively tolerable situation of the Tartars in that region. Viktor then asks: "'What did your lieutenant have to say about the Jews?,'" in response to which Karimov relays some rumors and an eyewitness account of German atrocities against them, concluding: "'I asked him about the Jews especially because I knew you'd want to know'" (1054-55). This statement, paired with Viktor's immediate reflection to himself, "'Why just me? […] Is it possible that this isn't of interest to anyone else?'" (1054-55)establishes a breakdown in common understanding between the two friends, one that is rooted

in ethnic alienation. On the one hand, Viktor notes the lack of sympathy for Europe's Jews from other groups who are not themselves targets of (the same degree of) persecution and murder. He feels the painful snub of exclusion from consideration on the basis of being part of a group that is "other." At the same time, he himself, in his question about what the lieutenant had to say about Jews, evinces the same kind of myopic sense of inclusivity; he asks only about his own ethnic group, not about how other groups are faring under the German occupation. Karimov is complicit in this viewpoint that locates subjects of concern on the basis of their sharing a common ethnicity with one. It is because he understands it—and presumably likewise embraces it—that he asked the lieutenant about the Jews' situation on behalf of his Jewish friend. Moreover, the conclusions from this scene reveal the poisonous way in which those who arbitrate ethnic—or other—designations may compel those they have identified to participate in their own identification, thereby reinforcing their own internalized sense of what is actually externally imposed. Karimov and Viktor both base their respective optimism and grief along probabilistic ethnic lines. For the former, news that members of his ethnic group are being treated comparably well by the German occupiers is cause for renewed hope of reunion with his family and therefore tentative joy; conversely, the confirmation of Jews' receiving almost unbelievably vicious treatment confirms Viktor in his grief over his mother. Rather than being allowed to suffer the uncertainty inherent in not knowing a specific person's fate, the two are compelled into emotional states on the basis of "probabilities" and ethnic "aggregates" (812). In other words, those very measurements of fascism and the worldview they inform that Viktor abhorred in his first reflections immediately after his mother's letter have come to characterize his own orientation. With this compulsion to view things along ethnic lines comes a corruption of the closeness born of common suffering that the two friends had previously enjoyed. Whereas

the friendship's foundation was based on the free movement toward emotional union with another specific person, the result of ethnic identification has been the snuffing out of living intimacy.[63]

4.3 The Limiting Nature of Identities

This manipulation, for Grossman, is not restricted to those, including Viktor, who are social victims of identity labels. His concern, as always, is for the ways in which labels—however ostensibly empowering—stunt and calcify the minds in which they exist. He expresses his idea of the universally limiting nature of identifiers in particular through German Lieutenant Bach's narrative. Contrary to Viktor's case, the label that is attempting to impose itself on him—National Socialist—is, in his context, one of social elevation. Nevertheless, adoption of this label denigrates Bach's personhood and corrals his thoughts along predetermined courses that are alien to his experiences and true beliefs. Thus, after acknowledging to himself how insignificant and degenerate the new men of Nazism are, how small they are compared to the tradition of great German thinkers including Einstein, a Jew, he manipulates his thoughts to the conclusion not that the entire National Socialist way of thinking is flawed, but, rather, that these men should follow the examples of Hitler and Goebbels to "'[f]ollow the path of consolidation instead of sowing

[63] It is also worth noting that, insofar as identity labels shut down communication and intimacy between persons fitting differing descriptions, they likewise limit and impede the imagination one may apply to another's situation. The more one can experience and imagine, the more he can expand both in himself and in his artistic work (i.e., text for Grossman). It follows, then, that being able to think of others is a good for the individual as a means of both psychologically and artistically realizing himself and that its converse—a myopic view that is constrained by a focus on oneself and those within one's identity categories—is damaging to the free, evolving individual in motion. There is further a practical dimension to Grossman's philosophy of expansive inclusion. Grossman shows a general trajectory toward greater inclusivity of concern and interest in the course of his writing, which not only provides him with greater material with which to work, but also causes him to draw attention to sufferings that, while not borne by members of any identity-label group to which he might belong, merit public attention. In seeing human suffering in general rather than confining himself to that one of one group, Grossman, for example, "became the first non-Ukrainian writer in the world who […] described the unbelievable Stalinist crime against the Ukrainian peasantry" (Przebinda 70). We find, then, that Grossman's philosophical position of inclusivity and his rejection of labels enables him, the artist, to become a social advocate for millions of otherwise voiceless people.

discord in the midst of our common German cause!'" (1065). Elsewhere Grossman considers the limiting effects of identity on those who have freely espoused a defined identity. Discussing both Viktor's breakthrough work and the promising career of a young (Jewish) scientist, for example, Viktor's colleague Postoev suddenly "embrace[s] Sokolov and add[s], 'Still, the most important thing is that we're both Russians'" (1130). A professional and a man who has dedicated much of his life to scientific inquiry, Postoev pursuit of the truth is impeded by his favoring ethnic identification at its expense. Across these cases we see free, noble minds made smaller; their thoughts treading along predetermined paths; and their sympathy weakened by the strictures of identity.

Grossman most overtly explores the limitations of identity as a measure of a particular quality, a matter of belonging or not belonging to a particular group, in Viktor's attempt to fill out the questionnaire imposed on him by his Institute. The very first question, asking for "Surname, name and patronymic," is followed by an ellipsis indicative of how complex even something as ostensibly straightforward as one's name is (1251). Even that most explicit and simple identity one has in one's name is, Viktor realizes, complicated by the peculiarities of one's life history. He, for example, is puzzled by his patronymic "Pavlovich," as his father's papers named him as Pinkhus.

These same doubts and confrontations with complexity assail him at each subsequent question, including those asking for birth date, sex, and place of birth. The whole, infinite person that Viktor is balks at the questionnaire's attempt to fragment him into easily comprehensible and categorizable parts. When he gets to question 6, "Social origin…," Viktor reflects:

> It seems to me that a distinction based on social origin seems moral and legitimate. But for the Germans a distinction based on nationality seems to be indisputably moral. I am certain of one thing: it's terrible to kill Jews simply because they're Jews. After all, they're people, each one an individual—good,

> bad, talented, stupid, obtuse, cheerful, kind, sensitive, greedy. But Hitler says, "In any case, only one thing matters and that is that they're Jewish. And I protest with my whole being! But then we have the same principle—what matters is whether or not you're the son of an aristocrat, the son of kulak, or the son of a merchant. And the fact that they're good, bad, talented, kind, stupid, cheerful—well, what of it? (1253)

In this way, Grossman lays bare his association between markers of identity that can be applied to a person as labels (whether by an external agent or by oneself) and all systems of ideology. This is hardly surprising given that an identity is itself a way of thinking and orienting just as an ideology is more comprehensively. As point 5—"Nationality"—makes plain, these labels of identity are not innate features of a person or even natural qualities of the objective world. Rather, what "had been so simple and insignificant before the war […] was now somehow becoming rather significant" (1252). Identifiers come into being and carry their relative weight, then, according to a particular ideology's need for tools to restrict and manipulate in particular ways. Insofar as an ethnic or other identity is not useful for a given dominant ideology, it is unremarkable or even nonexistent; conversely, it enters into existence as a category of being and may then become foregrounded to the extent it is ideologically useful. So, it appears that, as products of an ideological model, identity markers are used in Grossman's writing as a synecdoche for an overarching ideology itself. This allows Grossman to perform a kind of shorthand by exploring one ideological manifestation in depth that captures the mechanisms and consequences of the whole without having always to delve into the entire ideological system at every turn.

Grossman thus depicts one kind of movement in his treatment of defined identity. As the accumulation of identity fragments the elusive whole of the individual, the person to whose psyche this violence is done suffers consequences and may eventually resist (as in the case of Viktor Shtrum). This is not free movement, however; it is not the free play of forces that

characterizes the deep structures of Grossman's writing and is an enactment of his philosophy. Rather it is a goal-oriented, scripted kind of movement in which progressive breaking is ideally countered by defensive efforts aimed at restoration of the whole. In addition to depicting this necessary kind of repair work, Grossman engages with another, vital model of movement that is centered not on definition-based concepts of identity, but instead on a fundamental, relational identity. As we will see, this model is fluid, organic, and highly productive. As a point of entry, let us turn now to the relational model that is at the heart of his movement of identity.

4.4 The Relational Model of Identity

Grossman's prose, as is characteristic of realist fiction in general, depicts a range of human relationships and their dynamics. In *Life and Fate* in particular, by virtue of the sheer length of the work, nearly all major forms of human connection are explored to varying degrees: parent/(step)child, husband/wife, lovers, siblings, parents- and children-in law, boss/subordinate, comrades in arms, perpetrator/victim, colleagues, conspirators, friends, and those thrown together by circumstance. Of these, across Grossman's oeuvre, one relationship emerges as especially sacrosanct. The relationship of mother and child (most often son, perhaps because of Grossman's own close relationship to his mother) is both recurrent and so highly valued in Grossman's writing that it becomes a kind of signal model in its own right.[64]

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[64] One notable exception to Grossman's typical treatment of the mother/child bond appears in his early short story "In the City of Berdichev" («В городе Бердичевк»). In this story, a female fighter for the Red Army discovers, in the midst of her fighting in the Polish-Soviet War, that she is pregnant. Despite seeking an abortion, she is compelled to have the child while housed with a family in Berdichev. Despite a budding maternal bond with the infant to whom she gives birth, in the end the pull of serving the Bolshevik cause proves the stronger of the competing desires within her, and at the story's end she runs off into the insurgent fighting, leaving her newborn son to be raised by the couple in whose house she had been staying. Here, then, it is the lack of a strong maternal bond that stands out. The text itself suggests that at the time Grossman composed the story (published in 1934), he celebrated the choice of the story's heroine; the husband of the couple in whose care the woman has left her son declares to his wife, seeing the woman running off with the cadets, "'There were once people like that in the Bund. These were real human beings, Beila. And are we really human beings? No, we're manure" (5). To what extent this attitude may have been more a matter of posturing for prospective publishers rather than a personally felt conviction is unclear. Whatever the case may be, the story demonstrates that even early in Grossman's thought, a model was established in which ideological commitment was pitted against human connection. As we see, this model is

As the example of how, at Treblinka, "the living dead […] preserved […] the souls of human beings," Grossman cites his having heard "stories of women trying to save their sons and thus accomplishing great, hopeless feats[; of] young mothers hiding and burying their little babies in heaps of blankets and trying to shield them with their own bodies" (2). Reciprocally, he writes of an account of "a boy shouting out by the entrance to the gas chamber, 'The Russians will avenge us, Mama, don't cry!'" (2). While this last testimony, at least, is almost certainly apocryphal, the fact that it is a mother-son relationship in which the sentiment is couched speaks to that bond's unique ability to bear hyperbole and outright propaganda plausibly. Similarly, in depicting what he imagines the final, desperate minutes in the gas chambers to have been like, Grossman zeroes in on the experiences between mothers and their children, writing of the "superhuman effort" a hypothetical mother makes to give her dying child the slightest bit more room so that their last breaths may "be eased even the tiniest bit by a last act of maternal care" (2). As well as speculating on what may have been the final thoughts in each person's mind as he or she lost consciousness, Grossman leaves the reader with the haunting question he imagines being posed by a young woman being killed: "'Why are they suffocating me? Why can't I love and have children?'"(2). In Grossman's mind, as expressed through his imaginings, the loss of the possibility of achieving this most sacred mother/child bond constitutes the ultimate loss; those who deprive someone of that right represent the ultimate betrayers of humanity.

The emphasis on the mother/child bond is most explicit in "The Sistine Madonna," and it is here that we get Grossman's most explicit account of the dynamic in that relationship that holds such great power for him. He starts by characterizing the inconceivable profundity he perceives in Raphael's painting as being a matter of the

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overarchingly influential in Grossman's mature writing, with a central role for the human connection dynamic being accorded to the mother/child relationship.

> rendering of a mother's soul"—not a person, girl, or woman's soul, but specifically a mother's. (1) Attempting to grasp the nature of the power of this representation, he goes on to state that, by virtue of her being "the image of the maternal soul […] her beauty […] is forever intertwined and fused with the beauty that lurks in the deep, indestructible, wherever life is born and exists […] (1)

Given what we know of the central concerns and values of Grossman's philosophy, it is not surprising to discover that one of key values he highlights in the maternal nature—its unique ability to bring forth life—marks the mother as a figure to be venerated. This is a valuable connection to note in mapping Grossman's hierarchies of concerns. It also marks his thought yet more distinctly as being concerned with a conception of life that is earthy and embodied. This is particularly relevant as it signifies the kind of life that is subject to vicissitudes, changes, i.e., movement. That Grossman makes this plain in the context of considering a painting of divine subjects emphasizes his focus particularly strongly.

However, this connection between the maternal and life-giving is only one component of the mother and children dynamic. About this relationship as shown in the Sistine Madonna, Grossman notes that the mother (Mary) does not clasp her son to her herself despite quite possibly foreseeing his brutal death. Instead, "she holds him forward to meet his face […]." For his part, the son (Christ) "is not hiding his face in his mother's breast. Soon he will come down from her arms and walk towards his fate on his own bare feet." Grossman asks, "How are we to explain this, to understand it?" before answering his own query with the response that "[t]hey are one—and they are separate. They see, feel, and think together, fused, yet everything says that they will separate from each other, that they cannot not separate, that the essence of their communion, of their fusion, lies in the fact that they will separate from one another" (1).

Throughout Grossman's body of work, not even the literal connection of sexual intercourse[65] comes close in degree or significance to the kind of fusion between mother and child that he depicts here. This attitude of total oneness is not just a bit of rhetorical posturing; it finds resonance six years later in a personal, private letter he wrote to his deceased mother. Writing to her in 1961 across the separation of death, Grossman states simply: "I am you, my dearest. As long as I am alive, then you are alive, too" (Grossman, *The Road* 267). No identification or fusion could be more thorough and absolute than this declaration of actual equivalence, of being one and the same as another. Grossman has conceived a pole of extremity in human interaction that is possible for him in the context of the mother and child relationship. Yet, this is countered by Grossman's acknowledgement that separation between mother and child is inevitable; indeed that the defining quality of their relationship lies in its wholeness being sundered. His own biography attests to awareness of acceptance of the inevitable separation between a child and its mother; well before his own mother's death, Grossman had left home, established his own path in life, and married and had a family of his own; by the time of his mother's murder, they were not even living in the same republic.[66]

4.5 The Development of Self as Separate

Thus, we find Grossman planting another pole at the extreme of human relationships, one that establishes the ultimate split between people and can be realized in this highest degree only between mothers and their children. Having staked out via that maternal relationship his two poles of human unity and discreteness, Grossman further approaches the matter of boundaries between the two. In his later writing, the two extreme poles of fusion and atomization of people

[65] Which, in any case, receives notably little attention amongst all of Grossman's explorations of how human beings come together, interact, and separate.
[66] Grossman in Russia, his mother in Ukraine.

do not establish so much a sharp line between two categories as they mark two points on a fluid scale of receptivity. Having established his model on the basis of its most extreme potentialities, i.e., those that for him may be found exclusively in a mother/child relationship, Grossman extrapolates to a general one of relational identity that is characterized by movement between greater or lesser unity with or separation from another (person, concept, or role). It is in the active interaction and tension between the respective poles of union and separation that identity exists.

Chief among the important implications of this conception is that its fluidity is characteristic of and reinforces Grossman's imperative of movement. This obtains both on the level of philosophy and, from there, in the enactment of this thought into written form. In a conceptual schema that entails endless movement between the extremes of union and complete individuation in the action of identity, the overall infinite movement of the individual assumes a temporal dimension. Accordingly, no character's narrative in *Life and Fate* or *Everything Flows* is properly resolved (except, in some cases, by death); rather, each snaps off in time (and the space of the text), as this is the only option available in a view that resists the idea of resolution or ultimate realization of some particular self.[67]

4.6 The Self is Never Realized

Thus, we find a natural process of recursive movement that is inherently unbounded. As stated in the introductory section to this chapter, this feature alone makes identity, as Grossman

[67] This fact is not only not belied but is even reinforced by the apparently conclusive final words of *Everything Flows*, "Here [Ivan Grigoryevich] stood—gray-haired, stoop-shouldered, and yet still the same as ever, unchanged," for just above the narrator-cum-Ivan Grigoreyvich himself reflects that "he had simply remained what he had been since birth—a human being" (37). In other words, the protagonist's unchanging-ness at the novel's conclusion is not related to the idea of his being a static being from start to (neat) finish, but rather to the fact that his humanness has doggedly persisted throughout his troubled narrative. And, as we have established previously, central to Grossman's conception of the human being is the idea of infinite movement. As part of what makes a human being, identity is not a matter of exposure and reification to the point of an ultimately revealed concrete fact; on the contrary, it is a process, a movement.

conceives it, a particularly attractive locus around which to structure major threads of his text. Aside from how Grossman's idea of identity as a moving point between two extremes of unification and separation functions as a productive underlying structure of his writing, in accordance with the philosophy the text embodies, it is also a value within that philosophy in its own right, further refining our notion of how Grossman conceived that most sacred of his values, free individual life. In order to plumb the nature of this value, we return now to the narrative thread in *Life and Fate* concerning Viktor Shtrum and his family.

It is Viktor's wife, Lyudmila, who serves as an example of how identity may yet become petrified even when constructed along the fluid relational axis outline above. Her own first thought in the novel is about her son Tolya, a young solider from a previous marriage from whom she has had no word for some time. Thus, we are presented with a relational model based on the ideal mother/child relationship Grossman conceives. From this point of entry into her inner life, we discover that her preoccupation with him is unrelenting to the point that Viktor confides to his mother-in-law that he "[thinks] she's ill. She's become someone else" (867). Lyudmila's obsession with Tolya goes beyond preoccupation however, showing itself to be a total identification with him, even at the expense of all other considerations and relationships in her life. As early as the scene in which Grossman sketches the start to Lyudmila's typical day and the thoughts that attend it, the narrator describes the prismatic quality of Lyudmila's identification with her son, as "[a]ll the events in the world, the war, the fate of her sisters, her husband's work, Nadya's character, her mother's health, her own compassion for the wounded, her grief for those who had died in the German camps—everything [is born from] from the pain she [feels] for her son and her anxiety about him" (794). Even the most ostensibly central relationships in her life and what would appear to be causes of deep concern for her have

meaning only insofar as they are refracted through her son. While her daughter Nadya's unhappiness and loneliness in Kazan as well as Viktor's own tragedy regarding his mother's murder undoubtedly contribute to the pall in the family's shared domestic life and to its fragmentation, it becomes clear that Lyudmila's own shift to a total identification with one person has made its own contribution to these effects. Moreover, this myopic identification has circumscribed her perspective to the point that she is unable to see its role in shaping the family dynamic. Upon finally learning of Tolya's whereabouts and setting out by boat to find him, Lyudmila's fixation reaches a fever pitch, and she thinks to herself, "But let Tolya be alive!" This was her only wish, she asked Heaven for nothing else" (847). Grossman's mastery here is such that, while sympathizing with her position and anxiety, he simultaneously renders her sentiments subtly so as to softly implicate her moral compass from this position of complete exclusivity. Her thoughts are expressed immediately after the chapter opens with reference to the Volga, one of Grossman's favored metonyms for the Stalingrad front, itself representative of the war as a whole.[68] Thus juxtaposed, Lyudmila's wish is cast in a heartless light. In identifying exclusively with her son, she is happy to allow all other suffering, even that occurring on the scale of total war. Upon arriving at the hospital where she has been told Tolya is Lyudmilas learns that he had died. By the time she sees her son's nearby grave—one among countless others—Lyudmila's full identification with him crystallizes to the point of perniciousness. In his description of Lyudmila's experience, Grossman is, as always, sympathetic to his character, a human being. Nonetheless, he challenges his reader to consider simultaneously the implications of the fact that, for Lyudmila, "[e]verything living—her mother, Nadya, Viktor's eyes, the war

[68] See, for example, Grossman's first introduction of this trope, where his narrator describes how "[s]ometimes when people looked at the gently rippling Volga they felt that the river itself was stable and that the trembling earth was huddling against its shore." (758)

bulletins—had ceased to exist. Everything had become inanimate. In the whole world only Tolya was alive'" (863). This is a terrible myopia born of intense grief, itself a terrible thing. Grossman does not resist the uncomfortable simultaneity of two competing perspectives. What he reveals in Lyudmila's fixity at the pole of complete identification with another is two-fold. First, there is the moral problem presented in the narrative of not moving away from it, namely that such close identification renders one incapable of sympathy toward others and even, if taken to the extreme, of acknowledging their status as similarly living beings. There is also the broader ethical issue of stasis.

The majority of Grossman's ethical emphasis on uninhibited, ceaseless movement is based on its being the hallmark of free life as opposed to the restrictive, stultifying inertia of system-based thinking and experiencing. This is an instance, however, where the contrast is not between natural life and ideology, but rather, between life and (grief to the point of virtual) death. Lyudmila's complete identification with Tolya—itself a manifestation of deep grief—leads to a stagnation of movement between the poles of individuality and movement toward others that is characteristic of the cessation of life in any meaningful sense.

As a counterpoint to Lyudmila's stasis and myopia, Grossman develops Viktor's complex relational identity as a living thing. Just as in Viktor's narrative, more than any other single plotline, Grossman explores the problems of label-based identity, so too is it in developing Viktor more than in tracing any other character that Grossman thoroughly employs the movement of identity as a driver of text, and, as well, thoroughly explores his key interests in identity as an engine of movement. Perhaps not surprisingly given both Grossman's conception of identity and his relationship to his own mother, the structure of the narrative thread concerning Victor is supported at beginning and end by the maternal relationship. That his relationship with

his mother should be so significant to the novel and memorable to the reader is somewhat ironic given that, within the parameters of the narrative, the two characters never interact; by the time of the novel's action, Viktor's mother Anna Semyonovna has already been murdered by the Nazis. That the bond is nevertheless one of the most central and arguably the strongest one of the novel speaks to Grossman's perception of the mother/child relationship as uniquely situated in its incomparable depth and resiliency outside of time and beyond circumstance. Because Viktor and his mother are separated by death, and as Grossman never veers into the mystical or fantastical, it is impossible for much narrative space to be devoted to modeling the mother/son dynamic directly as it exists between the two characters. Most directly, we are given Anna Semyonovna's letter to Viktor that she wrote to him from behind the ghetto walls where she is imprisoned shortly before her death. Nevertheless, the bond is pervasive throughout the entire narrative thread concerning Viktor and his family, friends, and work life. In fact, Viktor's whole narrative is very nearly framed by his mother in a way that shows the direction of Grossman's arc in relation to identity within his larger philosophy. We note first that this narrative—the central one of *Life and Fate*—does not start until after several fewer central storylines have well-established themselves.[69] When Viktor is finally introduced, it is initially not on his own terms, but through his wife's lens. Our first introduction comes by way of her reflecting that, "[b]y the time Viktor Pavlovich sat down to breakfast, the teapot would long since have cooled down, and [she, Lyudmila] would have to heat it up again" (789). The reader's first, brief introduction to Viktor is then fleshed out only slightly more by a few short domestic vignettes that are likewise depicted through the perspective of his wife Lyudmila. The tone is one of estrangement, not only from his wife but also from his teenaged daughter Nadya; the only family member with whom Viktor

[69] These are, in order of appearance, the narrative threads concerning Mostovskoy and the German concentration camp, and the battle of Stalingrad, in particular, Krymov.

seems to be coexisting in relative harmony is his mother-in-law Alexandra Vladimirovna. Immediately following appears Viktor's mother's letter to him from the ghetto in which she has been imprisoned prior to her imminent murder. As discussed elsewhere, this letter details Anna Semyonovna's reflections about the recent events in her life, all addressed in unequivocally affectionate terms to her son. By its nature, it too poses to the reader a view of the novel's protagonist that is through the filter of another character. Thus, from the first, Viktor is presented simultaneously in two positions that are apparently at odds with one another. For one, he is a figure embedded in other lives and threads, as represented on the level of content through the narrative strokes tracing family involvement and via the broad structuring of the text that positions him as one of several lines of interest in Grossman's overall story. At the same time, Viktor is shown to the reader through a guise of double separation. First, for all his undeniable domestic enmeshment with Lyudmila and Nadya, Viktor is essentially estranged from his family. On top of that, he is separated—literally—from his mother. This tension between the two forces of separation/atomization and embeddedness/engagement will characterize Viktor's trajectory from here on out with an overall trend that signals Grossman's philosophical leaning.

Nowhere does Viktor's grappling with identity play out more fully than in his scientific work. Indeed, in his first reflections after reading his mother's letter, he is already attuned to the political ends to which not only the results of scientific experimentation but even the theories that inform its practice may be put. The doubt he feels from this acknowledgement, compounded by a way of thinking that has already been conditioned not to entertain subversive viewpoints, haunts Viktor as he attempts unsuccessfully to pursue his work. An evening get together in Kazan ushers in a break from this anxiety and frustration, and the markers Grossman lays down in this scene to set off the circumstances that facilitate the fruition of Viktor's thought from those

that have arrested him to this point serve as guideposts to the reader as to where he is leading his protagonist's trajectory from his ethical position.

The breakthrough in Viktor's thinking that leads to "the most important scientific[70] discovery of his life" (1038) occurs at the end of two linked chapters relating the conversations and interactions at an informal salon hosted by his friend and colleague Sokolov. Grossman characteristically establishes the true subject—and emotional tenor—of the chapters by broaching them with a name.[71] Thus, from "Instead of going home from the Institute, Viktor heads to see to his new friend Karimov" (972), we glean that the following chapter is centered around friendship. Further, this opening line indicates movement; here is the first instance in the novel where we find Viktor moving away from the alienation that was so pronounced in his situation when we first met him toward friendly communion. And indeed, from there, the narrative moves not simply toward a coming together of friends in a spatial sense but, more important, in a shared investment in open conversation.[72] By playing off of one another's thoughts in a shared dynamic, each participant is able to establish his own orientation to the topics under consideration, to use the group to better hone his self.

4.7 "Names" Create Movement and Meaning

Moved forward by opposition and contrariness, the dynamic of shared individual expression carries over into the following chapter. This chapter begins by naming Marya

[70] The qualifier "scientific" implies the other, more important discoveries of another kind. As we see, these take the form of ethical considerations relating to the human condition. This is underscored structurally by the fact that Viktor's discovery occurs not even halfway through this narrative. We understand by this that the scientific discovery constitutes a pivot rather than a climax in the protagonist's narrative arc.

[71] When we are first introduced to Viktor, it is in the context of a chapter that begins, "Again there was no letter from Tolya…" (68). Unaware at this point even of who Tolya is, the reader is nevertheless tipped off to the fact that this chapter is about Lyudmila's preoccupation with an absent person—i.e., about anxiety and loss—rather than with her husband, Viktor. In the same vein, the "Vitya" that leads into Anna Semyonovna's letter to her son alerts us to the fact that what follows is a particularly intimate expression to her son. Grossman uses this technique extensively throughout *Life and Fate*, not only in those chapters relating to Viktor.

[72] Sokolov is the one member of the group who stands apart from and objects to this candor and free exchange.

Ivanovna, Sokolov's wife. Already we have glimpses of the emerging dynamic between her and Viktor, as we have noted that Viktor is suddenly highly attuned to her presence and attention to him; it is not until much later, however, after seeing their interaction evolve into a romantic relationship, that we grasp the significance of heading this chapter with Marya Ivanovna's name. That she is now the (paradoxically background) focal point signals the emotional movement from friendship to a deeper level of identification and intimacy. It is also in the context of this emotional tone that Viktor's crowning discovery comes to him. Her presence, though peripheral to the central, literary conversations that comprise the bulk of the chapter, infuses a deeper level of meaning to the already robust exchanges that are foregrounded. Indeed, Viktor's whole sense of orientation is swayed not only by the marked freedom with which his friends are engaging in conversation but also and equally by his identification with Marya Ivanovna's interests. Not unaware of his perspective's being shaped, Viktor considers "that he'd been behaving strangely in this argument: Madyarov had only just begun criticizing the State, and he himself began arguing with Madyarov; but when Sokolov attacked Madyarov, he had begun to criticize Sokolov" (979). That his altered sense of self from which position he argues is related to his subtle movement toward Marya Ivanovna is attested later by Madyarov, who, in an aside to the latter, notes that Viktor shared his thoughts of the evening only when she was present. That he has spoken as freely as he has on this occasion can only be due to the influence of his peers, as (later on in the same chapter) he reflects that during his student days he had been terrified into submissive approval of *Pravda* on the basis of his fellow students' likewise being tight-lipped as to their real opinions on any matters of substance. Under the influence of his present company, his sense of self has taken on an emboldened quality normally absent in his makeup.

In the course of a two-chapter arc (which is the extent of the narrative concerning Viktor and his circle in this section of the novel), the reader is taken from a movement toward togetherness to one leading back into the self. That this mutual movement back toward the discrete self is prompted by the conversation's veering into increasingly contentious and atomizing topics relating to ethnicity and political position is not problematic for Viktor, as his return to inner reflection happens naturally, is not related to the artificial circumscription his peers construct around themselves in their increasingly atomizing positions. For his part, he simply returns to himself in the solitude of walking home at the end of the night. In this way, Grossman establishes a basic, productive model of identity motion. (He also, by positioning the breakdown of the conversation along the lines of identity politics in its midst, presents us with what an unsuccessful model may look like and the reasons for its failure.) We glean from Viktor's reflection on his crowning discovery that for him the retreat back to himself alone constitutes not a defeat, but, rather, part of a cycle that has in this instance come to unusually rewarding fruition. From his perspective, some link adheres between "his words and the words of his friends [that] had been determined only by freedom, by bitter freedom" and the idea that comes to him alone—both in thought and in space (990). The connection with others has served as a kind of nourishment that aids in the fulfillment of purely individual thoughts. That these are unique thoughts in Viktor's individual mind is made more explicit when we next encounter Viktor, some 60 pages later, considering again the circumstances that led to his discovery. In addition to the math and knowledge of physics that are to be expected, Viktor reflects that also contributing to the unique circumstances that allowed his specific, individual mind to formulate a transformative theory are the "the sound of leaves, the light of the moon, millet porridge with milk, the drone of flames on the stove, snippets of melody, the barking of dogs, the Roman

Senate, Soviet Information Bureau bulletins, a hatred of slavery, and a love of pumpkin seeds" that also fill his head" (1040).

4.8 Personal Identity and the Fundamental Self

Here, as elsewhere, does Grossman construct the idea of a specific and infinite universe in the individual by reference to an assemblage of discrepant thoughts, experiences, tastes, preferences, facts, and opinions that exist in unprecedented and unique relation to one another in each human being. In the scene we analyzed in Kazan, the individual (Viktor) is intellectually fortified by communion with others and absorption of their perspectives. It is through openness to the absorption of others' perspectives that Viktor is able to tap into his most comprehensive, fundamental self—the true stuff of his identity, as opposed to the generic items on the questionnaire—in order to formulate the terms of his theory. This is an achievement and an important stage of the relationship between the two poles. It is also a relationship in which the advantage is unidirectional; the benefit to the one is made by the group without offering anything in return to the latter. It is also, however, only one movement in an endless swinging motion to and away from others. The fullness of this motion between self- and other-identification is an ethical good in its own right in Grossman's estimation; it is also, as we find, a good on the level of the narrative.

The scenes in which we find Viktor immediately following his scientific discovery indicate the problems that come with remaining with the model according to which one absorbs from (an)other(s) to one's own benefit. Already, this has been hinted at in the Kazan episode as underlying the intellectual atmosphere in the aftermath of which Viktor makes his discovery and is the current of budding affection for Marya Ivanovna, i.e., nascent concern for another. In fact, Viktor's scientific breakthrough results, in the scenes following it, in Viktor's increased

isolation. Most telling in this regard is his haunting concern that his mother would never know "what her son had just achieved" (1048). His emphasis here is on the discovery itself and, more than that, on his role in it; in other words, the concern here lies with the self and its products. This orientation only increases in the scenes that follow, to the point that, while acknowledging to himself his painful isolation, Viktor is forced to acknowledge to Sokolov that "'It may well be that the fault lies in my bad character; it gets worse every day. You aren't the only one to notice it—Lyudmila has noticed it too'" (1154). While seeking understanding and connection with friends and colleagues, Viktor's simultaneous point of departure and reference is his work and his feelings.

If Lyudmila's narrative speaks to the danger and ethically problematic position of total identification, at this point in his narrative, Viktor's increased emphasis on self, especially in the wake of something that he himself knows will have wide-reaching consequences, provides a cautionary counterpoint of the opposite tendency: His solipsism neither furthers his relationships nor provides him with any joy or comfort. Grossman holds its biggest implication in reserve, however, until Viktor's central crisis in the novel.

Viktor's narrative undergoes a seismic shift when favor shines upon him unexpectedly and, after much politically- and anti-Semitically-based dismissal of and bias against his work, Stalin himself calls Viktor at home to give his approval of it. Not surprisingly, nearly all of Viktor's relationships undergo significant changes as a result. Most significant of all, however, is the change in Viktor's relationship to himself. When he was being persecuted, he "felt strong. His helplessness was a source of strength at the same time" (1258). This former strength was based on personal conviction and sympathy, the true, deep parts of himself that enabled him to risk not only his job but his very freedom in order to stand up for reason over dogma, his

colleagues over political campaigns against them. Having received Stalin's phone call, however, Viktor "rejoice[s] in his triumph […] It [doesn't] matter to him that this happiness [is] so different from what he had experienced when he had been on trial, when it had seemed that his mother was standing there beside him. He no longer care[s] whether Madyarov ha[s] been arrested or whether Krymov ha[s] informed on him" (1427). No longer socially or professionally vulnerable, Viktor stands at his farthest from his peers, no longer feeling a moral relation to them or sympathy for their position. Most telling is his willingness to be spiritually distant from his mother. Viktor's apparent movement toward his own individual identity of superiority is deceptive, however. In fact, at this point he has actually collapsed into identification with another, no less than Stalin himself. This is true to such an extent that, filtering his identity through Stalin's approval, and "[i]nvoluntarily, everything that had happened beg[ins] to seem normal and natural. His new life [is] the rule […] It was his past life that began to seem the exception, and slowly he [is beginning] to separate himself from it" (1470). The fact that, even as Viktor loses his ability to identify with others and incorporate regard of them in his moral sense, he likewise loses his individual sense of identity is significant. Grossman thus demonstrates his view that the two poles are mutually dependent—that the one does not exist without the other. The tragedy of this simultaneous loss plays out in Viktor's capitulation to his Institute's request (i.e., demand) that he add his signature as a senior Soviet scientist to a letter denouncing foreign press accusations of human rights violations under Stalin. In particular, the letter refutes the details of a fictionalized version of the anti-Semitic Doctors' plot. No longer under the moral command of any kind of compass beyond the blind demands of the state, Viktor is "paralyzed, not by fear, but by something much different, an exhausted, obedient feeling" (1485).

The complete erasure of all identity that comes from getting stuck at one pole—whether solipsism or loss of self in another—then, is a moral problem; it is in this state that one loses one's sense as a human being and, therefore, behaves contrary to the free human impulses that are at the heart of Grossman's concern. Thus, even as the movement between the identity of the individual self and that of the group represents the natural free movement of the human being and enacts, therefore, Grossman's ethical good, its cessation signals the dual moral problem of stalled humanity and the inhuman(e) attendant choices that go with being halted.

Finally, in the psychological aftermath of Viktor's choice to sign the letter, Grossman indicates his conception of the most productive and ethical model of movement between the two poles he conceives as being the structure for movement around identity. It is, crucially, a model that is based not on intellectual concerns and outcomes, as we saw to be the dominant force in the relational movements leading up to Viktor's scientific discovery; it is, rather, based on ethics. In Viktor's final scene, it occurs to him that he "still ha[s] the strength to lift up his head, to remain his mother's son" (1489). So it is that from his identification with his mother in the beginning, we find him at the end of his narrative once again considering himself in relation to his first moral compass. He reflects further that "[e]very day, every hour, year in, year out, he must fight for the right to call himself a man […] And if in some terrible time a desperate hour comes, a man must not be afraid of death; he must not be afraid of he wants to remain a man" (1490). Part of being "his mother's son," then, means precisely being his own person, his own individual with a "pure and kind" center of self. And then, as his final thought in the novel, he considers: "'Maybe I do have enough strength. Mama, mama, your strength'" (1490). And so, he has immediately moved back to a reference point in another—his mother—as that which will undergird that very center of self. That center, as Grossman makes explicit, is not an end in itself;

rather, it is an ethical being cum agent. Insofar as it can draw sustenance from its openness to others' ethical beings, it may respond in kind.

As such, an identity—specifically as an ethical being—is never wholly distinct., but, on the contrary, is always susceptible. Conversely, it asserts itself in the behaviors one takes, ideas one espouses, and so forth. This back and forth is endlessly recursive, both as a free, human experience and as mechanism for moral behavior. We see, finally, that, while Grossman's ethical measure is the individual, he considers their value in a relational network of many individuals. Endlessly penetrating and absorbing, identity is a process between discrete, porous human beings that is dynamic in the way only free, living things can be.

Chapter Five: The Thematics of Science: Superficial and Deep

5.1 Science: Bridging the Conceptual with the Concrete

This chapter departs somewhat from the model demonstrated elsewhere in this project, that is, discrete explorations of ways in which Grossman adopts the movement of human interior lived experience in the structure of his writing in order to express his philosophy of the ultimate value of the individual human life. While still addressing that project, it steps aside as an excursus to view in detail one of the primary topical ways by which Vasily Grossman addressed his philosophical concerns. It considers his focus on the topic of science (as defined in several ways) as a vehicle by which he could speak to the moral questions that engaged him as well as explore in detail the nature of the free thought that characterizes the individual. Further, he uses science to highlight the incompatibility of this thought with ideology-based models. Important to the coherence and enriched meaning of his writing, the topic of science allows Grossman to bridge the free movement of the human psychological experience (the conceptual) that is his principle focus with its products (the concrete) to demonstrate an ethical model that is based on the movement of sharing and exchange rather than right and wrong. Along the way, we will also see several ways in which modern physics serves as a metaphor for several key aspects of Grossman's thought.

Given Grossman's formal training in a scientific discipline (chemical engineering), it stands to reason that he was well primed by his personal and early professional life to incorporate scientific topics into his literary writing. Indeed, we find Grossman employ them in his mature writing not only insofar as they are part of certain characters' professions but also as important motifs and vehicles to engage with larger philosophical concerns. While his considerable scientific exposure may well have provided material on which to draw, however, Grossman's

interest in the field of science is far from straightforwardly based on biography. What follows will explore the writer's relationship to science both in terms of how it shaped his thinking as a young man coming into his own and ultimately served as a tool to express and grapple with his developed ideas in his writing.

In December 1929, after over six years of study, Grossman graduated with a degree from the Chemistry Department of Moscow State University. The delay in his graduation was occasioned by his shifting interests, which increasingly moved from the hard sciences to "social issues" (Popoff 38). Whether this shift had more to do with a pull toward more directly human concerns or with a growing realization that he was not suited to a life of science is vague; most likely, it was a combination of the two. In any case, in a letter written to his father in 1927, Grossman writes frankly that he "'[d]efinitely [...] won't become a brilliant scientist. [...to become] a chemist—a driving force behind science, an explorer—it seems I'm not made for this'" (38). This acknowledgement is significant beyond the influence it had on his change in career paths. Grossman may or may not have had a scientifically inclined mind, but, whatever the case, he did not perceive himself has having one. In his writing, then, scientific matters are not explored as topics in their own right; rather, they are approached from a perspective that is interested in them as topics of philosophical consideration. Congruent with Grossman's shift from the hard sciences to social issues, then, is a shift in his perspectival orientation from that of a scientist to that of one concerned with the philosophy of science. It is from this position that Grossman incorporates science into his work.

This philosophical approach did not, however, emerge immediately from the abandonment of scientific pursuit; instead, at the crossroads to his professional life that characterized his graduation from college, something closer to an either/or approach to science

versus other pursuits appears to have dominated. In a letter to his father dated April 10, 1929, on the eve of his graduation, Grossman laments the fact that he has not yet "discovered [a great] cause" that he can serve, a necessary component of life in his view (trans, Popoff 49). The world of science in which he had immersed himself, then, did not present itself to him as a sufficient cause to which he could devote himself. Writing, of course, emerged over the next several years as the cause to which Grossman would devote his life, but even having established himself along this trajectory, his thought remained comparatively undeveloped and fairly evenly in line with the political demands of his time. It is only as his thinking matured that Grossman came to incorporate back into his work the scientific interests that had never ceased to interest him and toward which he "felt nostalgic […] for the rest of his life" (Garrard and Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev* 76). Having kept up with scientific advances, Grossman was, in his mature period, able to fuse his early interests into an increasingly robust philosophical framework that benefited from its inclusion. In what way, though, did Grossman's ideas about the philosophy of science inform his writing? Just as his relationship with science itself was not straightforward, so too do we find the way he makes use of it in his philosophy to be multi-faceted. It is to consideration of the principle approaches and uses Grossman puts his philosophy of science that we now turn.

5.2 The Problematic Nature of Technology

That aspect of Grossman's treatment of science that is most readily apparent concerns his exploration of the ways in which it is problematic. This most often is concerned with the technology that is the product of scientific ventures. In its most benign aspect, the problem takes the form of missing the point. Considering the new world of "skyscrapers, factories, and nuclear reactors," (35) toward the end of *Everything Flows*, the protagonist Ivan Grigoryevich concludes that "'Everything inhuman is senseless and useless'" (36). For Grossman and his protagonist

narrator, not only the central, but even the only concern is—absolutely—free, individual life. As such, the scientific enterprises that are meant to exalt, protect, and render more comfortable this life are, in fact, at best distractions from and at worst fetters on the essence of that life. As all this technologically undergirded infrastructure of modern life "will disappear," investing in it takes away from the proper focus on lived human experience. (35). Implicit in this is, further, the idea that, whereas technology purports to support and elevate human existence, in fact, in focusing on it, human beings come to serve it instead. It is unclear what an ideal technological environment for human beings would look like for Grossman, but it is clear that in its modern state it often[73] represents to him a wedge between human life and its free, open existence. Related to this is the kind of interference science in general may run against true human experience as suggested in a short story Grossman wrote in 1960-61, "From the Window of a Bus" («Из окна автобуса»). In this brief sketch, a guide takes a group of scientists from the Academy of Sciences on a bus tour around the area where they are taking their holiday. Along the way, he takes questions and describes features of the locale and its history. Troubled that one excursionist remains aloof from the rest and neither asks the guide questions nor appears to listen to his explanations, the guide is surprised when, a few days later, the remote scientist approaches him, thanking him "with his whole heart" for the tour (1). The guide asks the scientist why he is thanking him given that he did not ask any questions during the tour and did not even appear to be interested in it. In the concluding lines of the story, the scientist refers to the guide's assistance in helping him "to answer the most important question" (1). But, he clarifies, he did not in fact listen to the guide's explanations. "After all, I am a guide on this bus," the scientist explains, indicating the world in general, and "we guides are not very necessary. It seems we even get in the way" (1). Thus, the

[73] This qualifier should be emphasized as, as we shall see later, this is not always the case for Grossman.

answer to the ultimate question of life is not to be found in scientific (or other) explanations that may attempt to impose themselves as a guide or key to understanding. Rather, it may be found in the pure experience of being absolutely present in the moment, in the world, where it may come about—as happens during the idyllic tour itself—that the soul becomes "immersed in a depth greater than that into which an interstellar spaceship can penetrate" (1). In other words, however great the understanding that science may allow for, it stands as nothing compared to the profundity of simple, engaged human sentience. Moreover, attempts to impose a scientific (or other rational) understanding on this experience only interferes with its full realization. So it is that from several angles Grossman problematizes science as being potentially intrusive on the subject of his concern. If in his writing science may stand in the position of a problematic nuisance, however, it may also take on far more menacing aspects—once again, most often conceived as being related to the field in its technological manifestations.

In broad terms, the opening of *Life and Fate* may appear to be a critique of scientific "progress" in modern life—perhaps even of the entire enterprise of science in general.[74] The novel begins with reference to some of the characteristic technologies of modernity—automobiles, "high voltage cables," trains and the tracks on which they run—sketching not only their existence but also their full sensory impact on the world with reference to visual, auditory, and olfactory impressions they occasion (*Жизнь и судьба* 743). Grossman immediately imbues these technologies with meaning. The world under this technologically-dominated order is one of straight lines and grids. In short order, the reader comes to appreciate how antithetical this regularity and mathematical precision are to Grossman's absolute emphasis on that which is

[74] In his critique of modern technology as vehicle for the mass destruction of human life in the 20th century, Grossman finds parallels with thinkers including Max Horkheimer, Zygmunt Bauman, and Theodor Adorno (Maier 812).

human and, in a more muted sense, on that which is simply alive. Moreover, by virtue of their being at odds with life, these technologies have “cut” (расскеавших) their way into the earth, the autumn sky and the mist; in other words, they are a violence on everything they encounter. Most damning of all is the object in service of which they all exist in this unnamed space—a concentration camp. In fact, Grossman’s distrust of technology on the basis of the uses to which it is put in his contemporary world date to his writing on the Treblinka extermination camp, where “the […] executioner’s block was no ordinary executioner’s block. It was a conveyor-belt executioner’s block that ran according to the same principles as any contemporary large-scale production. It was a real industrial plant” (“The Hell of Treblinka” 2). His apprehension finds further expression throughout *Life and Fate*, as he reflects that the large-scale and uniquely inhumane and horrific operations that savage modern life are made possible only by virtue of modern technology. This is most starkly apparent in his description of the gulag camps, which are “profoundly unnatural” (*Жизнь и Субьба* 882). Despite the fact that “hundreds of square kilometers of taiga l[ie] frozen in icy silence,” they are artificially brought to a grinding and intolerable kind of life by way of the whole technological apparatus that makes contemporary existence in general possible. Likewise, as Ivan Grigoryevich reflects in *Everything Flows*—considering the modern torture techniques he endured—whereas “[t]he death penalty began with a club that smashed your skull and a hemp rope [,] nowadays […] an executioner just turns on the master switch and does away with a hundred, or a thousand, or ten thousand people” (36). In describing Obersturmbannfuhrer Liss’s tour of a death camp under construction, Grossman explores the problematic relationship of technology to humanity in greater detail. Liss’s first, preliminary trip is to the engineering firm that is to supply the camp’s equipment. Here we read about a “cost estimate” (1155) and a day that leaves Liss “exhausted” (1155). Next, at Liss’s trip

to the chemical factory that is to supply the gases by which people will be killed, we learn of his "disappointment [that] production had reached only just over 40 percent of the planned chemical."[75] The cut and dry details involved in the construction of the place where multitudes of human beings are to be killed speak not only to the ability of the technology to kill but, what is more, to its singular ability to efface any consideration of that which is human, including the acknowledgement that the beings to which it is being applied are, in fact, such. As if seeing this understanding to its extreme conclusion, the engineers, chemists, and architects of the extermination camp who accompany Liss into the gas chamber itself have "moments when they fe[el] the chamber no longer obeys its creators but has come to life, living by its own concrete will, its own concrete rapacity, and will soon begin to secrete toxins, masticating with its steel jaws, and to digest" (1159). At least sensing the inhuman essence of the technology they have harnessed to their own inhuman ends, the perpetrators themselves fear its terrifying inconsideration of that which is human. In a similar vein, technology, in the absence of (human) art, denies human overtures or attempts at impression. Having learned that the previous "'fascination with the mystical side of the architectural design of the camps" vexed Hitler, we find that "the interior of the [new] concrete chamber correspond[s] perfectly to the epoch of the industry of large masses and speeds" (1157-58). Where efficiency and exactitude are of the essence, the technology of scientific innovation will always prevail, but always at the expense of human input. In expressing this doubt about the uses of applied science, Grossman's thought is in keeping with a common trend amongst Western European intellectuals in the wake of World

[75] It seems possible that Grossman's high degree of attunement to the potentially devastating uses to which technology can be put may to some degree be rooted in his own personal education and training. As a chemist, Grossman must have been keenly aware of the perversion of his field toward the end of eliminating his entire ethnic group.

War I that saw devastation rather than progress as the outcome of their technology (Kojevnikov 116).

5.3 The Contradictory Roles of Modern Technology

It is this same awesome capacity that is inherent in modern technology, however, that allows also for the defense and preservation of that which is most valuable—human beings.[76] Following on the narrative about Liss's bureaucratic tours—including that to the new extermination camp and the factories that will supply it—and an excursus on anti-Semitism as a general phenomenon, Grossman begins a new thread with reference to the movement of Red Army units up to the front. Once again there is reference to railway tracks and the trains that run along them carrying human cargo. In this instance, however, it is the soldiers, not victims, who are being transported not to camps in order to be killed, but rather to a growing concentration along the Don as part of the effort to encircle the Germans' 6th Army. Grossman is thereby able to link ideas and their specific relationship to one another through the way he structures the episodic narratives of his text.[77] We are presented with an idea—anti-Semitism (and, by implication, the overarching ideology that embraces it)—that is bookended by two active responses to it, both made possible and supported by technology. The industrial murder of Jews by the regime that promotes anti-Semitism may be challenged only by a comparably technologically outfitted foe—the military strength of the Red Army. The two forces clash in the text as in the reality the prose represents. In positioning them as he does, Grossman quietly lauds

[76] While Grossman focuses throughout the novel on the hard sciences and engineering as well as their industrial applications (particularly those used in war), he also nods throughout to the salutary effects of the medical sciences in promoting human wellbeing. So, for example, on pp. 211-12, Grossman presents a folkloric description of how one village woman is apparently cured of her infertility through being struck by lightning, and has the character who is relating this story add, "'That's what they say—but she did have an operation last year;'" i.e., modern medicine has solved an affliction hindering not only a good quality of life but even life itself.
[77] This is a technique he employs extensively throughout both *Life and Fate* and *Everything Flows*.

the capabilities of modern technology as a force for protection of that very human freedom that is central to his values.[78]

Thus, for Grossman, science—at least in its technological manifestations—may be simultaneously a good and a bad thing. What is more, these qualities of positive and negative coexist not by considering different fundamental aspects of the technology itself, but rather by looking at the same characteristic—the capacity to kill—from the two opposed perspectives of seeing aggressive and defensive violence. At this point, we may take a step back and see how, outside of the narrative itself, Grossman uses his reflections on science to construct a modality that is highly productive for him in general[79] and that reflects key features of his philosophy. Here is an example of Grossman's favoring the dynamic of contradiction that we see recur throughout his mature period. We shall examine this feature of his writing in greater depth in a subsequent chapter; here, it is worth noting the prominent position he accords technology in giving form to this concept of sustaining mutually opposed positions, as he regularly flips back and forth throughout *Life and Fate* between the destructive apparatuses that support the Nazi program and the defensive machinery and infrastructure that allows for the Red Army defense.

Viktor Shtrum's narrative synthesizes the two oppositions—the good and the bad of science—in a way that highlights how Grossman's engagement with science foregrounds the human being as a moral being. The process of Viktor's work itself, further, reinforces the

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[78] Even so, it is worth noting that this positive attitude toward technology is contingent. In one of the most gripping narratives of *Life and Fate*, Grossman traces the heroism of House 6/1 after it has been cut off completely from any technological reinforcements or aid, including its wireless set. This house, against all odds, stands alone against the Germans at a strategic point right in the heart of the Stalingrad front, and, despite surviving "for some time on a cache of potatoes they'd found in the cellar [and drinking] the water from the central heating system," the men fighting within it "[give] the Germans such a hard time that [send] an envoy with an offer of free passage […]" (253). Grossman depicts these men as possessing a kind of rare virtue of free, untamed will and ingenuity, which are the qualities that enable them to hold out against the enemy for far longer than seems possible. Thus, while it is the behemoth of technology that alone can support victory in the war, Grossman makes it clear that at the center of the entire war effort are the people who carry it out, with or without technological assistance.

[79] As we will see in a later chapter

centrality of the human being simply as such. In order to understand how Grossman goes about accomplishing these things, we shift from the above consideration of his concerns with the way in which science may remove the human being from consideration as an object and instead move now to an examination of how he treats human beings as subjects in relation to science. In the Viktor's laboratory, Grossman's protagonist is one of two theoretical workers (along with his friend and colleague Sokolov, a mathematician) and is the only theoretical physicist. This choice of profession for his lead character is hardly a coincidence. In making Viktor Shtrum a theoretical physicist, Grossman is able to posit the uniquely human (pure intellect) in relation to its antithesis, the cold matter of the universe. He had done so before, as far back as in his early novel *Stepan Kolchugin*, in which the character modeled on himself is distressed by having learned "that the universe was infinite in space and time; that everything in it was doomed to destruction; that human aspirations, thoughts, emotions, all of people's joys and sorrows were hollow and pointless in the limitlessness of light years […] that human existence had no purpose and meaning" (trans, Popoff 29-30). The relationship between the human sphere and the universe (specifically as it is conceived in scientific terms) is one of separation, in which not only is the character of the one and other radically different, but the two are at complete odds with one another.[80] In describing Viktor's work, however, Grossman explores the possible exaltation of the human being in probing the nature of the material universe he microscopically occupies.

At the time we are introduced to Viktor, his work is going poorly. His laboratory has conducted a series of experiments that have yielded empirical results that are at odds with the

[80] This relation of human to universe finds an echo in *Life and Fate* in Lyudmila's anxiety about whether her son Seryozha is alive or dead: "Once, when she was still studying in the Maths and Physics department, she had worked doing calculations at the Astronomical Institute. She had learned then that meteors move in showers and meet the earth in different months. […] She no longer remembered which meteors reached the earth in October and November…But let Tolya be alive!" (847-48).

theoretical work he is engaged in based on the classically accepted model of the behavior of atoms. Unwilling to consider rejecting the classical theory, as it was itself born of considering experimental data, Viktor tries futilely to patch it up in order to reconcile what is conceived with what is seen. At the most unexpected moment, however, Viktor experiences a breakthrough that overturns all previous ways of thinking such that the old theory becomes subsumed as a particular instance within his new, comprehensive theory. As Viktor characterizes it, his discovery "had arisen on its own from the free play of thought" (1039). In constructing this frustrating state of affairs and its positive resolution, Grossman signals to the reader several features that are important for his thinking. First, we see that science constitutes for Grossman a prime area for the expression of free human thought. Next, we see how the enterprise of science is inherently generative. As the original theory from which Viktor initially works is eventually understood to be valid but only as a particular instance within a larger framework, it emerges that the movement of thought is toward greater and broader insight: understanding in one area leads to progressively greater and more comprehensive understanding. The process is potentially endless. This idea of motion works both on its own terms and as a metaphor for the nature of human thought and insight more generally.

5.4 Art and Science as Generators of Meaning

As it suggests, both the endless horizons for understanding and, conversely, the endlessness of that which is not understood, scientific pursuit both allows for the expression of the human impulse toward understanding and models the nature of the human experience of understanding in its broadest terms. It is a model of endless expansion and endlessly shifting perspective that may be applied to the self just as to the physical world. When considered in this way, Viktor's sympathetic mentor Chepyzhin may assert that "'[s]cientific discoveries have an

inestimable value in themselves! They do more to perfection man than steam boilers, turbines, aviation, and all the metallurgy from Noah to the present day. They perfect the soul! The soul!" (1351). Thus, abstract science for Grossman finds parallels with his conception of art as sphere of thinking that both fosters the human inclination toward expansion and also models the nature of this human expansion through its process.

In a related vein, Viktor's work process signals yet another aspect of Grossman's thought, namely the way in which, as art, science is a uniquely human activity that produces meaning. While science, unlike art, is rooted in objectivity, the ability of the scientist to discover meaning where previously there had been sheer facts, to make light out of darkness, marks his field as one that is supremely human. In his reflections on how his discovery came about, Viktor notes that "[t]he logic of this theory, its chain of reasoning, was quite unconnected to the experiments Markov conducted in the laboratory"[81] (1039). Further, he considers that "[t]he experiments had been an external impetus that had forced him to think. But they had not determined the content of his thoughts" (1040). As a theoretical physicist, Viktor is engaged in the most abstract area of the broad field of science and is, therefore, able to go beyond seeing and recognizing (the experimental side of his laboratory's work) to understanding and conceiving meaning.[82] He is able to translate a set of observations into an array of relationships that not

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[81] Chief experimental physicist in Viktor's laboratory.
[82] It is worth noting that in his comparisons between the different kinds of workers in Viktor's lab, Grossman evinces a tendency toward hierarchization of human value that is not to be found elsewhere in his mature work. While Viktor himself concedes that, while his "new explanation had been born from his own head […] it was in fact linked to Markov's experiments [;…] if there were no atoms and atomic nuclei in the world, there would be none inside a man's brain […] and if it weren't for those famous glass-blowers the Petushkovs, if there were no power stations, no furnaces and no production of pure reactors, there would be no mathematics inside the head of a theoretical physicist that could predict reality," it is he alone who is able to crown these necessary components with cohesion and meaning. (1041) Since the ultimate value here for Grossman lies in the human capacity for generating meaning, Viktor, with his ability to theorize, is positioned highest relative to a supporting cast of scientists and technicians. In the same vein, whereas his experimental colleague Markov was previously wary of theoretical physicists, complaining that their lab needed more technicians and fewer researchers, after Viktor's discovery, he concedes his error, as though acknowledging the supreme value in meaning over supporting structures.

merely describes but, more important, comprehends. Insofar as the ability to find meaning is a uniquely and evolving human ability, Grossman exalts those endeavors that facilitate it, the more so as that meaning is grounded less in reified strata and more in the pure realm of free human thought. Once again, we discover Grossman's emphasis on a recursive motion of thought informing thought in an endless movement that is not stifled by the mundane limitations of material or artifice.

So, we have seen how for Grossman science plays an important and active role in helping human beings realize their full capacity for free thought, insight, and producing meaning. Understanding the importance of these capacities for him as pieces of his broader philosophy, we see how Grossman interweaves scientific concerns and processes into his writing to highlight these aspects. He thereby underscores important components of his thinking on the human being as such as being the paramount subject of concern.

5.5 Soviet Ideology and Science

Viktor's work also allows Grossman to examine the relationship between free thought and the strictures of ideology, and, in particular, the dynamic when the latter attempts to impose itself on the former. Having expected his discovery to be admired by a small but important group of theoretical physicists, Viktor is excited to discover that it is being taken up well beyond this circle; simultaneously, however, he finds it increasingly under attack for being too "idealistic," too "Talmudic," essentially for being too abstract. These collegial criticisms represent the Party line with regard to science as it was worked out from the inception of the Soviet State. In the 19th century, Marxist theory asserted that "science, including the most abstract concepts of mathematic, was as much a human activity as other forms of knowledge and had its origin in human life and needs" (Kojevnikov 125). Following this premise further, in 1918 philosopher

Aleksandr Bogdanov wrote a brochure—*Socialism of Science*—that introduced the idea "social constructivism," an idea according to which "science […] reflected the needs and concerns of society, not merely the natural world." It was because of this connection that, with the loss of the bourgeois class as a progressive force in the 19th century, science became increasingly abstract, "pure," and remote from the masses. It was the goal of social constructivism to rectify this trend and establish scientific efforts firmly on ground compatible with emerging Soviet ideological needs, specifically the Leninist scheme of dialectical materialism. Pure science was even frivolous, as science could be worthy only insofar as it had—at least in the long term—some practical use (Kojevnikov 121). Moreover, physical idealism, as the Soviet philosophers dubbed the new physics that was not rooted in Newtonian laws, was a potentially dangerous phenomenon standing in opposition to Marxist theory. Most dangerous were its disregard for physical necessity; its dismissal of causality (in the case of quantum theory); and its emphasis placed on the subjective individual observer (in both quantum theory and relativity). In other words, the new science was dangerous for official ideology precisely on those grounds that are close to the heart of Grossman's philosophy. For Grossman, the names Einstein and Planck become a kind of shorthand, a double metonym—first for the theories they established (the former, relativity; the latter, quantum) and second for the free, undirected qualities that are fundamental to them.[83] Indeed, he sprinkles these (and other contemporary scientists') names liberally throughout *Life and Fate* not simply to cite important persons but even to obliquely reassert to his reader his philosophical position.

[83] In the same way, the names Hitler and Wei function as a shorthand for totalitarianism and the qualities of that ideology. (Note that Grossman favors using the former's name in *Life and Fate*, whereas in *Everything Flows* he emphasizes the latter.)

Thus Viktor, the individual scientist who makes a discovery that is not rooted in the physical observation of *x* leading to *y*, but, rather, "aris[es] on its own from the free play of thought," is not simply engaged in a conflict with colleagues who are hostile to his work because it is too abstract for their taste (*Жизнь и судьба* 1039). On the contrary, the entire narrative thread concerning this struggle constitutes Grossman's pitting the freedom of noncontingent individual thought against the strictures of an ideology that would make it fit into a particular mold.[84] Disabused of his initial belief that his work would be simply well-received and his status as an important scientist secured, Viktor refuses to capitulate to the colleagues and bureaucracy (and, implicitly, embracing all of that, the State's official ideology) that attempt to discredit what he has achieved. The fact that he persists in the face of adversity is, not surprisingly, a virtue in the protagonist's narrative. It is the fact that his free discovery *must* triumph over the politically motivated forces that seek to hinder it or at least make it conform to their terms, however, that stands supreme in Grossman's ethical conception. Viktor's work stands on its own and ultimately wins out over its adversaries precisely because it has to, because it is the truth. However much an ideological program may wish to alter things to accord with its precepts, it is the truth that comes from free thought that stands the test of both assault and time.[85] Grossman is able to make this argument particularly effectively by constructing a narrative around abstract physics because the discipline is objectively verifiable and cannot be made to bend to social requirements or desires.

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[84] Insofar as abstract science is disparagingly associated with Judaism—Viktor is seen as guilty of "drawing physicists into Talmudic abstraction," (1266) e.g., and one of his colleagues says that his work "stinks of Judaism" (1246)—Grossman is also positing identity politics against the pure thought of the individual person.

[85] Grossman characteristically expresses a thought multiple times in different contexts, across different (and even discrepant) narratives. He takes of this idea of the individual genius as a bearer of unshakeable truth, e.g., in Lieutenant Bach's narrative, where the German soldier imagines himself countering the brute dogma of his fellows, saying "'Even throwing out Einstein, you won't take his place. Yes, Einstein is of course a Jew, but—be so kind as to forgive me—he's a genius. There's no power in the world that could enable you to take his place'" (1064-65).

Grossman has more to say about the (potential) uses of Viktor's work in a practical arena. While, as we saw above, he critiques ideological demands for free thought to conform to its practical requirements, he simultaneously considers the natural practical development of those thoughts on its own terms. As we discover, the simple movement of idea to product does not constitute a problem for him and is, in fact, valuable. While he uses Viktor's scientific narrative to express these views, it is clear that they are not limited to the scientific sphere.

Viktor's work triumphs (at least within the scope of the novel) not on its own merits alone. Rather, it is because of a direct call to him from Stalin himself that Viktor is able to proceed unopposed from then on. The sole reason for this call is that Viktor's work has potentially significant practical application in an area that is of great interest to the State: nuclear armament. As a result of it, whereas Viktor had only recently been on the verge of losing his job for both refusing to repent of his "abstract" position and for going so far as to critique the legitimacy of State-sanctioned science, he is now able to work secure in his position at the institute; where previously his colleagues had been at best distant and at worst derogatory, they are now solicitous and obliging. In setting up this second scenario, Grossman constructs a space in the text that allows him to examine the relationship between the cognitive movements inherent to the living self and those products that proceed from it. He shows that, just as science itself does not assign qualitative designations to phenomena, so too is it the simple fact of expressing these interior thoughts in a further movement of development itself—not a judgement on whether that expression is good or bad—that constitutes a value.

In Grossman's work generally, those scientists who are not motivated by vanity, fame, or political interest are shown to have a noble, almost spiritual commitment to their field.[86] As cited

[86] Even this division is not cut and dry, as shown, e.g., in Viktor's wounded pride over the fact that his discovery does not merit him a greater food ration than his colleague Sokolov.

above, Cheypzhin believes it “perfect[s] the human soul;” so, too, does Viktor believe that his discovery is not “a matter of originality…[But rather] it is bread, bread, black bread” (1044). In addition to the ennoblement of what it means to be a human, however, Viktor’s scientific motivation is governed by pleasure. From our first introduction to him as both a character and a scientist, we learn of his view that “no one in the world could be happier than a scientist…” (800). The war has opened his eyes to an awareness that the fruits of scientific labor may be put to grave misuse; he reflects that “[t]he century of Einstein and Planck was also the century of Hitler” (812). Nevertheless, science for Viktor is a matter of exhilarating exploration and expression. As considered above, Viktor’s engagement with his field is based on the compulsion toward deeper and broader understanding, a goal that in itself is shown to be positive, both by Viktor and by Grossman himself. What is never stated explicitly yet is increasingly and readily apparent, however, is the fact that Viktor’s work, which concerns the laws governing the splitting of atoms, will be instrumental in the development of a nuclear weapon. This view is finally confirmed (though still never made explicit) when Stalin makes a direct call to Viktor’s home. Viktor himself never reflects on nor even acknowledges this practical reality of his work—indeed, he is glad simply to be able to work in peace as a result of Stalin’s expressed approbation. This opacity with regard to Viktor’s attitude contributes to the open-ended one the reader is encouraged to have with the possibility of his being instrumental in helping develop a nuclear bomb. Indeed, Grossman leaves the question open as to whether or not Viktor’s work represents a positive development in his moral sphere or, conversely, is a deviation therefrom. Both possibilities are supportable based on the text. In the negative column stands the fact that Viktor’s respected colleague Chepyzhin declines to work further in the field because he can foresee the uses to which his efforts will almost certainly be put. Backing this is the entire theme

discussed above that treats the modern application of scientific work as destructive of human life and pernicious to its ability to thrive. Conversely, we recall Grossman's promotion of technology as an effective means by which to defend oneself against the oppressive and destructive aspirations of others. Viktor himself says he has "an extraordinary feeling. I think our perseverance at Stalingrad is the perseverance of Newton, the perseverance of Einstein, that our victory on the Volga marks the triumph of Einstein's ideas […]"[87] (1137). Grossman does not seek to close off either possible interpretation and, in leaving the judgement open to the reader, encourages here—as all throughout his oeuvre—the reader's active participation in making moral assessments of complex issues. The two position may not, in fact, be mutually exclusive. Just as in quantum physics a subatomic particle behaves as both a particle and a wave, so too may a moral issue simultaneously occupy a position in two apparently opposing perspectives. It is because Grossman does not commit to a "correct" position on the question of the moral nature of Viktor's work that we are led to conclude that, aside from seeking to highlight the complex and even contradictory nature of many ethical questions, his primary interest in describing a theoretical physicist whose work will come to be used for nuclear technologies lies in another vein.

5.6 Ethics: The Abstract vs. the Concrete

It is hardly a coincidence that Grossman's protagonist is not only a scientist but a physicist, and not only a physicist but a theoretical one.[88] In designating Viktor as such, he creates a character whose professional life (and, presumably, temperament) represent pure,

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[87] Viktor likely intends this in two senses: 1) that the ideas developed by these pillars of physics have led to the military technology necessary to achieve victory; and 2) that the freedom of the physicists' ideas must necessarily triumph over the ideological rigidity and inertia of the enemy forces.

[88] One of the principle characters in *Everything Flows*, the protagonist's brother, e.g., is also a scientist, but his field is biology. There is, conspicuously, no exploration of the moral relationship between the thinking individual as such and the practical outcomes of his work in that narrative.

unmitigated thought. That is to say, Viktor exemplifies his creator's ultimate value of the free individual experience of the mind. In increasingly making the reader aware of the practical use to which those thoughts will likely be put, culminating in detailing Stalin's direct intercession to help bring them about, Grossman creates a link between the abstract (ideas) and the concrete (applied science), and it is this link itself that is his focus. This is not the link of official Soviet science, which saw the value of the former as being entirely determined by its contribution to a compelling latter. Rather, Grossman posits two scientific extremes—purely conceptual thought and the products devised on its basis, which have the most serious practical consequences for human life—to suggest elements that are apparently absolutely remote. He then shows that in fact they inevitably meet, for as Viktor cannot cease to think, so can he not control the movement of his work beyond himself.

In doing this, Grossman demonstrates that there is a relationship between the two that is itself ethical for him. The ethical position of this relationship is based on the continued flow from one kind of movement to another, an example of endless morphing in the unfolding of human (individual and collective) life. It is independent of the judgements one makes regarding a particular technology's legitimacy. Indeed, just as modern physics is a matter of description, not explanation, so too, when all is said and done, is it true for Grossman that meaning is found in presenting, not analyzing. Ideas have real-world corollaries most significantly as impressions made by free human life. Whether these impressions are positive or negative depends on the perspective of the individual—just as perception of objective facts and the state of reality itself are dependent on the individual observer, as outlined in the two major modern branches of physics described by Einstein and Planck, respectively. The basic moral value of realized intellectual thought, however, lies simply in its being a shared expression of free, abstract life

that gave rise to it and the further movement from there that continues onward. (It does not take much of a leap to see that for Grossman himself this translation of the pure into the practical expresses itself through writing.) Grossman does not dismiss the need to make moral decisions about how the products of thought should be used—as we saw above, he leaves the matter of nuclear armament open-ended as a prompt to the reader to consider the proper course to follow. He does, however, use Viktor's scientific trajectory to suggest that free intellectual movement itself takes on a life of its own that is neither good nor bad in a conventional sense but is, rather, part of the larger movement of living experience that is paramount to him.

Finally, Grossman's examination of the process of science from the mathematical calculations of an individual mind to the creation of a technology that will shape the whole of society throws into sharp relief that between the two extremes of the singular and the social there exists a relationship. This finds parallels in his exploration questions concerning identity. The self and the (collective) other are not unconnected, and it is in making impressions by way of the fruits of one's cogitations and being impressed upon by those of others that one's morality of reciprocally shared humanity becomes established. There is no "good" or "bad" in this sharing; it is the stuff of life itself. Just as everything scientifically considered is inextricably interconnected, so too is the individual person connected to a web of relationships and a broader society; just as the individual observer is the determinant in significant areas of modern physics, so too is it the individual who gives and extracts meaning from this repository of individual expressions.

Chapter Six: Pain Is a Generative Experience That Supports Movement Within Both Linear and Cyclical Constructs of Time

6.1 Pain: Its Evolution in Grossman's Works

As we have considered through a variety of lenses, process emerges as the dominant structural feature of Vasily Grossman's mature work. Process takes the form of potentially endless movement, both within the individual that is at the heart of his ethics and, in parallel, in the execution of the texts themselves. In this final chapter, we will explore how the elaboration of process as both technique and ethical statement is joined by increasing complexity in Grossman's prose. Specifically, we will examine the role of several key oppositions—relating to time and to pain—in his later works and how the complexity that is fostered by an ever-increasing openness in the writing itself results in an iterative interpolation of opposed forces. Finally, we will conclude by considering how the oppositions contribute to the emergence in Grossman's late works of an ultimate opposition concerning Fate that improbably not only sustains itself across his writing but even serves as the vehicle to most productively realize the writer's engagement with process.

As Grossman's work increases in complexity, so too does its incorporation of oppositional processes increase—and vice versa. It is enough to observe this general trend without having to consider each instance of this individually. For our purposes, it is relevant to delve into two key contradictory concepts, specifically those concerning Grossman's conception of and structuring of time. These are worthy of exploration on their own merit and, as we shall see, come together to support what is one of the most fascinating dynamics of Grossman's writing, i.e., his ultimate engagement with his concept of dogmatic Fate. Treating first one area

of interest (pain) and then the other (time) in order both to understand the evolution of Grossman's thought and what, specifically, comprises its content, we will turn then to the writer's final substantive work of fiction, *Everything Flows*, in order to see how the two areas synthesize to create a new view of Fate.

Let us begin by tracing Grossman's view of pain in human life.[89] Because for him pain is of interest primarily—though not exclusively—as a psychic experience (e.g., emotional, existential, or spiritual), this will be the emphasis we have in mind when using the word. With the writer's exploration of pain and what its meaning is for a human life, we discover a significant apparently contradictory feature of Grossman's mature writing and one that directly informs his ultimate attitude toward the ideologically based Fate he seems to reject absolutely. Grossman's evolving view of pain relates to his expanding conception of the human being and his likewise broadening view of the nature of the value inherent to that being, as we discussed in the first chapter. As the scope of human nature enlarges for Grossman, so too does he come to treat the role of pain in human existence in new, unexpectedly positive ways.

Prior to Grossman's expansion on what constitutes a human being and its value—i.e., through the period reflected in "The Hell of Treblinka—he never denies that pain has a valuable, even laudatory role in human life. During this period, however, the role of pain in human life is not ironically or contradictorily positioned in relation to the whole human being. According to the aforementioned essay, suffering functions as a kind of martyrdom and triumph over evil, as, at Treblinka, the blood spilled was that of "humanity dying yet conquering through its death" (2). This pain is not, however, characterized as being an inherent part of lived human experience; it is a splinter evoked by extreme circumstance, a fragment experienced under incredible duress. It is

[89] It may be worth noting that Grossman also shows an interest in the pain experienced by animals. Because that is beyond the scope of this project, however, it will not be considered here.

undeniably human—and therefore valuable in the face of that which is inhuman—but it is not characteristic of the vicissitudes of life. Rather, the pain of individual death and collective mass murder represents an overcoming of evil, a suffering that is goal-oriented in its stamping out of fascism. Grossman's oblique acknowledgement that "[i]n Treblinka […] it was far more terrible to be doomed to live than to be doomed to die," suggests his awareness of a kind of moving, living pain that does not function as a kind of specific climax in a battle of innocence and humanity against evil (4). That he does not speak further on this experience of the pain of the living suggests that it does not align with his conception of pain as valuable at this stage of his thinking; in other words, it lacks utility. At this point in Grossman's thinking, then, the value of pain is limited to its ability to serve as a tool that may be pitted against an opponent (such as an ideological regime).[90] Even his sketches of the individual terror and despair experienced by specific persons making their way to their deaths at the camp are calculated less to trace the intricacies of the human mind and more to posit a triumphant response against the inhumanity of mass murder. This teleological view of pain as the weapon of victims in a fight against tyranny finds its parallel in Grossman's explanation of his motive in writing his essay: "Even reading about this is infinitely difficult," Grossman writes. "[I]t is no less hard to write about it. Maybe someone will ask, 'Why write about it then? Why remember all this?' It is the writer's duty to tell the terrible truth, and it is the reader's civic duty to learn it. […] Anyone who has not learned the whole truth can never understand against what kind of monster our great and holy Red Army has entered into mortal combat" (3). In Grossman's conception of meaningful pain in "The Hell of Treblinka," then, the pain experienced by the dying has value based on its utility, specifically

[90] Grossman never completely abandons this notion of pain as valuable in its capacity to work as a practical tool. In *Life and Fate*, e.g., speaking of the German soldiers' encirclement at Stalingrad, he writes: "The torments of hunger, the nightly fears, the sense of impending doom slowly and gradually released the freedom in each man, which is to say that the process of humanizing people and the victory of life over non-life had begun" (1392).

as a tool against the unfeelingness of Nazism. Portraying this suffering—itself an act that entails experiencing pain and evoking the same response in the reader—is not only valuable but even necessary by virtue of its didactic function. Grossman thereby harnesses pain as the principle element of a pathetic argument in a rhetorical effort aimed against fascism. Ironically, it is here, in his general defense of a humanity that enlists its own extreme experience in a cause, that Grossman is most distant from the individual human being that is the ultimate value for him.

By the time he wrote "The Sistine Madonna," the meaning of pain had transformed from an experience with practical value to something still subtly goal-oriented. Here we see the Madonna and Christ child transformed into any young mother and her baby. In so doing, the value of suffering embodied in the Christian narrative the former pair embody is in some measure grafted onto the more pedestrian pain of the average human mother and child depicted in the essay—experiencing on behalf of all humanity the horrors of gas chambers, the Great Patriotic War in general, labor camps, collectivization, deportation, and the Great Terror, as well as anticipated future traumas such as a thermonuclear bomb. By way of making this association more explicit, Grossman peppers these passages of human suffering with iconographic imagery, as when "Fate [has nailed] a wooden cross over [the] windows [of the hut where the son was born]" and when, presumably in a labor camp, the son is "unable to remove [a] living, flickering halo [of midges] because his hands are busy holding up the damp heavy log on his shoulder" (2). So, it appears that in "The Sistine Madonna," Grossman conceives of human suffering as in some way being a kind of rite of purification in order to attain a higher level of experience or existence. It is not a divine experience or plane of being that he aims at achieving through human trauma and pain; nonetheless, the religious parallels he establishes between divine and mundane

suffering in this essay establish the latter on a goal-oriented footing in the same manner as the former.

Much as Christ's suffering offers redemption to benighted humanity, so in Grossman's conception does human suffering offer redemption to humanity itself, in all its misery, by attesting to the perseverance of that which is sensitive and human through all the unfeeling atrocities that befall mankind. There is no opponent so specific here as the fascism in "The Hell of Treblinka;" that said, pain continues to provide value to human life as a means of asserting this life itself. What is also still apparent is Grossman's focus on pain as a feature of human experience in general (and, therefore, in service of some general human goal) rather than on the lived experience of a specific individual's pain. Because the young mother and her son represent any and all people, all sense of particularity is absent.

In *Life and Fate*, Grossman removes the religious association, thereby removing much of the remaining teleological thrust of pain as a positive value that was still apparent in "The Sistine Madonna." Here, too, we see him shift to an emphasis on specific individuals who undergo painful experiences unique to themselves. In general, the experience of pain and what it means is much more nuanced and complex in the novel than in either of the essays, which is not surprising given the far greater length of and number of persons depicted in the former.

In *Life and Fate*, pain appears in many guises and is favorably conceived by Grossman for a variety of reasons. To highlight several of the ways in which Grossman positively characterizes suffering, we may consider Lyudmila's narrative as it relates to her loss of and fixation on her son Tolya. Grossman makes use of many of his characters' narratives to suggest the range of positive dimensions to human suffering; in selecting Lyudmila's for particular consideration, we are able to focus on specific qualities of his conception of beneficial pain.

Of significant importance, Lyudmila's suffering regarding first her uncertainty as to whether Tolya is alive or dead and then her grief upon having the latter case be confirmed demonstrates the potential for pain to expand one's capacity for empathy. On her way to find Tolya at a hospital in Saratov, Lyudmila finds herself aboard a steamer that is conspicuously divided between those who have means and connections and those who do not. A ship that had originally been designated for the officials' families returning to Moscow, it has, at the last minute, been made to accommodate average citizens and soldiers bound for Stalingrad, to the protests and recriminations of the "legitimate" passengers (850). The narrator notes that "Lyudmila found the calm eyes of these women [the entitled family members of those in positions of authority] unbearable. […] And yet Lyudmila herself, in her own fur stole and grey Astrakhan coat, was just like these first- and second-class passengers. And she too, not long before, had been furious that Viktor had not been given a ticket for a 'soft' coach" (850).

In other words, until her own recent personal experience with deep suffering, Lyudmiala, too, was as indifferently callous as these other privileged women. Feeling an unaccustomed affinity with the coarse element onboard, Lyudmila now opens up to an artillery lieutenant about her son, to an ailing woman about her sister and daughter. These moments of connection and confidence are made possible because "[h]er grief was the same grief that breathed on this deck, a grief that had always found its way from hospitals and graves at the front to the huts of peasants, to a numberless hut standing on a nameless wasteland" (850). The suffering of one, then, bleeds into that of all, creating commonality and shared experience where advantage and stability lead to atomization and wariness of others. This ability of pain to connect is shown to have its practical advantages, as well. Having shared herself with fellow sufferers on the steamer, Lyudmila, who has forgotten to bring any food, is treated to some of theirs. Moreover, she is

entrusted to help work out a trigonometric function with some artillery lieutenants and to help repair a defective rifle, thereby entering into the common concern of the war effort in a way that both ennobles her and increases her connections to her fellows.

Lyudmila's narrative also gives us a glimpse into the role of pain as an agent of increasing specificity, both in the narrative of one's life and, as a corollary, in that of a written text. In other words, suffering individuates and distinguishes. For Grossman, insofar as differentiation lends itself both to a greater establishment of the individual and to the proliferation of the narrative that is in service to the unique unfolding of the individual, if it is facilitated by pain, the latter must be worthwhile. (It is worth noting that, while *Life and Fate* is justly compared to *War and Peace* for its narrative structure and scope, the novel—as well as Grossman's other mature writings—may be equally compared to Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* with regard to narrative impulse. As Grossman's predecessor famously observes: "All happy family resemble one another; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" («Все счастливые семьи похожи друг на друга, каждая несчастливая семья несчастлива по-своему.») (Анна Каренина 5). Grossman alludes to the productive role of pain both for his character's own sense of individual life and for the development of his written narrative in sketching a family scene between Lyudmila, Viktor, and their daughter Nadya upon the parents' discovering that the latter has been romantically seeing a young soldier. Here we see the idea play out that even in a moving narrative, a given story line may be a repetition of many that have gone before it, that the story itself becomes predictable based on precedent. Viktor wonders, "Could his daughter really be kissing some young man in a military overcoat? Could he be falling in love with this girl, this silly, smart little fool? Could he really be gazing into her puppy dog eyes?," only to conclude, "But after all, this was an timeless [«вечная»] story…" (1261). The ellipsis sums it up neatly:

No more needs to be written because the entirety of this narrative is already known. With the exception of its challenges and tribulations, romance itself offers a very limited thread on which to build a sustained narrative. Lyudmila, too, know the apparently predictable course of this narrative. She knows that, should she say anything more "Nadya [will] only get angry and clam up. She also [knows] that, when they [are] alone, she [will] stroke her daughter's head and Nadya [will] sob without knowing why […]" (1261). At this point, however, her thoughts veer toward the specific, as she reflects that "[s]he [will] continue to run her fingers through Nadya's hair and [will remember] her own first kisses and [will think] of Tolya—because she links everything that happens in life to Tolya." (1261). This last part is the one unanticipated piece of information, in fact unexpected enough that it comes as something of a shock—why should her daughter's budding romance relate to her grief over the loss of her son? But it is with this maneuver of Lyudmila's thoughts that we move from the generic to the peculiar and, therefore, to that which is interesting and capable of generating content. Without the reference to Tolya, Lyudmila's entire trajectory could just as easily have taken place in the mind of anyone else considering their daughter's first romantic relationship.

It is, then, pain that brings a new, specific dimension and variation to what is otherwise unremarkable. This pain, moreover, will continue to be the driving force that gives Lyudmila's character and narrative shape for the rest of the novel, much as Viktor's grief over his mother shapes his own and provides both a structure and focus of interest for the reader. In a more general sense, the suffering associated with the Battle of Stalingrad and the war as a whole serve as a narrative impetus for all of *Life and Fate*. The reader is implicated in this, insofar as taking aesthetic enjoyment in the artistic rendering of the (historical, real) pain of others is morally

fraught. Nevertheless, Grossman harnesses pain's specificity for both artistic and philosophical purposes, thereby casting it in a productive and even positive light.

When Grossman wrote *Everything Flows*, his last major work of fiction, he had not only enlarged on the dimensions of positive pain he had considered in *Everything Flows* but had also reached a new, final understanding of it. While retaining its value as a literary tool for the production of narrative, pain in this last short novel is valuable simply as a constituent—and even dominant—feature of the human being. Because it adds another dimension to experience—and thereby enriches human complexity—pain must necessarily be not just something to be endured in the service of something external and greater but a desirable addition to the internal human life. As Grossman's principle interest is in representing the fullness of the human being, this additional nuance in his views on pain constitutes an important development for the writer's incorporation of suffering and its relative prominence as an area of concern in his work.

6.2 Linear and Cyclical Time Evinced Through Narrative

Let us now consider the writer's view of how time moves. For Grossman, time constitutes a dual-natured phenomenon that is simultaneously both linear and cyclical. Where much of the dominance of oppositional forces in his writing emerges later and in concert with his expanding view of the human being individually and as a member of the world, this attitude toward time is in evidence as early as the mid-1940s, if one compares the essay "The Hell of Treblinka," from 1944, with his play "If You Believe the Pythagoreans"[91] («Если верить

[91] The play's title takes its name from an address by Eudemus of Rhodes—a student of Aristotle's and the first writer of the Ancient World to write a history of astronomy—to his pupils: "It may be asked if the same time will return, as some say, or not. … If you believe the Pythagoreans everything will eventually return in the selfsame numerical order and I shall converse with you staff in hand and you will sit as you are sitting now, and so it will be in everything else. It is reasonable to assume that time too will be the same. For movement is one and the same, and likewise the sequence of many things that repeat themselves is one and the same, and this applies also to their number. Hence everything will be identical, including time" (Sambursky 170).

пифагорейцам»), published in 1946. In the latter, the character Shatavskoi espouses, with Pythagoras, the belief that "all of life is subordinate to a great cyclical law. In everything, everything […] the same encompassing law seems to rule everywhere" (Popoff 109, translation hers). Not surprisingly, given the play's violation of the Marxist maxim that, as progress is inevitable, time must be linear, it was not performed or republished. That in "The Hell of Treblinka," by contrast, Grossman takes up a linear view cannot, however, be attributed simply to his returning to toeing the party line. Here, a view of linear time is not only apparent but is seen as an urgent necessity. In his conclusion to the essay, he writes: "Every person today is duty-bound […] to answer these questions: […] What is necessary to prevent Nazism, fascism, Hitlerism from ever rising again, either on this side or on the far side of the ocean?" (5). Thus, our very survival as human (and ethical) beings depends on our ability to move forward, to avoid repeating our mistakes. To what extent Grossman believes this progress is inevitable or even simply possible rather than merely aspirational is unclear. In any case, it is apparent at this intermediate phase of his writing that both a cyclical and a linear way of conceiving and treating time occupied his thinking.

We note that at this stage these two distinct kinds of time are treated separately. Moreover, Grossman is engaging with concepts of time more or less explicitly, as topics of interest in themselves more than as features of reality that are reflected in the playing out of a narrative. It is not until the period of his novels that he incorporates both aspects of time into a whole, oppositional structure within the narrative and that he does so without—most of the time—calling direct attention to what he is doing.[92] At this point, linear and cyclical time weave together into the text as supporting and guiding structures in the narrative.

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[92] With "The Sistine Madonna," we begin to see a synthesis of cyclical and linear time, but, perhaps because this piece—as "The Hell of Treblinka"—is an essay; their treatment remains essentially self-conscious.

Working along with a linear view is the circular motion of cyclical time in *Life and Fate*. So it is that, for example, Zhenya, returning to her estranged ex-husband, Krymov, at the Lubyanka, where he is imprisoned, reflects that "[h]er old fate had become her new fate. What had seemed lost forever in the past had become her future" (*Жизнь и Субьба* 1346). Likewise, General Nyeudobnov reflects on the apparent changes the war has brought while being fully aware that they represent merely the vicissitudes of extraordinary circumstances, that everything will return to its normal order once the war is over: "In its own way the war had revised service records, people's biographies, performance records, and award folios…And so Nyeudobnov of the nomenklatura had been subordinated to Colonel Novikov. It was clear to Nyeudobnov, however, that with the end of the war would also end this abnormal situation" (926). Thus, we see cyclicality play out as a matter of an externally imposed phenomenon, a feature of objective reality. In a similar vein, we find that small details repeat across the many threads of the novel, thereby establishing continuity and return amidst the apparent changes of circumstances and the march forward of the narrative in general. Thus, just as, on page 60, an orderly is about to put on the record "Chinese Serenade," so too, on page 243, does a commander offer Katya the radio operator a drink and invite her to dance to the same record. Moreover, culture redounds on itself, seeding the same ideas over and over, as shown in apparently discrepant characters' quotation of and reference to Heine in completely different circumstances across the novel.[93] So, it is that in *Life and Fate* we see how cyclical time as played out. This is an important development in

[93] On page 902 of *Life and Fate* appears: "[Sofya Levinton had heard a young woman say,] 'Today's Germans are savages. They haven't even heard of Heinrich Heine.' A man's voice from another corner said mockingly, 'But in the end these savages are driving us like cattle. How has this Heine of yours been of any help to us?'" On page 1002, camp inmate Chernetsov says, "'Heine said that only a fool reveals his weaknesses to an enemy […];" and on page 1014, still in the German concentration camp narrative, the narrator notes that the old Bolshevik Mostovskoy once said, "'It is already a long time since that Henrich Heine said, "we're all of us naked beneath our clothes. […]"'" On page 1153, Viktor Shtrum reflects that "[t]hey were both trustworthy! […] But then it could be, as Heine said, that 'They both stank.'"

Grossman's writing as a literary enactment of what previously had been largely a meditation on the nature of time. Here he demonstrates that recurrence/cyclicality may function as a productive model for generating movement in text. Insofar as things are certain to return to themselves, this motion of going around in a circle may be played out potentially endlessly.

The same is true of Grossman's employment of linear time as a model. At the foundation of the linear axis is the war—in particular those storylines that engage with the war directly (e.g., those concerning Novikov, Darensky, and the fighters in House 6/1) as well as the passages and chapters that are narrated from a historical perspective, apart from the characters' (individual and entwined) narratives. These threads tend to be the most heavily action-based and plot-driven. Whether Grossman sought a linear model and found a prime example in the war he was enlisted in documenting and explaining in his capacity as a journalist or—more likely—developed his thoughts on time's linear nature on the basis of what he saw unfolding around him, it is easy to understand how it came to form the basis for forward movement in his novel. More clearly and dramatically than in most other areas of human life, war demonstrates cause and effect; the changing in the present of circumstances and fates based on decisions and actions that have taken place in the (perhaps immediate) past; and the way present choices and deeds shape what happens next (or it may be in the more distant future). A war—as well as an individual battle such as Stalingrad—has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The teleological implications of this model are not persuasive for Grossman; what is compelling for him, however, is the linearity that sees an endless unfolding of that which is unprecedented and novel into the future. (We note that, while war may serve as a useful linear model, Grossman parts ways with its structure in leaving off the idea of an end.) We observe the relationship between the new and unique inherent in linear time and the likewise particularity with which pain imbues an individual, as seen above.

As both are strategies for narrative advancement—which, because it constitutes a further realization of life (both that of the characters and of the writer) is a desirable quality for Grossman—we are not surprised to find the two acting in concert through the writer's mature narratives.

It is important to observe that the tension and interplay between the cyclical and linear is so compelling in Grossman because he not only observed each of them playing out in the world around them but also fervently *desired* for each to function. His desire for the linear is rooted, as touched on above, in his goal of eliminating destructive ideologies and ending the violence that has become an everyday feature of life.[94] On one level, there is nothing particularly unique about this desire to move past brutality toward peace—indeed most people undoubtedly would concur with this sentiment. For Grossman, however, who had lost his mother as a victim to the Holocaust (and who, moreover, had nearly lost his wife in the Great Terror), this urge is especially strong. When coupling this motivation with the writer's general temperament, which seeks to foster maximum freedom, the linear model of moving toward something different becomes particularly pronounced for Grossman.

Conversely, Grossman's wish for cyclicality is expressed in his repeated insistence that "human beings [are] still human beings. […] [E]ven while constructing a new world, human beings [remain] human beings" (*Everything Flows* 199). This theme of the continuity and repetition of what it means to be human is, in fact, one of the central themes of Grossman's work, from early in his career. As considered positively, then, time may move forward past cruelty and violence in order to support the recurrent patterns of human nature that promote pure freedom. As Jan Kott writes, speaking of the wake of World War II and the Holocaust: "Never

[94] In *Life and Fate,* this corresponds to Grossman's aim of ending the war, specifically with a Soviet victory. In *Everything Flows*, it concerns his hope of eliminating totalitarian ideologies and systems in general.

before was there such a thin line between […] the violent need to begin everything anew and the equally desperate need to return to that which was" (Introduction, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* 17). There is, however, a reverse side to this model. As Grossman himself fully realized, it is entirely possible that time may move forward in the generation of new forms of injustice and violence as human beings repeat the worst aspects of their nature in an eternal loop of baseness. This is also a human model and one that Grossman accepts by the time he writes *Everything Flows*.

6.3 Synthesis

To review, Grossman's views on the positive value of human pain evolve over the course of his writing career from being characterized by suffering's utility in a higher aim to its being seen as socially useful and, ultimately, as a good in its own right by virtue of its inherent role in human life. Moreover, as we have seen, pain proves to be a productive vehicle for movement within a text and is, therefore, useful for the expansive kind of writing in which Grossman is engaged. Time, meanwhile, is represented by contradictory schemas of circular and linear movement, both of which operate in such a way that they are conducive to sustained textual movement. It is at the nexus of these two concerns—pain and time—that we find a highly productive deep structure in support of his ethical project. This model is most fully realized—as it is here most fully developed—in *Everything Flows*.

6.4 Personalized Trauma as Defining a Life

In this final novella, Grossman's characterization of human suffering enlarges upon the last aspect we considered in *Life and Fate*—i.e., the role of pain in differentiation and, by extension, narrative movement—and assumes final dimension, as touched on above, fully embraces pain as a constitutive part of what it means to be human. More than this, however, pain

is not simply one of many human experiences; it is the dominant aspect of human life. The book's protagonist, Ivan Grigoryevich, goes so far as to reflect that "while awake he had never felt happy" (*Все течет* 21). In other words, pain infuses the entire narrative from beginning to end. The reader is presented with three principle narratives, along with several tangentially related short stories and several reflective historical-philosophical chapters that, while perhaps[95] conceived in the course of Ivan Grigoryevich's musings, in any case stand on their own outside of the fictional narrative threads. Having very briefly encountered Ivan Grigoryevich, we meet the protagonist's cousin, Nikolay Andreyevich. This is a man whom life has treated fairly well, in any case far better than his relative. A scientist who has been successful in both his professional and personal spheres and has seen more comfort than not, Nikolay Andreyevich's narrative is, nevertheless, limited to what is apparently its only area of interest: a particular guilty pain he has carried. We read that "[w]aiting for his cousin to arrive, Nikolay Andreyevich thought about his own life [...]" (2). Indeed, as three decades have elapsed since the cousins have last seen each other, there should be ample sources of material to fill their conversation. There is a moment of anticipation as the reader considers the possible trajectories Nikolay Andreyevich may embark upon. The following sentence, however, curtails this speculation and fixes the focus of his thoughts; it also suggests what Grossman sees as constituting a story: "He got ready to tell his story, to make a confession to Ivan" (2). It suffices to say that Nikolay Andreyevich suffers not because of any injustice done against him, but rather because of his own unsettled conscience regarding his own unjust conduct and thinking during the Stalinist-directed campaign of anti-Semitism against his colleagues. It is, nevertheless, the principal pain in his life, and, of importance, filters everything we know about his character.

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[95] This remains ambiguous.

Looking for a place to live, Ivan Grigoryevich meets (and thereby introduces the reader to) Anna Sergeyevna, his landlady and love interest, who serves as the third principal character in *Everything Flows*. A single mother to a school-aged nephew, Anna Sergeyevna is, as we learn later, terminally ill with cancer. Despite her grim diagnosis, she is shown to be concerned not with her disease but instead with a period from her past that has haunted her since it occurred. She too, as Nikolay Andreyevich, suffers from the centerpiece of her narrative—and the one part of it that is told in her own voice—concerns her participation in and experience of the period of "dekulakization" and the Holodomor. In fact, aside from the brief sketches of her present circumstances, as well as a general description of her being someone notably kind and of a sad disposition, there is very little to Anna Sergeyevna's storyline except for this narrative of trauma.

Ivan Grigoryevich is the central character of *Everything Flows*. While, upon his return from the Gulag, we learn a bit about his family and his previous acquaintances, as well as his new romance with Anna Sergeyevna and connection with her son, here too we find that very little fleshes out Ivan Grigoryevich's narrative aside from his reflections on the twenty-nine years he spent in the camps and what those experiences mean in a broader social context. While he certainly had a youth prior to his internment—we learn from his cousin's reflections that "[a]t one time the view in his family had been that Vanya was more intelligent and talented than all his peers" (6)—and is beginning a new chapter of life at the time we encounter him, it is important to observe that these bookends are not what he considers as the substance and meaning of his own life. For Ivan Grigoryevich, life is pain, in the present and the past.

Grossman has written a short novel, then, that is comprised of painful returns to a painful past. This structure accords with trauma theory, according to which the person who suffers engages in "insistent reenactments of the past" (Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 151)

and whose "memory repeats […] what [s/he has not] yet comes to terms with, what still haunts [him/her]" (Erikson, *ibid*. 184). This structure establishes a mechanism by which pain interacts highly productively with time, both linear and cyclical. This is true on both the characters' experiential level and on that of the narrative itself. The cyclical return of and to pain is facilitated by the linear march forward, as new circumstances present new prompts to thinking about the past—as, for example, when Ivan Grigorevvich's return occasions Nikolay Andreyevich's sudden desire to confess and her new with relationship with Ivan Grigoryevich causes Anna Sergeyevna to want to open her heart to him and share its darkest contents. For the characters themselves, these fresh returns provide them with meaning and a fuller sense of their complete lives, as when Anna Sergeyevna realizes that "[she] wasn't a good person. [She] wasn't kind" (*Everything Flows* 116). On the narrative level, the tendency for pain to return, especially under new circumstances, naturally lends itself to the generation of continual, cohesive text.

Moreover, the narratives of both Ivan Grigoryevich and Anna Sergeyevna model a way in which pain may be employed both productively and creatively in a way that both sustains narrative through novel approaches to the same point of pain. It is from the pain of their central narratives (and especially that of Ivan Grigoryevich) that Grossman spins out tangential fragments, stories, and reflections. (As stated above, it is unclear whether the latter are direct thoughts of Ivan Grigoryevich's or supplementary pieces included by the narrator/Grossman himself.) Thus, we read, for example, about the tragedy of a wife and mother who is sent to the Gulag, to be forever separated from her husband and daughter; we read of a shy peasant couple whose quietly rewarding lives are slowly consumed by fatal starvation. There are also pieces concerning the painful course of Russian history in general and particularly that rooted in

Leninism.[96] Each small sketch provides a new insight into both the characters' pain and certain kinds of pain in general. This structure of assembling fragments around a central pain aligns nicely with the work Stevan Weine describes of employing Bakhtin's ideas on dialogism to help facilitate testimony around trauma. Referring to Caryl Emerson's work on Bakhtin, he explains that "words carry meanings and that repeatedly used words accumulate more and more meanings. This creates ever more complex webs of voices, memories, emotions, and experiences. […] One voice/point of view/word is shaped by its connections to the others and is held together with them in an ongoing dialogic relation"[97] (Weine 93). As words expand through repetition and association, so too for the narratives of suffering and trauma that Grossman elaborates in *Everything Flows*. What is more, Grossman's approach to novel expansion on the same theme of pain ties in with another Bakhtinian idea, itself also reflected in field of trauma theory. According to Bakhtin: "[n]othing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free […]" (Morson and Emerson 36-37). In a related vein, Dori Laub observes that, regarding trauma, "[n]o amount of telling seems ever to do justice to this inner compulsion [to tell and to be heard]. There are never enough words or the right words […]" (Laub, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 63). For Grossman, this concept of "unfinalizability" («незавершенность» in Backhtin's original), as applied to suffering,[98] proves to be not only compelling but also a productive vehicle for continued movement and the generation of greater complexity.

[96] As Maurizia Calusio notes: "several [scholarly] investigators have even refused to call [*Everything Flows*] a "literary work," as it lacks both any generic consistency and a stable plot (178).
[97] This last sentence speaks equally to the relationship between self and other and the approach and/or distancing that takes place between the two as discussed in Chapter 3.
[98] In fact, the idea may be convincingly applied to Grossman's philosophy of movement and process in general.

6.5 Contradictions Create Meaning

In Grossman's final major work of fiction, time forever spills forwards in a never-ending folding back on itself via the experiencing of great pain. So it is that time and space are maximized around the experience of suffering. Where an ordinary or even pleasant moment in the present passes over unnoticed or is at most noted in passing,[99] that which is painful, even if rooted in the distant past, is forever brought forth as that which most significantly occupies the characters' lives as well as dominates the space of the writing itself. This brings us once again to Bakhtin. Explaining his concept of the chronotope, Bakhtin writes: "The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature […]. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic" (Bakhin 85). By this, we may understand that there is an ethical viewpoint implicit in the time-space fabric of the text. For Grossman, in his latest work, the chronotope is characterized by time's expansion around experiences of pain that recur and accumulate and may splinter into new considerations of the same kind of suffering; conversely, the benign and neutral occupy little time in the lives of the characters and in the space of the text itself, the latter of which correlates with a relatively low temporal experience for the reader of that which does not hurt. The shape of this structure takes the form of maximized movement and complexity around the pain being expressed and/or experienced. In other words, suffering facilitates process and the fullness of expression. Thus, contrary to expectation, the moral perspective embedded in Grossman's chronotope is, according to his ethics of promoting the endless movement and expansion of whole human life, positive.

[99] For example, the introduction to Anna Sergeyevna's extensive account of the Holodomor to Ivan Grigoryevich is a brief reference to her partial nudity and the characters' bodies touching, followed by the one sentence: "A first night of love…" before she begins her account. Where the present—a time of intimacy and pleasure—is all but passed over, the pain from the past dominates both the space of the encounter and the text itself.

At first glance, Grossman presents us with a model of contradiction: Pain, most often considered an undesirable and negative feature of life, emerges as a good. The apparent opposition breaks down, however, when we focus on the overarching concern of Grossman's ethics of the human being. As we have discussed previously, the writer's interest in individual human beings and human life in general is not rooted in the moral categories of "good" and "bad" according any absolute, value-based system of assessment. Rather, once Grossman reaches the mature period of his writing, his conception of the "good" is based solely on an idea of wholeness, the ability to realize completely *ad infinitum*. (This itself constitutes a first paradox, as it is naturally impossible to realize something that continues in perpetuity.) It is therefore the case that "good" and "bad," "positive" and "negative," lose their values—and, consequently, meanings. Whatever life is valuable; the more it there is, the better; and the more it can generate and express more life, the better still.

If pain is not something to be rejected, it stands to reason that neither is that which causes it. Grossman appears to have realized that he must follow the implications of this way of thinking to their logical conclusion. He does this most explicitly in his last major piece of writing (along with *Everything Flows*). At the end of his life, during the same period he was revising *Everything Flows*, Grossman was enlisted by the state to make a new translation of an Armenian war novel,[100] a task that allowed him to visit Armenia for two months. From this experience, he wrote a memoir of sketches that was published as *An Armenian Sketchbook*. What is most striking about this work is its uncommon candor and personal approach to the reader. In it, he writes:

> Let's call on the Creator to show more modesty. He created the world in a fit of temper and, instead of revising his rough drafts, he printed his work straightaway. What a lot of contradictions there are in it and how many tediously long passages;

[100] It apparently was no object that Grossman did not speak or read any Armenian.

> what a lot of typos, plot discrepancies, and superfluous! But masters know how painful it is to cut and snip the living cloth of a frenziedly written and rashly published book." (6)

This passage appears at the end of a larger one calling "the Creator" to account for the creation of Hitler, Himmler, and Eichmann. It is remarkable in its summing up of Grossman's aesthetic ethics as they work within his larger ethics of unbridled movement. More than that, however, it speaks to the acceptance of a final, profound paradox in Grossman's thinking: the ideology and dogma that Grossman sees as the cause of so much human cruelty toward fellow beings[101] and against which his entire ethics of human movement and freedom is posited is likewise an aspect of human expression, of what it may mean to be a human being. In other words, that which stultifies and straitens life—which may even eliminate it in the name of a given cause—is, too, a part of that life and so must be valued as such. As we see, Grossman accepts these irreconcilable contradictions and even embraces them as part of a staggering complexity that defies human comprehension.

The acceptance of this paradox suggests not a final resignation or capitulation in the face of perceived defeat. This final inclusion of the very forces Grossman spent his life striving against from the position of his ethical worldview attests to his commitment to that viewpoint, to his uncommon flexibility as a thinker, and to his gift of loving life and those who possess it beyond boundaries, bias, and reason.

[101] What we have frequently referred to as "Fate" with a capital-F

Conclusion

The preceding chapters have set forth a view about the relationship between Vasily Grossman's abstract ethical ideas and his concrete literary works. More specifically, in these pages I have examined both key features of Grossman's philosophical thought and the evolving ways in these elements find expression in the writer's work, so as to be not only represented but—crucially—realized in motion via art.

The first task was to investigate Grossman's central concern and in what it consisted—the individual human being. While this foundational feature of his thought was apparent from early on, the evolution of Grossman's conception of it evolved in radical and significant ways. Thus, we have observed the evolution from "The Hell of Treblinka," in which an "us/other" («наш/чужой») perspective considers only a certain subset of *homo sapiens* to be "human beings," to one that is all-embracing and utterly boundless in his later works. The trajectory is unmistakably toward expansion.

Expansion of the concept of the human being parallels Grossman's focus on the expansion of psychological experience and the sheer state of life into a unique infinitude within each individual. This state of infinite limitlessness is for Grossman the condition of the fully realized, free human being. Moreover, we have seen that the sheer description of the individual person is at the same time linked to a moral position: The individual is, simply by virtue of his existence, the greatest good; therefore, that by which his being is characterized—movement, freedom, unboundedness—is likewise good.

Following chapters have laid out the ways in which Grossman weds his ideas to his prose. In particular, I have shown that, employing characteristic structures within the text, as well as productive thematic concerns, Grossman makes of his writing an artistic realization of his

philosophy of endless free movement. With regard to his use of themes, two areas emerge as being of especial interest to Grossman: art and science. Not only are these themes congenial to him because of his personal interests—his training as a scientist and his choice to pursue a career as a writer—but, as we have seen above, they are highly productive domains; by their very nature, these fields are fields that are, by their very nature, expansive without end. "The Sistine Madonna," in particular, elucidates the ways in which Grossman sees the potential in art—both in its creation and in its finished product—for capturing the idea of infinity and expanding beyond the ostensible boundaries of its given form. What is more, both art and science are ongoing by means of engagement in them by individual human beings. He demonstrates this especially in his narrative thread about Viktor Shtrum's work *Life and Fate*. In other words, both the arts and sciences are organizational structures that channel the infinitude of the individual human being and give shape to his movement.

As we have seen, Grossman also makes significant use of generative structures to embody his philosophy by means of artistic form. One example is his use of a lens device that consists of alternating movement between the macroscopic and the microscopic. In addition to highlighting Grossman's emphasis on the individual, this approach performs the characteristic work of the individual in its potential for a particular kind of endless movement.

I identify another of Grossman's favored structures as being regular, ongoing movement between two poles of identity: on one end, the absolute atomization of self and on the other, the full union of an individual with another person. This model not only highlights the characters' fluid experience of identity by way of showing in one area the expansive and ceaselessly emergent qualities of a human being's lived experience but; it , in itself, performs this work of

potentially infinite motion, creating through written form the psychological movement of a human being.

Another formal feature we have explored in Grossman's writing is his expression of cyclical and linear models of time and how the two coexist simultaneously. A dual structure that becomes more robust in Grossman's work over time, these paired perspectives on time are used by Grossman particularly in conjunction with his thinking on suffering and trauma. Once again, we have seen this to be a device that characteristically generates more of itself and the material that is subject to it. In Grossman's conception, cyclical time repeats without end; linear time proceeds forward with no end point or goal.

When we consider these thematic and structural devices taken together, a pattern common to all emerges. In all cases, Grossman sets his structures and themes to work on two distinct yet complementary planes. In the first place, he employs them to describe and facilitate the experiences of his characters within the text. So it is that, in *Life and Fate*, the final days, then hours, then minutes, and even moments of Sofia Levinton's and David's respective lives are stretched out and extended in prose even as the time itself contracts; it is in this context that we find Viktor Shtrum advancing the text as well as in his own personal development and conception of self through his relational vacillations with key persons in his life; related to this, Viktor further facilitates textual generation in his capacity as a theoretical physicist—someone engaged in a constant state of thinking that builds upon itself in all directions *ad infinitum* to the point of generating abstract thought products that others, in turn, may ponder and expand on to their own ends; in addition,and it is by pairing the theme of pain with the structures of time that, in his final novel, Grossman creates nearly the entirety of the textual movement and growth, not

only for his protagonist Ivan Grigoryevich but indeed for all the characters with their disparate life experiences.

This aspect of Grossman's project is undeniably important. His use of structures and themes as productive vehicles is what, in large measure, characterizes the texture and design of his writing; at the most basic level, it is what allows the text to exist at all—in any case, to exist as fully fleshed out pieces. It is on this plane, within the narrative of text, that Grossman *shows* his philosophy of free movement as it plays out amongst his characters.

There is, however, another way in which Grossman works with his productive models. Operating in conjunction with Grossman's application of the formal features, I have considered too his narratives is to be the writer's use of these same elements on a meta-narrative plane. It is here that his project of ideas fused with art is most fully realized.

In creating text, itself, Vasily Grossman *enacts* his philosophy. Writing itself constitutes generation and enlargement—the movement through time and space of a psyche engaged in endless proliferation of new and continuing experience and thought. It is through understanding his process of writing as a lived process of enacted philosophy that another feature of Grossman's mature writing becomes clear. It is in this light that we grasp his increasing tendency to include disparate material, genres, styles, and so forth—even to the point of outright contradiction—in his writing. Since for Grossman ultimate value lies in the infinity that is the individual human being in its ceaseless movement, endless novelty, and variation, and absolute uniqueness, it follows that value is, fundamentally, *everything* for him. To the extent one deviates from this principle of inclusion, therefore, he is committing a kind of violence to the (secularly) sacred worth of a person. To excise—whether in life by way of repression/suppression or in the living process of art—is undesirable.

As I have demonstrated in the preceding work, then, from an intermediate period of boundaries, distinctions, and limits, Grossman moves into his mature phase, which is distinguished by its elimination of anything that compromises the whole and its unfettered motion and growth. In the end, Grossman's project does not distinguish between life and art. His is a cobbling together of ever more varied and unique threads and pieces held together by means of narrative that is, itself, oriented toward movement and the greater accumulation of ideas and experiences by means of the structures and themes I have discussed above. It is by creating text that Grossman substantially creates himself to an ever more realized extent. This act of creation sees him working out his concept of the good, living through form the abstract content of his ethics. It was a process that continued until the end of his life, without break, in a forward movement that points toward infinity.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise specified, all translations in this work are by Emily Austin Traverse.

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