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Price of Conformity and Subjectivity in Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*

Character Studies

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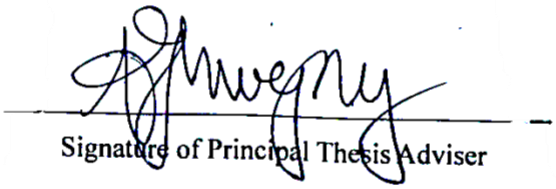

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PRICE OF CONFORMITY AND SUBJECTIVITY IN VASILY GROSSMAN'S *LIFE AND FATE*: CHARACTER STUDIES

by

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Abstract

Satzhan Baktygali: Price of Conformity and Subjectivity in

Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*: Character Studies

This thesis seeks to contribute to Grossman studies by applying Soviet subjectivity theories to analyze the transformations of key characters in Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*. Recent developments in post-Stalinist studies, particularly the concept of the "unmaking" of the Stalinist subject, provide a fresh critical framework for exploring how individuals navigate ideological shifts and personal crises within the novel. Grossman's dual-context narrative, written during the Thaw but set in the Stalinist era, adds a unique dimension to understanding his retroactive interpretation of Soviet subjectivity. This approach highlights the tensions between ideological conformity and individual autonomy, revealing patterns of self-transformation, acts of defiance, and the limited exercise of personal agency within the constraints of collective Stalinist life. By synthesizing these perspectives, the thesis offers new insights into the complex dynamics of subjectivity in one of Soviet literature's most significant works.

Keywords: *Vasily Grossman, Life and Fate, Soviet subjectivity, Stalinism, Thaw literature.*

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Introduction

Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate* stands as a monumental exploration of totalitarianism, ideology, and the resilience of human dignity. It was written from 1952 and 1961, finishing deep into the Thaw period yet set amidst the crucible of World War II, the novel bridges two distinct historical moments. Grossman's characters, shaped by the ideological pressures of mature Stalinism, grapple with questions of loyalty, morality, and survival. Simultaneously, the text itself reflects the broader cultural and intellectual currents of the post-Stalinist era, a time of cautious introspection and reevaluation within Soviet society. This dual context situates *Life and Fate* at the intersection of Stalinist and post-Stalinist subjectivity, making it an ideal case for exploring the interplay between literature, ideology, and human agency.

The concept of Soviet subjectivity provides a critical framework for analyzing Grossman's work. Subjectivity studies, particularly as developed by scholars like Stephen Kotkin, Jochen Hellbeck, and Anatoly Pinsky, emphasize the dynamic processes through which Soviet citizens internalized, negotiated, and resisted ideological frameworks. These studies challenge earlier models of totalitarianism that reduced individuals to passive victims of an all-powerful state. Instead, they reveal a more complex picture of Soviet life, one where individuals actively participated in their own ideological formation.

This work aims to synthesize insights from Soviet subjectivity studies and Grossman scholarship, setting the stage for an analysis of *Life and Fate*'s three central characters: Mostovskoy, Krymov, and Shtrum. By situating these characters within broader discussions of Soviet subjectivity, the review highlights how Grossman's work both reflects and critiques the ideological pressures of Stalinist and post-Stalinist eras.

Grossman's Oeuvre

Iosif Solomonovich Grossman was born December 12th, 1905, in the small Ukrainian town of Berdichev. It was originally a Polish town subsumed by the Russian Empire, and had a dominantly Jewish population rich with trade. By the time Grossman was born, the town's population went below 40 thousand as a large chunk of the Empire's Jewish population had migrated in the aftermath of many pogroms and persecutions by the Tsar. Grossman's parents were both fairly assimilated first generations of the new Jewish intelligentsia at the time, so he grew up speaking Russian and adopted the name Vasily early on.

In 1929, 24 year old Grossman published his article "Berdichev—Not as a Joke, but Seriously"[1] At that point, he was already about to graduate Moscow State with a degree in chemical engineering, but evidently wanted to express his concerns regarding his hometown that were bottled up. As the title suggests, the city became a butt of the joke for all things Jewish. Grossman opens his article, writing: "Всякий антисемит, услыша слово Бердичев, ухмыляется." Good half of the article he rants about a particular joke made in Checkov's play *Three Sisters*, where doctor Chebutykin says: "Balzac was married in Berdichev." Several times repeatedly with mocking outrage as he reads the newspaper. Grossman went off on Chekhov, who remained his literary idol, and proceeded to back up Jews of Berdichev, blaming the regular, "mechanical" Soviet population in their prejudice and antisemitism. More notably, he emphasizes the comradery the townspeople developed as a working class which aided the revolution's cause.

In 1934, Grossman finally had his fiction debut by publishing a short story "In the Town of Berdichev." He captures the dramatic experience of a woman serving as a commissar in the Red Army during the Russian Civil War. The protagonist, Vavilova, grapples with the dual responsibilities of motherhood and her military duties after giving birth to a child. She finds out about her unplanned pregnancy while stationed in Berdichev in pursuit of Poles. She is allocated a room in a crowded Jewish family of Magazanik. Head of the family is portrayed as a humbled yet angsty man who

[1] Бердичев не в шутку, а в серьез.

passively expresses his frustration of soldiers passing through the city once more: “To be honest with you . . . this is the best time of all for us townsfolk. One lot has left—and the next has yet to arrive. No requisitions, no ‘voluntary contributions,’ no pogroms”[2] Here we can see that Grossman always sympathized with the afflicted people first, although the story concludes in a romantic revolutionary note. It was an enormous success, recognized by likes of Maxim Gorky and Mikhail Bulgakov. Gorky’s appreciation and endorsement in particular is what prompted Grossman to dedicate himself to writing as much as he has in the following years.

Donbass Coal Mines

Grossman Graduated from Moscow State University in December of 1929, later than his peers, and received a letter from his mother, saying that it was about time to officially change his name from Iosif Solomonovich to Vasily Semyonovich before he entered the workforce. Grossman refused. He spent two years in Donbas as a chemical inspector, most of which he was stationed at Smolyanska-11. In late 1931 he had to leave due to declining health and had been diagnosed with beginning stages of tuberculosis, which he assumed will kill him shortly.

It is here we see his first attempts at long-form fiction. Artistically realizing his experience as a chemist, Grossman wrote his first novel, *Glück auf!* Published in 1934, the novel follows Donbas coal miners as they are pressured to work overtime during the second Five-Year Plan. The title originates from the usual greeting of the German miners, wishing for a good yield. Although the novel follows optimistic tropes of socialist realism which was established in 1932, with an emphasis for workers to persevere, Grossman seized the opportunity to call attention to the poor working conditions and faulty plan design that had miners exposed to hazardous environment: “The air here was more static than swamp water. It stuffed lungs, like wet and hot cotton wool, weakened the body, bound movement, invited sleep. . . . After working for a while, everyone would lie down to rest. But rest would bring no relief. Your head would spin, you wanted to sleep, and the longer people rested, the less they felt like

[2] Vasily Grossman, V gorode Berdicheve, 1937

getting up or stirring."[3] Inspector Lunin dies from tuberculosis during his shift, which reflects the author's coping with a very possible death. The book got popular among workers and was printed aplenty, but had underwhelming reception among fellow writers. Nonetheless, Grossman's name was circulating in the literary world.

In 1937, shortly after publishing *In the Town of Berdichev*, Grossman published his second novel, *Stepan Kolchugin*, in two parts. The books follow the eponymous protagonist as he climbs up the ranks from a young worker to becoming a member of Comintern. Solzhenitsyn mocked Grossman for this tendency to have protagonists end up at Comintern as if party affiliation was the only verticality in the life of a worker. Albeit it made sense at the time since Grossman wrote Kolchugin to live up to Gorky's and Writers Union's expectations. In the backdrop of the Stakahnovite movement, he revisits Donbass mines for the setting. It is the novel that brought him his first recognition as a writer. In *Stepan Kolchugin*, Grossman establishes a theme that will be recurring in his late works: what became of the first generation of revolutionaries? Characters often exchange their ambitious, globally sweeping hopes for communism that results in Stalin writing it off the nominees list for "Menshevik sympathies." Even though *Stepan Kolchugin* did not win the "Stalin Prize", it ended up being Grossman's ticket into the Writers Union. He would describe the following few years as his happiest as he went on to produce many stories while backed up by the Union until the day Germany invaded.

WW2 – Writer at War

The Great Patriotic War shaped Grossman the way he is known today. By the time Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Grossman was already an established writer. He was initially denied the draft due to his lacking physical parameters, but found his way into the frontlines

[3] Grossman, Glukauf, 53

by joining the newspaper *Red Star* as a war correspondent. He covered some of the most important events, including battles for Moscow, Kursk, and Berlin. In this same newspaper, he started publishing chapters of what would become one of the first-ever Soviet WW2 novel – *The People Immortal* (Народ бессмертен). The novel follows a battalion of soldiers fighting their way out of the German encirclement in the forests of Gomel. In 1942 he published *Years of War* (Годы войны) a collection of his notebooks and the revised version of the aforementioned novel. Notebooks and the novel cover the 'terrible retreat' of the soviet forces during Germans' first summer offensive in great detail, something that none of the other war writers dared to do. Perhaps Grossman got away with it due to him being first, and it paid off: *People Immortal* became an instant frontline classic.

Even in his personal notes, Grossman had not yet juxtaposed Nazi Germany with Soviet Union. To the contrary, he was driven with hatred towards the enemy like most Soviet people: "Ehrenburg recalls a conversation they had in Moscow when Grossman was on furlough. "We sat until three in the morning; he talked about the front, and we were guessing what life would be like after the war. Grossman said, 'I now doubt many things. What I don't doubt is victory. Perhaps, this matters most."[4] However, he does make a few sly comments about the harsh desertion and non-combativity policies enforced by Stalin: "To a correspondent's sugary remark about how happy and excited are the faces of wounded soldiers when they return from the battle, he remarked, with a sardonic grin: 'Especially the faces of those wounded in the left hand."[5]

Mature Stalinism – Mature Grossman

Grossman did not catch too much rest upon returning home. The question is often open if Grossman grew disillusioned with the Soviet Union after witnessing horrors of war. While he certainly had seen many questionable things over the years on the front, what really started twisting the knife in his side was the anti-cosmopolitan campaign that was raging by the 1950s. "Jewish question" regarding

[4] Ehrenburg, Vospominaniya, 2:347.
[5] Grossman, Beevor, Writer at War, 25 – wounds to left hand were deemed self inflicted and were punished by death as desertion

Grossman gets a bit complicated around this time. As we had seen, he was adamant on dispersing prejudices regarding Soviet Jews. Even though he came from the assimilated family and spoke little Yiddish, his Jewry ties in deeply with his personal trauma of losing his mother, hometown, and witnessing the immediate aftermath of Holocaust atrocities. There are mixed accounts on to what extent he related himself to Jewry. Semyon Lipkin, his close friend, claimed that he had not identified himself as Jewish as much as he was a Soviet man, and only went around it over the Doctor's Plot, an event which plays major role in his two novels. Current Russian scholars often invalidate Lipkin's take on this matter, however close the two were, evidence suggests otherwise. In 1942, Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC) was established by the Soviets to shed light on Nazi war crimes and further antagonize it. Their biggest project was "The Black Book of Russian Jewry" (Черная книга), edited by Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman. The project involved interviewing survivors of German occupied zones shortly after liberation. Grossman had quite a few entries and did much of the editing, which shows his dedication to the cause. However, Ehrenburg still suggested that Grossman did it out of sheer human empathy, whatever personal stakes he had, and was a true internationalist: "Он был доподлинным интернационалистом и часто меня упрекал за то, что, описывая зверства оккупантов, я говорю «немцы», а не «гитлеровцы» или «фашисты»: «Нельзя отнести эпидемию чумы к националь- ному характеру."[6] (Ehrenburg 349) He seemed to still retain much of those "Menshevik sympathies" Stalin had suspected of him. The Black Book ended up banned in late 1940s, by then Grossman was halfway through a 16 year journey of writing his magnum opus: the Stalingrad duology.

The first part, *For a Just Cause*, was published in 1952. To make this happen, Grossman had to fight with editors of *Novy Mir* for three years. With Stalin still alive at the time, censoring was harsh and resulted in a lot of back and forth between Grossman and the editors due to the writer's reluctance to comply with their suggestions. Due to the novel's sheer scale of over 800 pages, editors took a lot of liberties in their suggestions, telling Grossman to add whole characters with certain arcs and agendas, while removing Viktor Shtrum, a Jewish scientist and Grossman's stand in. Not without

great support from Tvardovsky, the chief editor, and 11 versions of the novel now resting in the archives, *For a Just Cause* was out there. A war epic with Tolstoyan sweep, but not too reckless yet.

The Thaw, Tamizdat, Oblivion

"Stalin Had Died! In this death lay an element of sudden and truly spontaneous freedom that was infinitely alien to the nature of the Stalinist State. The State was shaken, just as it had been shaken by the shock of the German invasion of June 22, 1941." This is how Grossman described Stalin's death in his *Everything Flows* (1963). This surprise seemed to have been a welcome one for Grossman, as enthusiastic for national reimagination after Kruschev's not so secret speech, he made his sequel *Life and Fate* much more daring and honest towards the Soviet state. He completed it around 1960, but was aware of the political stir that *Doctor Zhivago* had recently caused, and should have expected what equating Stalin and Hitler would bring to his doorstep. Still, he started sharing copies, which resulted in NKVD raiding his apartment in 1961, taking away his manuscripts and the typewriter. It is then he wrote his iconic letter to Khrushchev: "To confiscate a novel is to deprive a writer of his livelihood, to undermine his moral and social standing, and to destroy his hope for the future." It never got past Suslov, and the novel was eventually smuggled and spread across Europe, some 20 years later.

Everything Flows or *Все Течет* is one of Grossman's most renowned work, second only to *Life and Fate*. It was seized from his apartment by the authorities along with *Life and Fate* in 1961. It was Grossman's last major work, only followed by *Armenian Sketchbook* in 1962, which was also rejected and unpublished until 1989. His granddaughter Yekaterina Korotkova made a great effort to publish the majority of his fiction which was made possible during Gorbachev's *perestroika*. *Everything Flows* is very complex in its structure. There is a concise narrative following a protagonist that could serve as a complete short story on its own. However, it is intertwined with many diversions of history telling, a thought experiment, and monologues on freedom, concentration camps, and totalitarianism.

Vasily Grossman passed away on September 14, 1964, in Moscow, having lived through some of the most tumultuous periods of Soviet history. He passed away in sickness and pain, aged 58, having been told that his greatest works won't see the light of day. His literary legacy today is peculiar and all over the place. In post-soviet space, he is mostly grouped with other socialist realist war writers. His only novel that can be found in modern mass print in Russian is *For a Just Cause*. But in the US and Europe he attained classic status. Most importantly, he wrote a lot of what he thought of Soviet people as a Soviet man, and he thought a lot.

Soviet Subjectivity Studies

The Development of Stalinist Subjectivity Frameworks

The study of Soviet subjectivity emerged as a critical response to earlier totalitarian models, which depicted Stalinist society as a monolithic system of oppression, reducing its citizens to passive victims. Stephen Kotkin's Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization (1995) pioneered a transformative approach by introducing the concept of "speaking Bolshevik"[7]. Kotkin argued that Stalinism was more than a system of control; it was a "civilization" where ideology suffused every corner of life. Citizens had to master the language, rituals, and symbolic order of Bolshevism to navigate its intricate terrain. Yet, far from being mere automatons, individuals could appropriate this ideological lexicon to negotiate their roles, adapt to power structures, or even subtly resist them.

Jochen Hellbeck advanced this discourse with a more intimate lens in *Revolution on My Mind* (2006). By delving into Stalin-era diaries, Hellbeck illuminated how individuals

[7] Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

actively shaped their identities in alignment with ideological imperatives. His concept of "self-fashioning" portrays citizens not as coerced pawns but as participants in a transformative dialogue with Bolshevik ideals. Where Kotkin emphasized the external frameworks of ideological mastery, Hellbeck unveiled the inner lives of individuals, revealing their efforts to internalize, reinterpret, and sometimes even reconfigure the values imposed by the state. Together, these scholars present a dynamic model of Stalinist subjectivity that oscillates between compliance and agency in the 1930s, a framework that resonates with the ideological journeys of Grossman's characters Mostovskoy and Krymov in Life and Fate.

Post-Stalinist Subjectivity: The Cultural and Creative Turn

The death of Stalin and the ensuing Thaw marked a profound shift in the dynamics of Soviet subjectivity. While terror receded, a new set of cultural and ideological negotiations emerged, fostering opportunities for critical reflection and self-expression. Denis Kozlov's *The Readers of Novyi Mir* (2013) offers a compelling exploration of this period, focusing on how readers engaged with Thaw-era literature to interrogate the Stalinist past and envision alternative futures. He argues that the cultural polemics of this time "did much to undermine the foundations of the Soviet ideological, educational, ethical, linguistic, and aesthetic order"[8], virtually unmaking the Soviet subject. Unlike their Stalinist predecessors—who often embraced the state's ideals of self-perfection—Thaw-era citizens embarked on a process of "unmaking" Soviet subjectivity, rethinking their relationship to ideology and history.

This shift away from the rigid certainties of Stalinism was further enriched by the rise of personal narratives and critical discourses. Readers of journals like *Novyi Mir* used literature as a mirror to reflect on their own identities and as a lens to question the ideological orthodoxies

[8] Denis Kozlov, The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 9.

of their time. Kozlov's insights align closely with the cultural milieu in which Grossman's *Life and Fate* emerged, where literature functioned as both an act of memory and an instrument of critique.

Anatoly Pinsky's edited volume, *Post-Stalinist Subjectivity* (1953–1985), complements Kozlov's work by focusing on the creative and intellectual opportunities that arose in the post-Stalin era. Pinsky highlights how this period gave rise to new forms of self-expression, arguing that "the newfound drive for creativity and autonomy was not simply a result of the absence of terror and the resulting sense of maneuvering space. Rather, it can be seen as a function of the discourses and practices of the time, which in some cases acquired their own dynamics"[9]. These dynamics fostered a critical consciousness that redefined the boundaries of Soviet identity, highlighting both the continuities and ruptures with Stalinist paradigms.

Together, Kozlov and Pinsky illuminate the cultural and psychological dimensions of the Thaw, revealing a society in flux, where individuals navigated between the remnants of Stalinist ideology and the burgeoning possibilities of personal autonomy. For Grossman's characters, particularly as skeptical and scientifically minded as Viktor Shtrum, these frameworks provide invaluable insight into their struggles with morality, loyalty, and freedom as products of this transformative era.

Focusing on Mature Grossman

My thesis concentrates on Vasily Grossman's magnum opus, *Life and Fate*. Written over the Thaw period, this novel represents Grossman's most profound engagement with questions of ideology, individual agency, and moral responsibility. Unlike his earlier works,

[9] Anatoly Pinsky, ed., *Post-Stalinist Subjectivity (1953–1985)* (St. Petersburg: Издательство ЕУ СПб, 2018), 24.

which were shaped by the constraints of socialist realism and Stalinist cultural policies, it reflects Grossman's transformation as a post-stalinist subject.

Grossman's pre-war novels, such as *Glükauf* (1934) and *Stepan Kol'chugin* (1937), focused on the lives of coal miners in the Donbass region, reflecting his background as a chemical engineer. These works, steeped in social realist conventions, portrayed the industrial proletariat as heroic builders of the Soviet future. During World War II, Grossman's wartime diaries and his reporting for *Red Star* centered on the patriotic and heroic endeavors of the Soviet people, from Kursk, Stalingrad, and all the way to Berlin. These writings reinforced the state's narrative of the "Great Patriotic War" and solidified Grossman's reputation as a national writer.

The transition to his mature phase began with *For a Just Cause* (1952), the prequel to *Life and Fate*. While this novel retains elements of socialist realism, it also signals Grossman's growing disillusionment with ideological orthodoxy. However, the text's extensive editing—there are up to 13 versions in the RGALI archives in Moscow—limits its usefulness for examining Grossman's unfiltered subjectivity. The heavily redacted versions, drilled for publication in *Novyi Mir*, reflect a compromise with Soviet censorship rather than Grossman's authentic voice.

By contrast, *Life and Fate*, despite the writer's best efforts, never came near publication under Khrushchev and thus represent Grossman's most unvarnished exploration of Stalinism. The novel delves deeply into the ideological and moral crises of their characters, making them ideal for this thesis's focus on subjectivity. Its exclusion from the Soviet publishing apparatus ensures that it reflects Grossman's mature intellectual and ethical positions without the distortions of state-imposed socialist realism.

The Development of Grossman Studies

Vasily Grossman's works emerged in Soviet literary discourse relatively late, primarily due to the suppression of his most significant writings. His magnum opus, Life and Fate, was confiscated by the KGB in 1961, and both it and Everything Flows remained unpublished in the Soviet Union until the 1980s, when they began to circulate in the West. This delayed entry into public and academic consciousness meant that Grossman's contributions to literature and thought were overlooked for decades, even as his works gained recognition for their profound critique of totalitarianism and their humanist ethos.

This text became central to Grossman studies, not only for their literary merit but also for their exploration of individual agency and ideological entrapment under Stalinism and its aftermath. Grossman studies as an academic field remain relatively recent and limited. The first major biography in the West, *The Life and Fate of Vasily Grossman* by John and Carol Garrard, provided a foundation for understanding the writer's life and context. This pioneering work opened the door for further exploration of Grossman's literary achievements, focusing on his unique position as both a chronicler of his time and a universal moral philosopher.

Significant momentum was added with the establishment of the Vasily Grossman Study Center in Turin, which aimed to integrate Grossman's works into global academic discourse. The center organized three international conferences, attracting scholars from diverse disciplines and publishing their findings in collected volumes. Despite these efforts, scholarship on Grossman remains somewhat isolated, with a strong emphasis on biographical studies and ethical considerations, particularly his views on freedom and human dignity.

The most comprehensive and developed analysis of Grossman to date is Alexandra Popoff's 2019 monograph, *Vasily Grossman and the Soviet Century*. Popoff contextualizes Grossman's life and work within the broader scope of Soviet history and literature, offering a nuanced exploration of his moral philosophy and his critique of both Stalinism and Nazism.

Her work bridges the gap between biography and literary analysis, positioning Grossman as a pivotal figure in 20th-century literature.

Although Grossman studies have made significant strides, there remains substantial room for further integration of his works into broader discussions of Soviet literature, history, and subjectivity. This thesis contributes to that effort by examining *Life and Fate* through the lens of Soviet subjectivity, a perspective that has yet to be fully explored in existing scholarship.

Integrating Grossman Studies with Soviet Subjectivity

Vasily Grossman's works, particularly *Life and Fate*, offer a rich field for examining Soviet subjectivity. While much of the existing scholarship on Grossman emphasizes his biography and ethical philosophy, his novels also provide a profound lens through which to explore the inner lives of individuals under totalitarian regimes. The dual contexts of this particular novel—written during the Thaw but set in the mature Stalinist period—makes it an especially good fit for analyzing the dynamic interplay between personal agency and ideological constraint.

Literature as a Medium for Exploring Subjectivity

One of the reasons literature, particularly prose, serves as a compelling outlet for examining subjectivity is its intrinsic focus on individual introspection over collective narratives. Jochen Hellbeck, in his studies of Stalinist diaries, notes that while diary writing often emphasized collective identities and ideological conformity, prose fiction allowed authors to delve deeper into the personal and introspective dimensions of human experience. This shift reflects the broader cultural and intellectual trends of the Thaw, where literature

became a crucial space for articulating and documenting the complexities of individual subjectivity.

Tzvetan Todorov's *Hope and Memory: Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (2016) provides a theoretical foundation for this analysis. Todorov argues that personal narratives and memories are essential tools for resisting homogenizing ideologies. According to Todorov, literature serves as a vessel for preserving individual subjectivity, allowing authors to challenge the erasure of the personal under oppressive regimes. Grossman's works exemplify this dynamic, offering richly textured explorations of individual moral and ideological struggles within the broader context of Stalinist repression.

The Role of Thaw-Era Writers

The cultural shifts of the Thaw further strengthened the incentive for writers like Grossman to document Soviet life with a new level of introspection and realism. Anatoly Pinsky highlights this transition, noting that reform-minded writers and critics argued that their colleagues had so distorted Soviet reality under Stalin that a new goal emerged: not merely to tell completed stories but to study and document the challenges and contradictions of Soviet life. Pinsky writes: "Реформаторски настроенные писатели и критики утверждали, что их коллеги до такой степени исказили советскую действительность, что теперь нужно поставить перед собой новую цель: не столько рассказывать законченные истории, сколько изучать и документировать проблемы советской жизни... В итоге в среде писателей и критиков зародился эмпирический императив, составной компонент субъективности."[10]

This empirical imperative encouraged a more nuanced approach to subjectivity, urging Soviet writers to confront and document the flaws of Soviet society as a means of fostering

[10]Pinsky, *Post-Stalinist Subjectivity*, 24.

reform and self-awareness. Grossman's mature works, with their unflinching portrayals of ideological betrayal and moral reflection, epitomize this shift. By exploring the fractures and contradictions of Stalinist subjectivity, Grossman not only critiques the collective myths of the Soviet system but also advances a profound humanist vision centered on individual dignity and agency.

Grossman's Contribution to Understanding Soviet Subjectivity

Grossman's portrayal of subjectivity is deeply intertwined with his critique of collectivist ideologies. His characters are not merely passive victims of Stalinism but complex individuals who confront their ideological entrapment in varied and deeply human ways. Mostovskoy, Krymov, and Shtrum—the focus of this thesis—each represent a distinct facet of Stalinist subjectivity, offering insights into the psychological and moral consequences of living under a totalitarian regime.

For example:

- **Mostovskoy**, an Old Bolshevik, exemplifies the internal contradictions of ideological loyalty. His imprisonment by the Nazis forces him to confront the ethical and moral failings of the system he once served, making him an ideal figure for retroactively exploring Hellbeck's notion of "self-fashioning" in Stalinist subjectivity.
- **Krymov**, a Stalinist enforcer turned victim, highlights the fragility and volatility of Soviet identity. His downfall reflects the instability of ideological conformity, echoing Stephen Kotkin's concept of "speaking Bolshevik" as both a tool of survival and a mechanism of betrayal. He is an Old Bolshevik who, Unlike Mostovskoy, stayed in Soviet Union and copes with irrelevance as he is confronted with actual New Men of stalinism.

- **Shtrum**, a Jewish scientist, navigates the dual pressures of professional ambition and ethnic marginalization. His moral dilemmas, framed by Pinsky's exploration of post-Stalinist creativity, reveal the enduring scars of Stalinist repression even as individuals seek autonomy.

Expanding the Scope of Grossman Studies

Grossman's works provide a critical opportunity to bridge the gap between Soviet subjectivity studies and literary analysis. While scholars like Alexandra Popoff and John and Carol Garrard have illuminated Grossman's moral and philosophical commitments, their analyses often stop short of engaging with the theoretical frameworks of Soviet subjectivity. This thesis seeks to fill that gap by situating Grossman's characters within the broader discourse of how Soviet citizens internalized and resisted ideological control.

By applying the insights of subjectivity scholars to Grossman's literary corpus, this study not only deepens our understanding of his characters but also contributes to a more nuanced picture of Soviet subjectivity itself. Grossman's portrayal of moral agency, ideological entrapment, and human resilience under Stalinism challenges existing paradigms, offering a narrative counterpoint to the historical and theoretical accounts provided by Kotkin, Hellbeck, Kozlov, and Pinsky.

Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate* emerges as conveniently positioned work to explore the complexities of Soviet subjectivity. Written during the Thaw but set in the mature Stalinist period, these novels embody a dual perspective that reflects both the ideological rigidity of Stalinism and the emerging critiques of the post-Stalinist era. By focusing on the inner lives of characters like Mostovskoy, Krymov, and Shtrum, Grossman provides a narrative laboratory for examining how individuals internalize, resist, and ultimately navigate the oppressive frameworks of totalitarian ideology.

The integration of Soviet subjectivity studies with Grossman's literature enriches both fields. Scholars like Stephen Kotkin and Jochen Hellbeck have illuminated the processes of ideological self-fashioning and conformity under Stalinism, while Denis Kozlov and Anatoly Pinsky highlight the cultural and creative shifts that defined the post-Stalinist intellectual climate. These frameworks align seamlessly with Grossman's thematic focus on moral agency, ideological disillusionment, and the enduring value of individual introspection.

Grossman's works also exemplify the power of literature as a medium for preserving and exploring subjectivity. As Tzvetan Todorov observes, personal narratives play a crucial role in resisting homogenizing ideologies, and Grossman's novels offer profound insights into the psychological and ethical struggles of his time. The Thaw-era emphasis on documenting and critiquing Soviet life further underscores the significance of Grossman's commitment to unvarnished realism and moral inquiry.

This introduction has laid the groundwork for the thesis's central argument: that *Life and Fate* and *Everything Flows*represent a culmination of Grossman's engagement with Soviet subjectivity, offering unparalleled insight into the tensions between ideological control and human resilience. The subsequent chapters will examine how the trajectories of Mostovskoy, Krymov, and Shtrum reflect these themes, contributing to a deeper understanding of both Grossman's literary legacy and the broader discourse on Soviet subjectivity.

Chapter 1. Mostovskoy (Good, Evil, and Communist)

The novel opens with a stark depiction of "camp-cities" in an enslaved Europe, characterized by straight lines, uniform barracks, and electrified fences. Grossman's description, "Бараки тянулись, образуя широкие, прямые улицы. В их однообразии выражалась бесчеловечность огромного лагеря. В большом миллионе русских деревенских изб нет и не может быть двух неразличимо схожих. Все живое – неповторимо. Немыслимо тождество двух людей, двух кустов шиповника... Жизнь глохнет там, где насилие стремится стереть ее своеобразие и особенности"[11], captures the suppression of individuality under totalitarian regimes. This world of rigid structure opposes the natural diversity of life, symbolizing how such systems reduce human existence to mere utility.

The camp functions as a microcosm of 20th-century totalitarianism, originally created for political prisoners but later expanded to hold individuals deemed undesirable, ranging from prisoners of war to social outcasts. These prisoners bear visible markers of their assigned categories, reflecting how such regimes systematize oppression. Even within this inhumane environment, political hostilities persist. Though this particular camp features only briefly throughout the novel, Grossman deliberately begins his story here to frame its philosophical underpinnings. He introduces Mikhail Sidorovich Mostovskoy, a defiant Old Bolshevik and Soviet prisoner of war, as a lens through which to explore some of his most daring questions about totalitarianism, ideology, and human resilience. The camp's oppressive environment and Mostovskoy's internal struggles illuminate the unique challenges faced by Old Bolsheviks, whose revolutionary ideals were increasingly at odds with the realities of Stalinist governance.

[11] Vasily Grossman, *Life and Fate*, trans. Robert Chandler (New York: NYRB Classics, 2006), 10

Old Bolsheviks occupy a complex and precarious position in Stalinist Russia. Their identities were largely forged in the fires of revolutionary ideals, which were later compromised under Stalin's rule. Despite their sacrifices and the fact that many of them were targeted during the purges, they often adapted to the regime, continuing to support the Communist cause. This adaptation was facilitated by the state's vocal maintenance of a Leninist tradition and the continued use of "Bolshevik speak," a rhetorical strategy that allowed old revolutionaries to align their beliefs with the evolving ideology of the state[12].

However, Old Bolsheviks had the unique vantage point to recognize the state's descent into totalitarianism, even if their growing disillusionment was often buried beneath layers of loyalty and the exigencies of wartime. In moments of crisis, such as those depicted in *Life and Fate,* this suppressed disillusionment occasionally surfaces, exposing the psychological toll of their attempts to reconcile revolutionary ideals with the brutal reality of Stalinist governance. Mostovskoy's journey is that of stubbornness. He is tested on his accountability for the Stalinist inaction. First he is asked to admit moral degeneration and hypocrisy that went into upholding bolshevik cause, then when he finally finds sympathy, it's coming from a Nazi..

Conflict with the tolstoyan

Ikonnikov, a spiritual man of indeterminate age, stands as a poignant counterpoint to the ideological rigidity that pervades *Life and Fate.* Emerging from a long lineage of priests, he is the last to preserve his beliefs, as his father ensured a secular upbringing for his brothers. Arrested in Belarus for preaching against the Nazi occupation and for aiding Jewish refugees, Ikonnikov's moral stance places him at odds not only with fascism but also with the revolutionary ethos represented by figures like Mostovskoy. His disdain for Mostovskoy's generation stems from their acceptance of violent methods, which he associates with the

[12] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*.

collectivization campaigns that devastated the peasantry: “Нет, – хмуро проговорил Иконников. – Ведь для вас цель ваша оправдывает средства, а средства ваши безжалостны. Во мне вы не видите чуда – я не диалектик”[13]. His rejection of dialectics and its justification of brutality underscores a broader indictment of totalitarian paradigms, where the end justifies the means. The Hegelian dialectics foundational to Marxist thought, which legitimized the terror and suffering of collectivization, find no resonance in Ikonnikov’s worldview. As he tells Mostovskoy, “Там, где есть насилие, – объяснял Иконников Мостовскому, – царит горе и льется кровь. Я видел великие страдания крестьянства, а коллективизация шла во имя добра. Я не верю в добро, я верю в доброту.”[14] This distinction between “добро” (abstract good) and “доброта” (compassion) situates Ikonnikov as a moral outsider, whose critique dismantles the utilitarian logic of both Bolshevism and Nazism.

Grossman uses Ikonnikov’s perspective to explore the broader mechanisms of Soviet subjectivity, particularly its self-justifications for systemic violence. As Jochen Hellbeck’s studies of Soviet diaries reveal, Old Bolsheviks like Mostovskoy were acutely aware of their transitional role in the dialectical progression of history. They embodied the ascetic and self-renouncing revolutionary, precursors to the “New Man” of socialist society: “Consistent with their dialectical role in history’s progression, the heroes from the 1920s were one-sided ascetic and self-renouncing warrior types. They were covered with dust and wounds, often sick, and unable to form personal relationships. They did not embody the ‘new man’ of socialist society but acted as its precursor, progenitor, or educator”[15]. While this role often led to their marginalization under Stalin, they adapted by aligning themselves with the increasingly

[13] Grossman, *Life and Fate*, 16
[14] Ibid.
[15] Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 237.

totalitarian trajectory of the state. The very concept of the "New Man" served to validate their sacrifices and sustain their complicity.

This dynamic, as Hellbeck notes, reflects not only the regime's external violence but also the internalized, symbolic violence that shaped Soviet self-understanding: "While the Stalinist regime practiced extreme forms of violence toward its citizens, their own self-understanding was suffused with symbolic violence as well. Struggle, campaigns against external and internal enemies, and the destruction of the Old Man in order to build the New Man were all core components of Soviet subjectivity"[16]. Ikonnikov's moral clarity, then, acts as a foil to this process, exposing the cost of these ideological transformations and the human suffering they entail.

Grossman captures Ikonnikov's rejection of this moral compromise through his "nonsensical and absurd categories of a supra-class morality." Despite his chaotic and seemingly irrational demeanor, Ikonnikov offers a radical critique of the foundational assumptions underpinning Soviet subjectivity, highlighting Grossman's broader inquiry into the tension between ideology and humanity.

The conversation between Ikonnikov and Mostovskoy concludes on a note of profound ideological dissonance. Ikonnikov rejects the justification of violence in the name of any supposed "greater good". His refusal to align with Mostovskoy's dialectical worldview is met with sarcasm, as Mostovskoy retorts, "Ужасайтесь уж без меня,"[17] distancing himself from Ikonnikov's moral absolutism. Yet Ikonnikov's parting words—"Спросите Гитлера, и он вам объяснит, что и этот лагерь ради добра"[18]—reveal the chilling equivalence he perceives between Bolshevik and Nazi rationalizations of atrocity. Through this exchange, Grossman

[16] Ibid., 358.
[17] Grossman, *Life and Fate*, 16
[18] Ibid.

juxtaposes two irreconcilable approaches to morality: one rooted in ideological expediency and the other in uncompromising humanity.

Conflict with the menshevik

Mostovskoy encounters Chernetsov, a Menshevik émigré who was arrested for attempting sabotage at the Parisian bank where he worked. Their exchange begins with a rare moment of mutual reflection, as both men fondly recall the revolutionary fervor of their youth. Grossman writes, "Этот лагерный человек, враждебный и чужой, любил и знал то, что знал и любил в молодости Мостовской…Оба понимали: лагерная смерть скоро заровняет, занесет песком все, что было в долгой жизни, – и правоту, и ошибки, и вражду"[19]. In this fleeting moment, the shared recognition of mortality and the inevitability of history softens the ideological divide between them, offering a brief anticipation of reconciliation. Yet this fragile truce collapses when Mostovskoy mentions Hitler.

Chernetsov's biting response is immediate: "Вам-то чего удивляться, – вас террором не удивишь… Вас, конечно, устраивает мысль, что в тридцать седьмом году были перегибы, а в коллективизации головокружение от успехов и что ваш дорогой и великий несколько жесток и властолюбив."[20] With precision, he targets Mostovskoy's ideological blind spots, accusing him and the Soviet people of enabling terror and silencing their dissent through rationalizations. He directs particular scorn toward the Great Purge of 1937, comparing it to the actions of the tsarist police colonel Strielnikov, who forged confessions from battered revolutionaries: "Помните жандармского полковника Стрельникова? Тоже работал без перчаток: писал фальшивые признания вместо забитых им до полусмерти революционеров. Для чего вам понадобился тридцать седьмой год? Готовились

[19] Ibid., 206.
[20] Ibid.

бороться с Гитлером, этому вас Стрельников или Маркс учил?"[21]Chernetsov's invocation of Marx is particularly cutting, highlighting the stark deviation of Bolshevism under Stalin from their shared revolutionary ideals. In this moment, Grossman illustrates the unbridgeable ideological chasm between the two men. For Mostovskoy, Marxism remains a framework for justifying state violence; for Chernetsov, it becomes a standard by which to measure the betrayal of their cause. Their confrontation exemplifies Grossman's broader critique of Soviet subjectivity, particularly its capacity for self-deception in the face of moral and ideological compromise.

Denis Kozlov, in *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, examines the perplexing silence of the Old Bolsheviks during the Great Purges, a silence that encapsulates their ideological entrapment. As Kozlov argues, "The Old Bolsheviks viewed the protest against Stalin as discrediting the common cause. Although they did not necessarily have warm feelings for the leader and his policies, they dreaded unleashing factional struggles and disputation… At the root of the silence of veteran communists in 1937 was a characteristic understanding of higher loyalty. Regardless of whether such unity existed, people in the 1930s considered the idea of it a blessing. On top of that, unity was a necessity in view of the impending and inevitable battle against Nazi Germany"[22]. This perceived loyalty to the collective cause, combined with the internalized fear of ideological fragmentation, fostered a self-disciplining subjectivity among Stalinist citizens, driving their transformation and deeper internalization of state rhetoric.

Mostovskoy embodies this mindset during his heated exchange with Chernetsov, the Menshevik émigré. When confronted with Chernetsov's critique, Mostovskoy does not engage in self-reflection but instead lashes out, accusing him of betrayal: "Да, да, вот именно! Выгнанный, бежавший лакей! В нитяных перчатках! А мы не скрываем: мы без

[21] Ibid., 207.
[22] Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, 200.

перчаток. Руки в крови, в грязи! Что ж! Мы пришли в рабочее движение без плехановских перчаток. Что вам дали лакейские перчатки? Иудины сребреники за статейки в вашем 'Социалистическом вестнике'?"[23] Mostovskoy's defiant pride in Bolshevik violence reflects the extent to which Stalinist compromises have been ingrained into his identity. Instead of entertaining Chernetsov's arguments, he weaponizes the rhetoric of loyalty and sacrifice to invalidate his opponent's perspective.

Chernetsov's critique, however, strikes at the core of Soviet subjectivity. He accuses Mostovskoy and his peers of enabling state terror through their silence and complicity, particularly during the Great Purge: "Помните жандармского полковника Стрельникова? Тоже работал без перчаток: писал фальшивые признания вместо забитых им до полусмерти революционеров. Для чего вам понадобился тридцать седьмой год? Готовились бороться с Гитлером, этому вас Стрельников или Маркс учил?"[24] This biting reference to Marx underscores how far Bolshevism under Stalin has deviated from its revolutionary origins. Chernetsov frames Stalin as a continuation of Lenin's flawed precedent, arguing that the system's moral decay was inevitable: "чудовищная бесчеловечность Сталина и сделала его продолжателем Ленина. Как у вас любят писать, Сталин – это Ленин сегодня. Вам все кажется, что нищета деревни и бесправие рабочих – все это временное, трудности роста."[25] Grossman explores this idea more explicitly in Everything Flows, suggesting that Chernetsov's critique is not merely Menshevik polemic but a legitimate challenge to the ideological foundation of the Soviet project.

Mostovskoy, however, refuses to concede. He sees Stalin as the culmination of a uniquely Russian revolutionary legacy: "Мы наследники всех поколений русских революционеров – от Пугачева и Разина. Не ренегаты-меньшевики, бежавшие за

[23] Grossman, *Life and Fate*, 207.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 206.

границу, а Сталин наследник Разина, Добролюбова, Герцена."[26] By linking Bolshevism to figures like Pugachev, Razin, Dobrolyubov, and Herzen, Mostovskoy portrays it as the rightful heir to centuries of struggle against oppression. This historical narrative reinforces his belief in Bolshevism's legitimacy and helps him deflect Chernetsov's accusations.

Chernetsov, in turn, acknowledges Stalin's pragmatism but views him as an authoritarian architect of terror: "Между прочим, из всех вас я уважаю лишь одного Сталина. Он ваш каменщик, а вы чистоплюи! Сталин-то знает: железный террор, лагеря, средневековые процессы ведьм, – вот на чем стоит социализм в одной отдельно взятой стране."[27] He shifts the blame for the terror onto Soviet citizens themselves, arguing that their self-fashioning under Stalin allowed such violence to flourish. In his view, Stalin's success lay in his ability to capitalize on the transformed subjectivities of a complicit populace.

Ultimately, Mostovskoy dismisses both Chernetsov and Ikonnikov as enemies of the state, refusing to allow their critiques to disrupt his ideological commitments. Grossman poignantly illustrates Mostovskoy's inability to engage with dissenting perspectives through his bitter rejection: "–Вы с вашей ненавистью к нам не должны сидеть в гитлеровском лагере. И не только вы, вот и этот субъект, – и он указал на подходившего к ним Иконникова-Моржа"[28]. This moment encapsulates the tragic rigidity of Soviet subjectivity under Stalinism, where even profound moral challenges are neutralized by ideological conformity.

[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 207.
[28] Ibid., 208.

Chapter 2. Krymov

Nikolai Grigoriyevich Krymov, a political commissar and Old Bolshevik, embodies a unique and tragic arc in *Life and Fate.* Unlike his fellow Old Bolshevik, Mostovskoy, who clings to Stalinist ideology with unyielding rigidity, Krymov actively seeks relevance within the Stalinist system. He is a man deeply entrenched in the collective, attempting to adapt and align himself with the evolving values of the Party. Yet, despite his efforts, Krymov's story is a poignant exploration of superfluousness—his irrelevance to a society that no longer values his revolutionary past.

The novel positions Krymov as a lens through which the reader witnesses the Soviet Union's inner workings during the Battle of Stalingrad. As he is sent to the beleaguered House 6/1 to "restore Bolshevik order," his interactions with Grekov and the defenders of the house reveal the growing chasm between the state's control and the people's will. Grekov, with his pragmatic defiance, embodies the people's liberal and dismissive attitude toward the Communist cause, challenging Krymov's authority and belief in the Party's supremacy.

Krymov's personal life mirrors this ideological conflict. His ex-wife, Zhenya Shaposhnikova, left him for Pyotr Novikov, a tank commander and a quintessential "new man" of Stalinism. Novikov's pragmatic, modern approach to life contrasts sharply with Krymov's increasingly outdated revolutionary ideals. Krymov's life becomes a futile struggle against irrelevance, culminating in his arrest during Stalin's purges—a fate that unites him with his ideological comrades yet underscores his inability to escape the system's contradictions.

This chapter examines Krymov's attempts to cope with his superfluousness and his ultimate failure to adapt. His journey reveals the futility of striving for relevance in a system designed to discard its ideological forebears, illuminating the broader collapse of Stalinist subjectivity.

Early Revolutionary Zeal and Initial Cracks in Ideological Confidence

Krymov's life is defined by his loyalty to the Party and his deep-seated belief in the revolutionary cause. As a commissar during the Battle of Stalingrad, he takes on the dual role of enforcer and ideologue, tasked with maintaining discipline and ensuring adherence to Communist principles. His mission to the battlefield is marked by a sense of purpose—yet also by an undercurrent of personal and ideological doubt.

Krymov's early recollections reveal his awareness of the passage of time and his diminishing role within the Party's hierarchy. His thoughts about irrelevance are tinged with a bitterness that he struggles to suppress: "Самое трудное – быть пасынком времени. Нет тяжелее участи пасынка, живущего не в свое время... Время любит лишь тех, кого оно породило, – своих детей, своих героев, своих тружеников. Никогда, никогда не полюбит оно детей ушедшего времени, и женщины не любят героев ушедшего времени, и мачехи не любят чужих детей."[29] The acknowledgment of being a "stepson of time" speaks to a deeper insecurity: Krymov knows that the ideals and methods that once defined him have been overtaken by a new era. His ex-wife, Zhenya, represents this transition. Her rejection of Krymov and embrace of Novikov underscores the generational shift within Soviet society. Where Krymov clings to ideological justifications for the horrors of collectivization and the purges, Novikov embodies a pragmatic, results-oriented Stalinism that resonates with Zhenya's disillusionment.

The personal and the political converge in Krymov's life, as his ideological rigidity alienates him from those closest to him. Zhenya's dismissal of his worldview reflects a broader societal shift away from the idealism of the revolutionary generation toward a more pragmatic, survival-oriented ethos. For Krymov, this loss is not merely personal but emblematic of his growing obsolescence in a system that once depended on men like him.

[29] Ibid., 34.

Clash with Grekov and the Limits of Adaptation

Krymov's assignment to House 6/1 marks a pivotal moment in his struggle to remain relevant. The house, modeled on the historical Pavlov's House, is a symbol of both Soviet heroism and individual defiance. Krymov is sent there to "restore Bolshevik order" and assert Party control, but he quickly finds himself at odds with Grekov, the leader of the defenders.

After discovering that the local command has been wiped out in a bombardment, Krymov is sent to investigate House 6/1, the novel's version of Pavlov's House, with clear instructions: "Вот товарищ Крымов получил распоряжение политуправления фронта отправиться в окруженный дом, навести там большевистский порядок, стать там боевым комиссаром, а в случае чего отстранить этого самого Грекова, взять на себя командование."[30] From the outset, it becomes clear that Krymov's authority is tenuous. The defenders of the house, led by Grekov, regard him as an unwelcome Party official—an outsider disconnected from their reality. Krymov, acutely aware of their perception, struggles to assert himself. At first, he finds himself drawn to Grekov's reckless confidence and even considers using his own frontline experience to bolster his credibility. Yet, wary of exposing weakness, he suppresses this impulse. Internally, he harbors disdain for his promotion and doubts his fitness for the role of "commissar". Nonetheless, he is determined to fulfill the Party's mandate, playing the role of its agent with as much conviction as he can muster.

Unlike Mostovskoy, who is ideologically stagnated and severed from the Soviet state in a German camp, Krymov shows an ability to adapt—or at least to attempt to—within the totalitarian system. However, his efforts are limited and fraught with internal contradictions. Grekov, by contrast, operates entirely outside the bounds of Soviet bureaucracy. He takes charge of the house on his own volition, refusing to keep logs or answer to higher authorities: "Когда поселок отрезали и я в этом доме собрал людей, оружие, отбил тридцать атак,

[30] Ibid., 286.

восемь танков сжег, надо мной командиров не было."[31] Grekov's success in leading the defense without state oversight unsettles Krymov. It starkly contrasts with his own position, which depends on the Party's validation. Krymov grows increasingly self-aware of his diminishing authority in the room. The tension reaches a breaking point when a minor interruption—a joking remark by the defenders—derails his attempt to initiate a serious discussion about the siege: "Нежелание слушать комиссара, рожденное ощущением своей силы, своей собственной опытности? … просто возникло от ощущения естественного равенства, которое было так сильно в Сталинграде."[32]The sense of "natural equality" among the defenders, once something Krymov admired, now breeds anger and frustration. He feels alienated not because the defenders are cowed or disorganized, but because they are self-assured and confident. This strength diminishes Krymov's authority and reveals the growing disconnect between the state he represents and the people who should be subject to it.

Krymov becomes hyper-aware of his symbolic role as the embodiment of the state's power in the room. Yet, the defenders of House 6/1 operate on the very edge of Soviet sovereignty. They are physically surrounded by the German threat and emotionally liberated from the Party's panoptic control. They sustain the siege on their own terms, controlling their means of production and their collective survival. This independence, combined with the camaraderie of the battlefield, dissolves the fear of punishment that would otherwise enforce compliance. The defenders' irreverence toward Krymov is typified by their mocking remarks about the Party's promises and postwar policies: "Вот я давно уж хотел спросить у партийного человека. Говорят, товарищ комиссар, что при коммунизме все станут получать по потребности, это как же тогда будет, если каждому, особенно с утра, по потребности – сопьются все?– А вот насчет колхозов, товарищ комиссар. Как бы их

[31] Ibid., 289.
[32] Ibid., 292.

ликвидировать после войны."[33] Grekov, humoring the banter, further enrages Krymov, who interprets this dynamic as a direct affront to his authority. That night, Krymov confronts Grekov privately, accusing him of tolerating anti-Communist sentiment among his men. Grekov, however, dismisses Krymov's concerns with little interest, refusing to legitimize his authority or entertain his grievances. Krymov's resentment deepens as he realizes that Grekov's control of the house, achieved without Party oversight, represents a direct challenge to the Soviet system Krymov has dedicated his life to defending.

The next morning, Krymov is hit by a stray bullet and carried away, a symbolic culmination of his alienation and impotence in the face of a defiant, self-reliant collective. His brief sojourn in House 6/1 leaves him with an acute awareness of his irrelevance, both to the defenders and to the broader Stalinist system that has little use for ideological relics like him.

Ironic Resentment in Akhtubinsk

After being removed from the frontlines, Krymov finds himself in Akhtubinsk, grappling with the deep frustration of being relegated to a peripheral role. This enforced retreat marks a significant turning point in his arc. For Krymov, the transfer represents not only a physical displacement but a symbolic relegation to irrelevance. As a commissar, his identity is rooted in his active participation in the machinery of the state; being sent away from the action feels like an exile from purpose itself. Even if he didn't allow himself to play into revolutionary behavior that situation in the house allowed, his temptation to participating in the action further contributed to the moral defeat.

Krymov's sense of humiliation is compounded by his bitterness toward Grekov. In the chaotic, egalitarian world of House 6/1, Grekov had thrived without oversight, embodying the

[33] Ibid.

independence and pragmatism that Krymov, bound by the Party's rigid hierarchy, could neither understand nor tolerate. Removed from the immediate pressure of the front, Krymov has ample time to ruminate on his perceived failure to assert his authority and the affronts to his position. His thoughts fixate on Grekov, whose defiance has become a symbol of Krymov's own inadequacy, so much so that he takes time to file a report. Such petty exercise of limited power Krymov has emphasizes his sense of abandonment

The Exile

Krymov's transfer to Akhtubinsk can also be read as a microcosm of his broader displacement within the Stalinist system. Once a key figure in the revolutionary struggle, Krymov now finds himself sidelined, his ideological commitment increasingly irrelevant in a world dominated by pragmatists like Novikov and individualists like Grekov. The town becomes a metaphorical prison, a place where Krymov's ideological fervor is rendered useless.

This sense of exile is underscored by Krymov's growing awareness of his own obsolescence. The system he has served so faithfully no longer has a place for him. In this realization, Krymov begins to understand the futility of his attempts to adapt to the new Stalinist order. His hatred for Grekov, then, is not just personal—it is a way of externalizing the larger forces that have marginalized him. In Akhtubinsk, Krymov is surrounded by the trappings of bureaucratic stagnation. The town, removed from the intensity of the frontlines, is suffused with a sense of inertia that Krymov finds intolerable. The Party officials he interacts with seem more interested in maintaining appearances than engaging with the pressing realities of war. This atmosphere deepens Krymov's feelings of alienation. His sense of being "out of time" and irrelevant resurfaces, echoing his earlier reflections in Stalingrad. The bureaucratic environment strips Krymov of the immediacy and danger that once gave his role meaning. The vibrant, chaotic energy of House 6/1 is replaced by the stifling monotony of reports,

committees, and ceremonial gestures. Krymov longs to return to the front, not out of a sense of adventure, but because he believes that only in the crucible of battle can he reassert his relevance.

Hatred, Coping, Rationalizing

In this period of forced idleness, Krymov's thoughts repeatedly turn to Grekov. His initial resentment—rooted in the erosion of his authority during his time in House 6/1—grows into a consuming hatred. Grekov's defiance becomes, in Krymov's mind, emblematic of everything that has gone wrong in his life. His failure to discipline Grekov or assert control over the house feels like a personal betrayal, not just by Grekov but by the system Krymov has devoted his life to serving. This festering hatred offers Krymov a grim form of solace. It provides him with a focus for his frustrations and a way to rationalize his current state. Grekov becomes the scapegoat for Krymov's own inadequacies, the embodiment of the Soviet system's disregard for its Old Bolsheviks. Krymov convinces himself that his anger is righteous, a defense of the Party's principles rather than a reflection of his personal insecurities: "Ему даже душно стало от злобы, – это Греков отшвырнул его от желанной жизни. Идя в этот дом, он радовался своей новой судьбе. Ленинская правда, казалось ему, жила в этом доме. Греков стрелял в большевика-ленинца! Он отшвырнул Крымова обратно в ахтубинскую канцелярскую, нафталинную жизнь! Мерзавец!"[34] Here, Krymov's hatred for Grekov intertwines with his feelings of loss and humiliation. His frustration is not merely about being sent away; it is about being denied a chance to reclaim his identity as a soldier of the revolution. Grekov, in Krymov's mind, has usurped this opportunity, embodying the vitality and autonomy that Krymov himself has lost. It is here Krymov starts rationalizing his decision to report

[34] Ibid., 352.

Grekov to the command: “Крымов вновь сел за стол. Ни одного слова неправды не было в том, что он написал. Он прочел написанное. Конечно, Тощеев передаст его докладную в Особый отдел. Греков растлил, политически разложил воинское подразделение, произвел теракт: стрелял в представителя партии, военного комиссара. Крымова вызовут для показаний, вероятно, для очной ставки с арестованным Грековым. Он представил себе, как Греков сидит перед столом следователя, небритый, с бледно-желтым лицом, без поясного ремня.”[35] Krymov is fantasithing about the whole scenario, driven by vengeance, that he has to turn into a justice using the party means. He first catches dangerous line in his rhetoric: “Генсек марксистско-ленинской партии объявлен непогрешимым, чуть ли не божественным! В тридцать седьмом году Сталин не пощадил старой ленинской гвардии. Он нарушил ленинский дух, сочетавший партийную демократию с железной дисциплиной.”

As an old Bolshevik, he retains his preference to Leninism, which makes his hesitate to apply Stalinist methods: “Мыслимо ли, законно ли расправляться с такой жестокостью с членами ленинской партии? Вот Грекова расстреляют перед строем. Страшно, когда бьют по своим, а Греков ведь не свой, он враг.”[36] Krymov brushes off this thought by reducing Grekov to a simple “enemy”, in similar fashion to how Mostovskoy refused to engage with Liss. This way, Krymov excludes Grekov from the collective and absolves himself from any moral responsibility in sentencing him to death. Grossman demonstrates it as a moment of weakness that Stalinism seeks in their subjects, as we see how exponentially Krymov’s ideological conversion twists around his narrative: “Крымов никогда не сомневался в праве партии действовать мечом диктатуры, в святом праве революции уничтожать своих врагов. Он и оппозиции никогда не сочувствовал! Он никогда не считал, что Бухарин,

[35] Ibid., 352.
[36] Ibid.

Рыков, Зиновьев и Каменев шли ленинским путем. Троцкий при всем блеске своего ума и революционного темперамента не изжил своего меньшевистского прошлого, не поднялся до ленинских высот. Вот сила – Сталин! Его потому и зовут Хозяином. Его рука ни разу не дрогнула, в нем не было интеллигентской дряблости Бухарина. Партия, созданная Лениным, громя врагов, шла за Сталиным. Военные заслуги Грекова ничего не значат. С врагами не спорят, к их доводам не прислушиваются."[37] Similarly to Mostovskoy, Krymov uses his opportunity to exercise the state's power, but with the implication that it serves his selfish needs. If in the case of Mostovskoy and Shtrum, leading the camp revolt and receiving Stalin's affirmation served as a moment of heightened purpose that alligns with their place as Soviet subjects, Krymov's moment is signified by moral decay as he turns on his Leninist beliefs. At the same time, Krymov is the one out of the three with legitimate state power and legitimate reasons to arrest Grekov. In isolation, his sense of subjectivity to the state is heightened, which is reverse to Viktor Shtrum, who fed further into his dissident views once awaiting trial.

Krymov remembers Grekov's teasing. "Тоскуете вы, но об этом в рапорте не напишешь." He ironically fed into Grekov's provocations and affirmed his pettiness. Nonetheless, he takes effort to rationalize this as well: "Что ж это, – думал Крымов, – донос, что ли, я написал? Пусть и не ложный, но все же донос... Ничего не поделаешь, товарищ дорогой, ты член партии... Выполняй свой партийный долг."[38] If we ignore the fact that Krymov's action here is in line with his selfish desire in vindication, an argument can be made that he is subjecting himself to the state by letting it betray the Bolshevik cause. This particular scene captures Krymov alone with own thoughts. The way he internally shelves revolutionary mindset and begins to approve of Stalin marks the same transformation average citizens

[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

underwent in the early days of Stalinism: "The leader's task was to 'take under [his] influence and leadership the personality of each student,' to engineer their souls according to standards of aesthetic perfection, and ultimately, to forge a 'cohesive collective.' After 'forcing them to correct their flaws, to overcome the residue of their former backward consciousness'."[39] In this context, Grekov inadvertently caused Krymov to deliberately engineer his own 'soul' to allow himself to exact the state's will appropriately. Krymov knew that punishing Grekov was what the state would have wanted, and he had a good understanding of the Stalinist rhetoric. All that was left is for him to adopt it, simultaneously satisfying his vengeance and making him more relevant in the collective, all in his mind.

Arrest and Interrogation

Krymov, revitalized after dealing with Grekov and adopting the newest doctrine, returns to Stalingrad. Approaching frontlines, where the conflict is reaching its conclusion, Krymov is called into a small house, where he is arrested: "Крымов ожидал, что капитан обратится к нему примерно так: 'Простите, товарищ батальонный комиссар, не откажетесь ли вы передать на левый берег товарищу Тощееву наш отчет?' Но капитан сказал не так. Он сказал: – Сдайте оружие и личные документы. И Крымов растерянно произнес уже не имеющие никакого смысла слова: Это по какому же праву? Вы мне свои документы раньше покажите, прежде чем требовать мои… Но это уже не были слова свободного человека."[40] Grossman accentuates how oddly swiftly and quickly the arrest happens. Krymov's arrest symbolizes the ultimate irony of the Stalinist state, which consumes its own revolutionaries. In the interrogation room, Krymov's defragmentation ensues. His initial confrontation with the interrogator reflects his shock and inability to process

[39] Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 263.
[40] Grossman, *Life and Fate*, 426.

the enormity of his situation: “Ему показалось, что разрушить эту каталажку могла немецкая бомба… И эта мысль была проста и отвратительна.” Krymov’s instinctive focus on external threats, such as the Germans, underscores his long-standing faith in the system. He cannot yet comprehend that the real danger lies within the Soviet apparatus itself. Still, following the many parallels made between the two states in the camps – line begins to blur for Kyrmov. His physical humiliation, encapsulated in the moment he is struck by the interrogator, marks the beginning of his psychological unraveling: “Удар по лицу означал духовную катастрофу и не мог ничего вызвать, кроме оцепенения, остолбенения.” Punches to the face fit the primitive, almost minimalist nature of both the arrest and interrogation. Krymov is accused of being ‘recruited’ by the Germans during the siege and simply demanded to admit it untill the rest of his story. The image of the “колхозник-автоматчик” staring at Krymov, a supposed vanguard of the proletariat, underscores his complete fall from grace: “Крымов оглянулся, стыдясь часового. Красноармеец видел, как били коммуниста! Били коммуниста Крымова, били в присутствии парня, ради которого была совершена великая революция, та, в которой участвовал Крымов.” He anchors his dissonance in his revolutionary past. Earlier he admitted that he is only a stepson of the time, this arrest makes him still cling to his diminished authority. He beings to grasp the gaping chasm between the state and its people, more specifically between its enforcers and soldiers, resulting in acute feeling of injustice and resentment. Approaching Lubyanka, he still anticipates resolution, still associating himself with the command: “В глазах темнело. Он пойдет к Щербакову, в Центральный Комитет, у него есть возможность обратиться к Молотову, он не успокоится, пока мерзавец подполковник не будет расстрелян. Да снимите же трубку! Позвоните Пряхину... Да ведь сам Сталин слышал, знает мое имя. Товарищ Сталин спросил как-то у товарища Жданова: ‘Это какой Крымов, тот, что в

Коминтерне работал?’”[41] Like with Grekov, Krymov envisions his interrogators to be punished by the state, as he still sees himself as part of the collective. Grossman highlights Krymov’s delusion as he perceives Stalin, who was shown to only to have a vague idea of one of the many Krymovs, as his saving grace. When the command rejects him as well, Krymov resorts to listing his patriotic war efforts, as he latches on the Lubyanka officer: “Ты, сукин сын, сволочь, где был, когда я вел людей с боями по Украине и по брянским лесам? Где ты был, когда я дрался зимой под Воронежем? Ты был, мерзавец, в Сталинграде? Это я ничего не делал для партии? Это ты, жандармская морда, защищал Советскую Родину вот тут, на Лубянке? А я в Сталинграде не защищал наше дело? А в Шанхае под петлей ты был? Это тебе, мразь, или мне колчаковец прострелил левое плечо?”[42] He continuously tries to prove his cumulative value to the collective: first listing his revolutionary deeds, then commanding career, then war efforts. His whole identity had centered around these associations, which are stripped away and disregarded one by one by simply ignoring. His degradation evolves parallel to the violence imposed on him by the interrogators: “Потом его били, но не по-простому, по морде, как во фронтовом Особом отделе, а продуманно, научно, со знанием физиологии и анатомии. Били его двое одетых в новую форму молодых людей. Они работали, не сердясь, без азарта. Казалось они били не сильно, без размаха, но удары их были какие-то ужасные, как ужасно бывает подлое, спокойно произнесенное слово.”[43] More methodological application of violence is followed by social discreditation: “Свидетели, документы говорят! Вы вели работу, разлагающую политическое сознание бойцов в окруженном немцами доме «шесть дробь один». Вы толкали Грекова, патриота Родины, на измену, пытались уговорить его перейти на сторону противника. Вы обманули доверие командования, доверие партии, пославших

[41] Ibid., 427.
[42] Ibid., 548.
[43] Ibid., 549.

вас в этот дом в качестве боевого комиссара. А вы, попав в этот дом, кем оказались? Агентом врага!"[44] Ironic mention of Grekov in his files is cherry on the top. Similarly to allegations against Shtrum, the accusatory language is Bolshevik Speak, the same for which Krymov was well known among the Shaposhnikovs. As the interrogations progressed, Krymov also loses his fluency in Bolshevik and becomes increasingly emotional in his defensive outbursts, which officials often perceived as a mark of ideological dissent[45]. His fate serves as a cautionary tale for Shtrum as he awaits his own judgement: "Как все это нелепо, как бессмысленно, – говорил он, – вспомните только мои разговоры с Николаем, он всегда мне вправлял мозги. А теперь! Я полон ереси, гуляю на свободе, а он, правоверный коммунист, – арестован."[46] Such unprecedented arrest, while not too questioned and rationalized pretty fast by the citizens, still evoked dissonance and denial among the victim's friends and family. Lyudmila, on the other hand, interprets it as twisted karma: "А ведь какой он был жестокий, – Николай! Не жалел он крестьян во время сплошной коллективизации. Я, помню, спросила его: что же это делается? А он ответил: черт с ним, с кулачьем. И на Виктора он сильно влиял."[47] While Krymov does reflect at length about his silence over Bukharin trials, collectivization was not something he felt particularly bad about.

All results in total annihilation of Krymov as a Soviet subject. His story is left unfinished as he is kept captive until pleading guilty, only left to long for reuniting with Zhenya, who only manages to send him groceries. Krymov's imprisonment reveals the tragic paradox of his life. As an Old Bolshevik, he dedicated himself to a cause that ultimately turned against

[44] Ibid., 548.
[45] Glennys Young, "Bolsheviks and Emotional Hermeneutics: The Great Purges, Bukharin, and the February-March Plenum of 1937," in Interpreting Emotions in Russia and Eastern Europe, ed. Mark D. Steinberg and Valerie A. Kivelson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 5.
[46] Grossman, *Life and Fate*, 486.
[47] Ibid., 474.

him. While like Shtrum he sees Stalinism as a deviation from Leninism, it was its direct consequence, such as Krymov's carrer lead to his unmaking. Narratively Grossman implies that his physical and psychological degradation in Lubyanka is direct punishment for Krymov's weakness. His insecurities led to complicity and betrayal of his autonomous suspicions about Stalinism, all while his fate was sealed in an apparently inconsequential way.

Chapter 3. Viktor Shtrum and the Shifting Paradigms of Soviet Subjectivity

Viktor Shtrum, the conflicted protagonist of Life and Fate, represents not only a deeply human response to Stalinist oppression but also Vasily Grossman's broader critique of Soviet moral and ideological frameworks. Shtrum's journey, marked by intellectual brilliance, personal failure, and moral compromise, parallels Grossman's own struggles as a writer navigating the pressures of systemic conformity and personal loss. Through Shtrum, Grossman crafts a narrative that explores the transformation of Soviet subjectivity, highlighting the tension between individual conscience and state control.

In examining Shtrum's arc, this chapter draws heavily on the theoretical frameworks outlined in *Post-Stalinist Subjectivity* by Anatoly Pinsky and The Readers of Novyi Mir by Denis Kozlov. These works provide crucial insights into the evolving nature of Soviet identity during and after Stalin's regime. Kozlov's exploration of cultural dialogues in Novyi Mir, alongside Pinsky's focus on Foucauldian subjectivity, frames Shtrum's internal conflicts and his relationships with family, colleagues, and the state. These perspectives enrich our understanding of how Life and Fate captures the disintegration of Stalinist self-fashioning and the emergence of a more fragmented, introspective post-Stalinist identity.

This chapter takes a chronological approach to Shtrum's arc, beginning with his life in wartime Kazan and culminating in the infamous phone call from Stalin and his ultimate moral collapse. Each phase of his journey will be analyzed in light of Grossman's own experiences and the broader cultural shifts described by Kozlov and Pinsky. Special attention will be paid to key dialogues, such as Shtrum's interactions with his colleagues and family, as they reveal the ideological and emotional pressures shaping his subjectivity. Finally, this chapter concludes with a comparative analysis of Shtrum and the scientist cousin in Everything Flows, showcasing how Grossman's critique of Soviet moral compromise evolves across his works.

By situating Shtrum's story within the theoretical frameworks of post-Stalinist subjectivity and cultural memory, this chapter argues that Life and Fate serves as both a personal reckoning for Grossman and a profound commentary on the human cost of totalitarianism. Shtrum's journey is not just a narrative of survival—it is a mirror reflecting the fractures of an entire society grappling with its past and its humanity.

Life in Kazan: Family, Alienation, and the Burden of Survival

Viktor Shtrum's narrative begins in Kazan, where he and his family are evacuated during the war. This period sets the stage for his inner struggles, marked by a profound sense of isolation, guilt, and the gradual awareness of his precarious position as both a scientist and a Jew in Stalinist society. Life in Kazan is characterized by mundane survival on the surface, but beneath it lies a simmering tension within Shtrum's family and his own psyche. His relationships with his wife, Lyudmila, his daughter, Nadya, and his mother, Anna Semyonovna, are strained, reflecting the broader pressures of wartime displacement.

The Family Dynamic: Fractures and Resilience

In the close quarters of their wartime evacuation, the fractures in Shtrum's family become increasingly visible. Lyudmila, mourning the absence of her son Tolia from her first marriage, appears emotionally distant and preoccupied. Her relationship with Nadya is equally strained, as she views her daughter's stubbornness and aloofness as a reflection of Viktor's own traits. Shtrum, caught between his scientific work and the pressures of family life, often feels disconnected from both.

These tensions are compounded by the presence of Alexandra Vladimirovna, Lyudmila's mother, whose attempts to maintain a sense of cultural and intellectual vitality through her interest in Kazan's history and daily life are dismissed by Lyudmila as selfish distractions. Shtrum's interactions with Alexandra Vladimirovna, however, reveal a different

perspective. He finds her resilience admirable, contrasting it with the growing bitterness he perceives in Lyudmila.

This dissonance in their perceptions points to a deeper alienation within the family. Shtrum's mounting frustration with Lyudmila's perceived coldness toward his mother, Anna Semyonovna, becomes a focal point for his guilt and helplessness. He accuses Lyudmila of having made it impossible for his mother to live with them in Moscow, projecting his unresolved feelings about Anna's fate onto their relationship. Lyudmila had her own reasons for leaving Anna Semyonovna since she was not fond of her son, showing clear preference for Nadya - own flesh and blood: "Но как мог Виктор требовать от Людмилы дружбы к Анне Семеновне – ведь Анна Семеновна нехорошо относилась к Толе. Каждое ее письмо, каждый ее приезд в Москву были из-за этого невыносимы Людмиле."[48] This quote emphasizes the mutual strains within their marriage. Lyudmila's antipathy toward Anna stemmed from her mother-in-law's favoritism toward Nadya, which made her presence unbearable. Viktor, while understanding these nuances, cannot fully reconcile them with his own feelings of guilt. Grossman captures this unresolved tension when Viktor reflects: "Виктор упрекал ее в том, что она не любит помогать людям, плохо относится к его родным. Он считает, – захоти Людмила, Анна Семеновна жила бы с ними и не осталась бы на Украине."[49] This projection of blame reflects Viktor's struggle to reconcile his scientific detachment with the emotional turmoil stemming from his family dynamics and his Jewish identity.

[48] Ibid, 47.
[49] Ibid, 87.

Anna Semyonovna's Farewell Letter: A Testament of Resilience and Loss

The arrival of Anna Semyonovna's farewell letter marks a turning point in this section of the narrative. Written from a Nazi-occupied Ukrainian town, the letter recounts her harrowing experiences as a Jewish woman facing persecution and imminent death. Grossman's portrayal of Anna's dignity and humanity amidst these horrors is both deeply personal and universal, drawing on his own mother's tragic fate during the Holocaust.

Anna's letter becomes a central symbol in Shtrum's journey. Her reflections on betrayal and unexpected kindness from acquaintances challenge his assumptions about human nature, while her final words—"Remember that your mother's love is always with you"—serve as a source of moral strength and a painful reminder of his own helplessness. Her account juxtaposes acts of betrayal and kindness, revealing the stark moral dichotomies of life under occupation: "Этим же утром мне напомнили забытое за годы советской власти, что я еврейка. Немцы ехали на грузовике и кричали: 'Juden kaputt!' А затем мне напомнили об этом некоторые мои соседи."[50] The letter not only captures the disintegration of societal bonds under duress but also becomes a compass for Shtrum, forcing him to reckon with his dual identities as a Jew and a Soviet citizen. The moral pivot it initiates in Shtrum's character is profound, as it juxtaposes his scientific rationality with the harrowing emotional reality of his mother's experience. As Bichurin notes, Grossman transforms Anna into a 'неусыпный моральный ориентир'," a figure whose presence haunts and guides Viktor throughout his moral and ideological struggles: "Если в хронотопе Гроссмана мать Штрума является частью романного прошлого, то Додин благодаря придуманной им структуре на протяжении всего спектакля (героиня – часть сценического настоящего) использует ее в качестве неусыпного 'морального ориентира' для раздираемого всевозможными

[50] Grossman, *Life and Fate*, 53.

противоречиями Виктора Павловича."[51] This quote highlights Anna's symbolic role as more than a victim of Nazi cruelty. She embodies the ethical consciousness that Viktor must navigate as he reconciles his scientific endeavors with the moral compromises imposed by the state. Her letter, therefore, is not merely a testament to her suffering but a challenge to Viktor's fragmented sense of self.

Grossman's depiction of Anna's plight and her unrelenting moral clarity reflects his personal struggle to document the darker facets of Soviet complicity in wartime atrocities. As Alexandra Popoff observes, Grossman's attempts to expose the role of local collaborators were repeatedly suppressed: "The manuscript had to undergo 'scrupulous political and factual editing' to exclude information about 'the abominable activity' of local collaborators.'"[52] By including Anna's letter, Grossman not only defies this censorship but also underscores the broader human cost of totalitarian systems. For Shtrum, the letter becomes a pivotal moment in his arc, forcing him to confront the enduring tension between his personal and professional identities, and anchoring his subjectivity within Grossman's broader critique of Soviet moral failures. The letter's impact on Shtrum is profound. It deepens his sense of guilt over not being able to save his mother, exacerbating the rift between him and Lyudmila. It also catalyzes his growing awareness of the systemic forces that marginalize him as a Jewish intellectual, even as he tries to maintain his scientific integrity in an increasingly hostile environment.

Shtrum's Early Alienation

Unlike Mostovskoy and Krymov, whose ideological crises emerge gradually, Shtrum's alienation is immediate and deeply personal. It is rooted in his Jewish identity, which becomes a source of both internal conflict and external persecution. Shtrum's reflections on his Jewishness—juxtaposed against the scientific optimism of his early career—highlight this

[51] Bichurin, "Мать как моральный ориентир," 58-59.
[52] Popoff, *Vasily Grossman and the Soviet Century*, 233.

tension: “Никогда до войны Штрум не думал о том, что он еврей, что мать его еврейка. ... Век Эйнштейна и Планка оказался веком Гитлера.”[53] This alienation sets Shtrum apart as a uniquely post-Stalinist figure. While Krymov and Mostovskoy grapple with the erosion of their Stalinist ideals, Shtrum’s estrangement stems from his inability to reconcile his personal identity with the ideological demands of the state. This dichotomy, as Denis Kozlov notes, reflects the “fragmentation of Soviet subjectivity in the face of unrelenting ideological pressure”.

Grossman has a very complicated relationship with local collaborators of the Nazi occupied Ukrainian and Belarusian villages. In his wartime reports to *Red Star*, he tried to bring those to light, but they were redacted. He then wanted to include the letter in *The Black Book* and *For a Just Cause*, and it got redacted for the same reason: “In February 1945 a commission appointed by Lozovsky assessed the entire manuscript. It produced a report stating that the manuscript had to undergo “scrupulous political and factual editing” to exclude information about “the abominable activity” of local collaborators “among the Ukrainians, Lithuanians, etc”[54]. Despite Grossman’s disdain for collaborators, and the exploration of Soviet anti-cosmopolitan prosecutions later in Shtrum’s story, he consistently uses the topic of anti-semitism as an anchor of Soviet State’s moral superiority over Nazi Germany: “Никогда до войны Штрум не думал о том, что он еврей, что мать его еврейка. Никогда мать не говорила с ним об этом – ни в детстве, ни в годы студенчества. Никогда за время учения в Московском университете ни один студент, профессор, руководитель семинара не заговорил с ним об этом.Никогда до войны в институте, в Академии наук не пришлось ему слышать разговоры об этом. Никогда, ни разу не возникало в нем желания говорить об этом с Надей – объяснять ей, что мать у нее русская, а отец еврей. Век Эйнштейна и

[53] Grossman, *Life and Fate*, 60.
[54] Alexandra Popoff, *Vasily Grossman and the Soviet Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 233.

Планка оказался веком Гитлера."[55] In the rest of the novel, much of discussion on antisemitism by the narrator is followed by scenes featuring Himmler, Hitler, or gas chambers.

This conflict early in his story sets the tone different from Mostovskoy and Krymov. If Krymov's alienation comes with the passage of his time, Shtrum's alienation stems from his Jewish background. At the start it is merely consequential, he feels distanced by his family whilst reminded of his Jewishness. Anna's letter seeds certain moral pivot into otherwise very scientifically minded Shtrum: "Если в хронотопе Гроссмана мать Штрума является частью романного прошлого, то Додин благодаря придуманной им структуре на протяжении всего спектакля (героиня – часть сценического настоящего) использует ее в качестве неусыпного 'морального ориентира' для раздираемого всевозможными противоречиями Виктора Павловича."[56]

Conclusion of the Kazan Section

Shtrum's time in Kazan establishes the emotional and ideological conflicts that will define his arc. His strained family dynamics, the burden of Anna Semyonovna's letter, and his growing alienation set the stage for the more overt challenges he will face upon returning to Moscow. These early struggles provide a foundation for understanding the complex interplay of personal conscience and systemic coercion that shapes his subjectivity throughout the novel.

Return to Moscow: Professional Triumphs and Brewing Tensions

The transition from Kazan to Moscow marks a pivotal moment in Viktor Shtrum's journey, as his professional accomplishments elevate him to the zenith of his scientific career. Yet, even as he gains recognition for his groundbreaking research in nuclear physics, a

[55] Grossman, *Life and Fate*, 60.

[56] Anatoly Bichurin, "Мать как моральный ориентир," in *После Сталина: позднесоветская субъективность (1953–1985)*, ed. Anatoly Pinsky (St. Petersburg: Издательство ЕУ СПб, 2018), 58–59.

foreboding sense of vulnerability begins to overshadow his triumphs. Moscow, a city where opportunities and dangers intertwine, becomes the stage on which Shtrum grapples with systemic anti-Semitism, ideological coercion, and his own moral dilemmas. This period reveals the fragile balance between personal success and the pervasive undercurrents of suspicion and hostility in Stalinist society.

Professional Triumphs and Brewing Tensions

The return to Moscow brings a newfound sense of purpose and validation for Shtrum. His scientific research gains widespread acclaim, with his innovative theories on nuclear physics heralded as groundbreaking. During a particularly significant academic council meeting, an eminent academician proclaims, "Эта работа, Виктор Павлович, – результат высокого математического и физического дара. Она, несомненно, открывает перед наукой новые горизонты, да и перед страной нашей, пожалуй, тоже."[57] This recognition cements Shtrum's status as a key figure in Soviet scientific progress, affirming his belief in the transformative potential of his research. Yet even in this moment of triumph, the double-edged nature of his success begins to manifest.

Shtrum's professional achievements are inseparable from the ideological scrutiny that pervades Soviet academia. His awareness of this is palpable when he reflects, "Но ведь в том-то и дело, что в научной жизни партийная линия превалирует. Любое несоответствие вызывает подозрение, даже у самых близких коллег." This observation underscores the precarious balance he must maintain, where every scientific breakthrough must align with Party ideology to be deemed acceptable. While his colleagues celebrate his work, Shtrum is keenly aware of the invisible boundaries he cannot cross. The Soviet state's insistence on ideological conformity means that no achievement, however exceptional, is immune from suspicion.

Despite the acclaim, Shtrum cannot escape the shadow cast by his Jewish identity. He notes with unease, “Штрум почувствовал, что в глазах окружающих он не столько выдающийся ученый, сколько человек с ‘пятым пунктом.’” Here, the term “пятый пункт” (fifth point) references the line in Soviet identity documents that indicated nationality—marking Shtrum as a Jew in a society increasingly hostile to his heritage. This realization complicates his success, as he recognizes that his identity, rather than his merit, may define his professional fate in the eyes of many.

The tension between recognition and vulnerability becomes evident in his interactions with colleagues. “И хотя все хвалили его работу, он ясно видел, как в словах некоторых коллег проскальзывало нечто большее – страх, что его труды могут оказаться идеологически опасными.” This subtle fear among his peers reflects the pervasive anxiety that even a celebrated figure like Shtrum could be ensnared by accusations of ideological deviance. Their praise, though outwardly sincere, carries undertones of caution—a reminder of the state’s capacity to reframe intellectual contributions as threats.

Moreover, Shtrum himself understands the fragility of his standing, acknowledging that his success depends not only on his scientific contributions but also on maintaining political favor: “Без одобрения ‘сверху’ никакие успехи в науке не могут быть безопасны.” This statement encapsulates the reality of his position, where political approval is as critical as intellectual achievement. The hierarchy of power, epitomized by “сверху” (from above), looms over every aspect of his professional life, eroding any sense of autonomy.

The celebratory atmosphere in Moscow thus masks a deeper undercurrent of tension. While Shtrum’s return marks a high point in his scientific career, it also serves as a reminder of the tenuousness of his position. His achievements, though transformative, are vulnerable to the shifting tides of political favor and ideological expectation. For Shtrum, this duality—the exhilaration of recognition tempered by the dread of suspicion—defines his reintegration into

Soviet academic life, setting the stage for the mounting pressures that will soon challenge his resolve.

The Colleagues: A Spectrum of Soviet Subjectivities

As Viktor Shtrum navigates the scientific community in Moscow, his interactions with colleagues offer a microcosmic view of the broader societal dynamics under Stalinism. These relationships reveal the varied strategies Soviet intellectuals adopted to adapt to the regime's ideological and personal demands. Together, they form a complex tapestry of survival, complicity, dissent, and moral ambiguity, reflecting the multifaceted subjectivities of life within the Soviet system.

Initially, Shtrum is buoyed by professional recognition, with his groundbreaking work in nuclear physics hailed as a historic achievement. Yet, the celebratory atmosphere is tainted by the subtle but unmistakable signs of exclusion, particularly in the sidelining of his Jewish colleagues. This realization forces Shtrum to confront the systemic anti-Semitism that undermines even the ostensibly meritocratic realm of scientific research. The contradictions of his position—celebrated for his intellectual contributions yet marginalized for his Jewish identity—underscore the fragility of his success and highlight the precariousness of individual autonomy within a collectivist state.

Shtrum's growing awareness of these injustices isolates him further, as he struggles to reconcile his scientific achievements with the ethical compromises and systemic inequities that surround him. Casual remarks and veiled warnings about his "fifth point" serve as stark reminders of the persistent vulnerabilities imposed by his identity. These tensions, both internal and external, deepen as Shtrum engages with his colleagues, each of whom embodies a distinct mode of survival and adaptation under Soviet rule.

Petr Lavrentievich Sokolov, a longtime colleague of Shtrum and a fellow physicist, epitomizes the cautious pragmatism that defined many Soviet intellectuals. Sokolov's

demeanor is marked by an almost religious acceptance of the state's authority, which Grossman describes with meticulous detail: "Соколов склонен к мистике, к какой-то странной религиозной покорности перед кесаревой жестокостью, несправедливостью." This acceptance is not born of enthusiasm but rather of a resigned fatalism that sees the injustices of the regime as akin to natural disasters—inevitable and beyond human control. Shtrum reflects on Sokolov's reluctance to engage in political discussions, which further illustrates his passive complicity: "Соколов до войны не терпел политических разговоров. Едва Штрум касался политики, Соколов замолкал, замыкался либо с подчеркнутой нарочитостью менял тему... Он словно бы воспринимал гнев государства, как гнев природы или божества." For Shtrum, Sokolov's silence is both frustrating and illuminating. It highlights the pervasive fear that inhibits open dissent while also serving as a mirror to Shtrum's own hesitations. Sokolov's quiet compliance ensures his survival but at the cost of moral agency, a dynamic that resonates with the broader compromises faced by Soviet intellectuals.

In stark contrast to Sokolov's passive pragmatism, historian Leonid Madyarov offers a bold critique of Soviet ideology and its historical roots. Through philosophical conversations with Shtrum, Madyarov articulates a scathing indictment of Russian humanism, which he characterizes as inherently sectarian and intolerant: "Ведь наша человечность всегда по-сектантски непримирима и жестока. От Аввакума до Ленина наша человечность и свобода партийны, фанатичны, безжалостно приносят человека в жертву абстрактной человечности." Madyarov's words resonate deeply with Shtrum, challenging him to question the moral authority of the state and inspiring him to think more freely about the intersections of ethics, science, and politics. In a moment of clarity, Shtrum attributes a breakthrough in his research to the intellectual liberation sparked by these discussions: "И странная случайность, вдруг подумал он, пришла она к нему, когда ум его был далек от мыслей о науке, когда захватившие его споры о жизни были спорами свободного человека, когда одна лишь

горькая свобода определяла его слова и слова его собеседников." As Popoff notes, even those "living outside the barbed wire yearn for freedom and suffer its loss." Madyarov's intellectual courage provides Shtrum with a fleeting glimpse of what unshackled thought might achieve, offering a rare moment of empowerment amidst the oppressive environment.

Marya Ivanovna, the wife of Sokolov, occupies a unique place in Viktor Shtrum's life. Unlike his colleagues who embody the professional and ideological tensions of Soviet life, Marya provides an emotional reprieve. Her presence and kindness allow Shtrum to momentarily escape the alienation and pressures of his daily existence, offering a connection grounded in trust and understanding. Yet, their relationship is laden with complexities, as societal constraints and personal loyalties limit the depth of their bond. Shtrum's interactions with Marya are characterized by a sense of openness and emotional safety that is absent in his other relationships. This dynamic is captured when Shtrum reflects on his ability to speak freely with her about his fears and suspicions: "Ему хотелось расспросить ее подробнее о Мадьярове, о его подозрениях по отношению к Каримову, рассказать о подозрениях Каримова. В пустынном Нескучном саду им никто не помешает. Марья Ивановна сразу поймет всю важность этого разговора. Он чувствовал, что может говорить с ней свободно и доверчиво обо всем тревожащем его, что и она будет с ним откровенна."[58] Here, Marya is portrayed as a confidante, someone who provides Shtrum with a rare space for vulnerability. Her understanding and attentiveness allow him to process the anxieties that plague him, making her presence a vital counterbalance to the hostility and suspicion he faces in the professional sphere.

The depth of Shtrum's attachment to Marya is further illustrated through his thoughts during a mundane moment, where her presence becomes the focus of his anticipation: "Я все время думал, что голоден, как волк, и все смотрел на дверь, скоро ли позовут обедать, а

[58] Ibid., 411.

оказалось, я ждал – скоро ли придет Марья Ивановна." This quote highlights how Marya's presence transcends the physical, providing emotional sustenance that Shtrum craves amidst the emotional barrenness of his life. It is not merely her company but the sense of belonging and understanding she brings that makes her so significant to him.

Marya's impact on Shtrum extends beyond personal comfort; she also represents a subtle defiance against the regime's dehumanizing influence. During a critical conversation, Shtrum realizes the profound wisdom in her perspective, which emphasizes the resilience of human connections: "Штрум не сразу, не вдруг понял, что Марья Ивановна нашла единственно верный ход разговора. Она как бы подчеркивала, что нет силы, способной помешать людям оставаться людьми, что само могучее государство бессильно вторгнуться в круг отцов, детей, сестер и что в этот роковой день ее восхищение людьми, с которыми она сейчас сидит, в том и выражается, что их победа дает им право говорить не о том, что навязано извне, а о том, что существует внутри."[59] In this moment, Marya embodies a quiet but profound resistance. By affirming the sanctity of personal relationships and internal values, she asserts a humanity that defies the state's attempts at intrusion and control. Her words serve as a reminder to Shtrum that, even within an oppressive system, there remains a realm where the state's influence cannot fully penetrate.

Prosecution and Stalin's Call: The Breaking Point of Subjectivity

The next phase of Viktor Shtrum's journey is marked by a dramatic shift in his fortunes, as he moves from the depths of professional and personal isolation to an unexpected resurgence following a phone call from Stalin himself. This section explores the dual impact of his prosecution and subsequent "redemption," revealing the profound ways in which these

[59] Ibid., 491.

experiences twist Shtrum's subjectivity. His internal conflicts—between fear and defiance, conscience and survival—are brought to the forefront, highlighting the corrosive effects of systemic power on the individual.

The Prosecution: Accusations of Anti-Leninist Practices

The turning point in Shtrum's story comes as his professional achievements draw the attention of Party superiors and institute colleagues, setting off a chain of politically motivated attacks. These accusations, cloaked in concerns for ideological purity, exploit his Jewish identity and unorthodox scientific theories, branding them as anti-Leninist deviations. The campaign seeks to discredit him both as a scientist and as a loyal Soviet citizen. A scathing article published in the institute's newspaper crystallizes this campaign, accusing Shtrum of ideological errors. The public denunciation undermines his previously celebrated work and reinforces his growing isolation. Once hailed for his groundbreaking contributions, he now faces relentless scrutiny, treated as an outsider who threatens the collective integrity of the institution.

Seeking some form of redemption and protection for his colleagues, Shtrum approaches Councilman Shishakov. He passionately defends his Jewish colleagues, including Vaispapir, a nuclear photography expert, and Loshakova, a respected worker in the institute: "Я категорически возражаю против увольнения Лошаковой. Она замечательный работник, она замечательный человек... Мне очень неприятно, что конфликты эти возникают в основном вокруг людей с еврейскими фамилиями." Despite his heartfelt plea, Shishakov deflects the issue, suggesting that the disputes have nothing to do with ethnicity and subtly insinuating that Shtrum's theories detract from the state's wartime priorities: "Некоторые люди заинтересованы в том, чтобы спорные теории объявить генеральным направлением науки именно в пору, когда все силы наши должны быть обращены к задачам, поставленным войной." This exchange highlights the duplicitous language often

used by Soviet officials to disarm and condemn dissenters. Shishakov's response, ostensibly concerned with aligning scientific work to the state's goals, veils an unspoken condemnation of Shtrum's identity and perceived disloyalty. Employing the "Bolshevik Speak", introduced by Steven Kotkin, allows Shishakov to undermine Shtrum's position while appearing ideologically steadfast, illustrating how language became a weapon of suppression.

For Shtrum, this attack is more than a professional setback; it is deeply personal. The orchestrated campaign underscores the precariousness of his position, forcing him to confront the limitations of his defiance and his vulnerability in a system designed to suppress individuality. Grossman uses this moment to reflect the broader mechanisms of Stalinist repression, where accusations of ideological deviation served as tools to silence dissent and enforce conformity. Through Shtrum, Grossman lays bare the human cost of these mechanisms, portraying a character increasingly aware of his helplessness yet unwilling to abandon his moral convictions entirely.

The Dread of Isolation: A Personal and Professional Abyss

Shtrum's rising dread highlights the personal toll of systemic repression. As his colleagues are called to present their views during the tribunal, their willingness to distance themselves from him becomes clear. Shtrum is left only to overhear fragmented conclusions: "Считать несовместимым, просить дирекцию рассмотреть вопрос о дальнейшем...– Понятно." These few words, laden with implicit betrayal, symbolize the collective's decision to isolate him. The scene captures Shtrum's growing paranoia and disillusionment, as he speculates how his colleagues likely compromised their integrity to save their positions.

Shtrum's most intense frustration is directed at his friend Sokolov, whose absence wounds him deeply: "Невыносимо было думать о Соколове... Простить можно всем... Но другу! Мысль о Соколове вызывала в нем такую злобу, такую мучительную обиду, что становилось трудно дышать." This betrayal reveals a core tension in Shtrum's relationships,

where loyalty is sacrificed to fear. Even as he rages against Sokolov's abandonment, he subconsciously seeks to justify his own perceived failures. Grossman uses this internal conflict to underscore the fragility of human connections under authoritarian pressures.

The atmosphere of dread pervades Shtrum's private thoughts, which oscillate between despair and a desperate attempt to rationalize his predicament. At one point, he reflects: "Мне не до философии, меня посадить могут, какая уж тут философия... Вот мы мудры, и Геркулес нам кажется рахитиком. А в это же время немцы убивают еврейских стариков и детей... у нас происходили тридцать седьмой год и сплошная коллективизация." Here, Shtrum's internal monologue connects personal persecution with broader systemic atrocities, showcasing his growing dissidence. However, rather than achieving true introspection, his thoughts spiral into a critique of the state, fueled by his acute awareness of its brutal history.

Grossman's narrative aligns Shtrum's state of mind with broader theories of Soviet subjectivity. The quote, "The more their observations departed from the required viewpoint, the more they were expected to struggle to reinhabit the grid," reflects how individuals were pressured to rationalize their observations to align with state ideology. Shtrum's failure to do so marks him as weak, underscoring his volatile position within the collective. Grossman's portrayal suggests that Shtrum's inability to suppress his critical thinking makes him a liability in a system that demands conformity.

Shtrum's professional isolation is mirrored in his personal life. His once-strong relationships are fraying under pressure. Marya Ivanovna, his emotional refuge, is forced to sever ties under her husband's orders. Meanwhile, his strained marriage with Lyudmila offers no solace. This dual isolation pushes Shtrum to the brink of collapse, as he struggles to maintain any semblance of purpose.

The systematic betrayal by his colleagues is laid bare in the tribunal's discussions. Once vocal supporters now publicly denounce him: "Очень нехорошо выступал доктор

физических наук Гуревич. Он признал, что грубо ошибся... путаник в политике окажется неминуемо путаником и в науке." The insinuation that Shtrum's political unreliability discredits his scientific work exemplifies the fusion of personal and professional attacks in Stalinist purges.

Perhaps the most cutting betrayal comes from Pimenov, who previously revered Shtrum's work: "Пименов не раз говорил, что работа Штрума вызывает в нем молитвенное чувство." Yet, during the tribunal, Pimenov denounces Shtrum with rehearsed rhetoric, symbolizing the complete moral erosion within the scientific community. This betrayal shatters Shtrum's belief in the integrity of his peers, reinforcing his isolation.

Grossman reflects on the mechanisms behind such betrayals, emphasizing self-censorship as a survival tactic: "Scholars often consider self-censorship... not to conceal a dangerous truth... but to preserve a truth they entertained of themselves."[60] The narrative portrays Shtrum's colleagues as complicit in their moral erosion, choosing silence or denunciation to safeguard their positions.

This section captures the culmination of Shtrum's alienation, both professionally and personally. The collective that once celebrated his achievements now rejects him as a liability. Grossman uses Shtrum's plight to expose the destructive impact of authoritarianism on human relationships and intellectual communities. The reader witnesses the corrosive effects of fear and conformity, as even the brightest minds capitulate to a system designed to crush individuality.

Stalin's Call: A Moment of Relief and Subjugation

The narrative reaches an unexpected turning point with a direct intervention from Stalin himself, a figure whose presence is typically felt as an omnipotent force rather than as a

[60] Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 359.

participant in events. For Shtrum, the phone call represents both a moment of personal validation and a stunning shift in his circumstances. Stalin's voice, described as "медленный, с горловым произношением, с значительностью звуковых подчеркиваний,"[61] evokes an almost performative authority. Grossman's attention to the surreal tone of Stalin's speech underscores the dissonance between his paternalistic words and the systemic brutality he represents.

Stalin's inquiry about Shtrum's work and his needs, "Не испытываете ли вы недостатка в иностранной литературе... обеспечены ли вы аппаратурой?" projects an image of benevolence. However, this brief exchange, which lasts only a few minutes, holds profound implications. Stalin's acknowledgment effectively erases the accusations against Shtrum, as the system that condemned him now pivots to align itself with his perceived importance. The reinstatement of Shtrum's professional standing is immediate and unequivocal, highlighting the capriciousness of Stalinist power.

For Shtrum, the call is a moment of profound cognitive dissonance. The passage, "Возникло пронзительно ясное ощущение свершения судьбы, и с ним смешалась печаль о потере чего-то странно милого, трогательного, хорошего," captures the complex interplay of triumph and loss. The recognition he craved comes at the cost of an intangible yet deeply felt part of himself. This ambivalence reflects the psychological toll of living under a regime where personal success is inseparable from systemic complicity.

Shtrum's reaction to hearing Stalin's voice, "Неужели это он произнес в телефон эти немыслимые слова," reveals his awe and disbelief. Even as he responds with deference, his astonishment underscores the surreal nature of the interaction. Grossman juxtaposes Shtrum's private mimicry of Stalin's radio speeches with the reality of speaking to him, illustrating the totalitarian leader's almost mythic presence in Soviet life.

[61] Grossman, *Life and Fate*, 534.

Stalin's phone call serves as a narrative device to highlight the arbitrariness of Soviet power. Shtrum, who was previously ostracized and discredited, is now reinstated with privileges far exceeding his former status. This shift exposes the systemic fragility of Soviet institutions, where an individual's fate hinges not on merit or truth but on the whims of authority. The reinstatement of Shtrum's authority, as symbolized by Stalin's parting words, "Желаю вам успеха в работе," demonstrates the paradoxical nature of totalitarian validation—it offers security while reinforcing submission.

Stalin's only appearance as a character in Life and Fate is charged with symbolic weight. The interaction reveals not only the extent of his influence but also the psychological mechanisms that sustain his power. Shtrum's transformation from a pariah to a celebrated scientist mirrors the precariousness of individual agency within the Soviet system. Grossman's depiction of Stalin as simultaneously human and omnipotent reflects the unique nature of his totalitarian rule, a phenomenon that defined an era and continues to shape historical memory.

This scene, both intimate and emblematic, encapsulates the central tension of Shtrum's arc: the intersection of personal ambition and systemic oppression. While Stalin's call restores Shtrum's professional standing, it also reinforces the psychological and moral compromises required to survive in a regime that wields power with such arbitrary and overwhelming force.

The Twist in Subjectivity: From Defiance to Compliance

While Stalin's call offers Shtrum a profound sense of relief, it also signals a turning point in his subjectivity. The privileges reinstated to him—professional validation, a restored position, and material support—come at a cost: his moral integrity. Grossman positions Shtrum as a stand-in for himself, reflecting the struggle of a skeptical, thaw-minded intellectual ensnared by the allure of belonging to a corrupt yet omnipotent collective. Shtrum acknowledges his dependence on Stalin's intervention, as he reflects, "Не будь сталинского

телефонного звонка, никто бы в институте не хвалил выдающиеся труды"[62]. This admission underscores his awareness of how his achievements are tied not to merit but to political favor. The depiction of Stalin as "не был прихотью, капризом. Ведь Сталин – это государство," elevates him from an individual leader to a manifestation of state power itself. Grossman conveys Stalin's symbolic presence as omnipotent and impersonal, a figure whose actions define not only the system but also the terms of personal survival within it.

Through Stalin, Grossman explores the nature of totalitarian power, echoed by Yurchak's post-Stalinist analysis: "С исчезновением господствующей фигуры... исчез и метадискурс."[63] This perspective highlights Stalin's unique role as both the enforcer of ideological coherence and its sole arbiter. The paradox lies in the simultaneous existence of an objective "truth" of Marxism-Leninism and the lack of any figure capable of embodying or verifying it after Stalin's death. This analysis aligns with Hannah Arendt's argument that totalitarian states, a phenomenon unique to the 20th century, derive their strength from such contradictions. Stalin's enigmatic presence, Grossman suggests, is both ideologically contradictory and uniquely irreplaceable.

This contradiction resonates in Shtrum's internal struggle. Grossman captures how the lure of state validation manipulates even the most skeptical of minds. Shtrum's vulnerability and subconscious desire for reintegration into the collective reflect a broader critique of the psychological mechanisms underpinning totalitarianism.

[62] Grossman, Life and Fate, 583.

[63] Alexei Yurchak, *Это было навсегда, пока не кончилось. Последнее советское поколение* [*Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*], trans. [translator, if applicable] (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2014), 52.

Shtrum's Signing of the Letter: A Moral and Psychological Collapse

The pivotal moment of Viktor Shtrum's moral compromise comes with his signing of the infamous letter, a public declaration orchestrated by Soviet authorities to discredit and silence Western scientists who had expressed solidarity with their persecuted Soviet counterparts. The letter serves as a stark illustration of the state's ability to manipulate its intellectual elite, compelling them to participate in the very mechanisms of repression they might internally oppose. For Shtrum, the act of signing the letter becomes a devastating realization of his own complicity, a moment that irrevocably twists his subjectivity and underscores the tragic paradox of his existence.

The letter is part of a larger campaign designed to showcase the Soviet Union's ideological and moral superiority. Its intended purpose is to refute criticisms of the regime's treatment of intellectuals, particularly in the wake of high-profile purges and ongoing anti-Semitic policies. By leveraging the prestige of its scientific elite, the state seeks to lend credibility to its denials and portray an image of unity and compliance among its intellectuals. Shtrum, whose prominence has been reinstated following Stalin's call, finds himself at the center of this campaign. As a newly rehabilitated figure within the scientific community, his signature carries symbolic weight. By signing, Shtrum not only endorses the regime's narrative but also affirms his loyalty to the state—a loyalty that he knows, in his heart, is coerced and hollow.

The act of signing the letter is fraught with tension for Shtrum. On the surface, the pressure to conform is immense. His colleagues, many of whom had previously distanced themselves from him, now look to him for guidance and assurance. The implicit threat of renewed persecution looms large, reinforcing the idea that refusal is tantamount to self-destruction.

Internally, Shtrum grapples with the moral implications of his decision. He understands that signing the letter is a betrayal—not only of his own conscience but also of the principles of truth and integrity that he once held dear. Yet, in the moment, he succumbs to a pervasive sense of inevitability, convincing himself that resistance is futile and self-sacrifice meaningless. Grossman captures this inner conflict with haunting clarity. Shtrum's thoughts oscillate between self-justification and self-condemnation. He rationalizes his decision by citing the pressures of the system and the need to protect his family, but these justifications ring hollow even to him. The very act of rationalizing reveals his awareness of the choice he is making—and the cost of that choice.

The Aftermath: Realizing the Consequences

The weight of Shtrum's decision becomes fully apparent in the aftermath of the signing. His initial relief at avoiding immediate consequences is quickly replaced by a deep and abiding sense of shame. This shame is compounded when Marya Ivanovna, unaware of his compliance, calls to express her admiration for what she assumes is his continued defiance. Her praise becomes a piercing reminder of the man he has failed to be, and Shtrum cannot bring himself to correct her perception: "Я уверена, что это вы, ваша сила помогла Петру Лаврентьевичу выстоять, у нас все обошлось благополучно. И тут же я представила, как вы при этом навредили себе. Вы такой угловатый, где другой ушибется, вы разобьетесь в кровь. Он повесил трубку, закрыл лицо руками. Он уже понимал ужас своего положения: не враги казнили сегодня его. Казнили близкие, своей верой в него."[64] This moment encapsulates the tragic irony of Shtrum's situation. By signing the letter, he has secured his survival and professional standing, but he has lost something far more essential—his integrity and his sense

[64] Grossman, Life and Fate, 583.

of self. The act of betrayal becomes a permanent wound, one that he knows he must carry as both punishment and reminder.

The Retrospective Choice: Could He Have Resisted?

Looking back, Shtrum reflects on the moment of signing and realizes, to his horror, that he did, in fact, have a choice. The coercion, while powerful, was not absolute. He recognizes that others, facing similar pressures, have found the strength to resist. This realization deepens his sense of guilt, as it forces him to confront the fact that his compliance was not merely a product of external forces but also of his own weakness: "Герои Гроссмана всегда оказываются в ситуации, когда нужно сделать выбор, чтобы утвердить свою человечность. Свобода в философии Гроссмана оказывается универсальным ключом, но особенно сильно она проявляется вопреки обстоятельствам, а отнюдь не в прямой зависимости от них."[65] This philosophy of freedom of choice is what makes Grossman's understanding of Soviet subjectivity unique. Sofiya Levinton chooses not to use her pardon to accompany young boy David in the gas chambers. Grekov, Novikov, and soldiers of Stalingrad choose to die to protect their people even when the state is not there to see it. These people exercise their autonomy and do not contemplate their life and death decisions in response to the state. Human values over communist values. Shtrum did not see the choice of not signing the letter, same as his collegues did not see the choice to stand for him in the moment of peril. Mostovskoy didn't see the choice not to follow through made up party orders. For Grossman, heroes can consciously defy their subjectivity in the moments of crisis, while others willingly choose to follow it. Choosing your own safety over death is still a morally wrong choice if conformity supports a totalitarian regime.

[65] Boris Lanin, "«Жизнь и судьба» в театре и кино," in Grossman Studies: The Legacy of a Contemporary Classic, ed. Maurizia Calusio, Anna Krasnikova, and Pietro Tosco (Milan: EDUCatt, 2016), 188

Conclusion of the Prosecution and Redemption Section

The events surrounding Shtrum's prosecution and Stalin's call encapsulate the central tensions of his subjectivity. The transition from isolation to prominence, from defiance to compliance, reveals how the subject's autonomy is volatile in the face of the collective and the state. Grossman uses Shtrum's reflections to highlight a broader truth about the nature of totalitarian power: its ability to exploit human vulnerability and turn individuals into agents of their own oppression. Shtrum's recognition of this dynamic adds a layer of complexity to his guilt. He understands that his betrayal was not inevitable, and this understanding becomes the source of both his redemption and his enduring torment.

Conclusion

This thesis has analyzed the characters of Mostovskoy, Krymov, and Viktor Shtrum in Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*, exploring their struggles with the Stalinist past and their transformations as Soviet subjects. By applying Soviet subjectivity theories, this study situated Grossman's novel within the broader discourse on the "unmaking" of Stalinist subjectivity, demonstrating the novel's profound engagement with both Stalinist and post-Stalinist contexts.

Key Findings on the Characters. Mostovskoy's ideological rigidity and inability to critically reexamine his faith in Stalinism mark him as emblematic of the Old Bolshevik who is paralyzed by history. Confronted by figures like Ikonnikov and Chernetsov, who challenge his worldview, Mostovskoy retreats into an uncritical affirmation of the collective's ideological purity. His arc demonstrates how Stalinism fosters a kind of fatalistic submission that undermines the very revolutionary zeal it once sought to harness.

Krymov, on the other hand, illustrates the struggles of an Old Bolshevik attempting to adapt to a rapidly shifting ideological landscape. Unlike Mostovskoy, Krymov strives to remain relevant by embracing the state's evolving Stalinist ideology. Yet his failure to assert control in House 6/1 and his eventual arrest reveal the futility of this adaptation. Krymov's downfall is marked by his internal contradictions: his attempts to serve the Party culminate in his own destruction, highlighting the self-cannibalizing nature of Stalinism.

Viktor Shtrum offers a contrasting trajectory, embodying the individual intellectual's struggle with Soviet conformity. While initially grappling with self-doubt and a longing for state affirmation, Shtrum ultimately begins to distance himself from the Stalinist apparatus, albeit at great personal cost. His refusal to fully submit to the regime suggests the emergence of a nascent dissident consciousness. Shtrum's arc thus serves as a counterpoint to Mostovskoy and Krymov, offering a glimpse of subjectivity that begins to resist the totalizing grip of the state.

Contributions and Challenges of Soviet Subjectivity Analysis. The application of Soviet subjectivity theories has provided a nuanced framework for interpreting these characters, revealing the ideological struggles, moments of defiance, and degrees of complicity that define their arcs. This method uncovers how Grossman's characters navigate the interplay between personal autonomy and collective loyalty, offering valuable insights into the psychological mechanisms of Stalinist rule.

However, this approach has its limitations. The concept of Soviet subjectivity is inherently fluid, heavily dependent on historical and contextual nuances, which can make it challenging to apply with precision in literary analysis. The lack of established precedents for using subjectivity theories in the study of Soviet literature further complicates comparative analyses. Much of the scholarship in this field has focused on official reports, diaries, and memoirs, leaving a gap in applying these theories to fictional narratives.

Implications for Future Research. This study suggests several avenues for further exploration. Analyzing Grossman's *Everything Flows* and his later short stories could deepen the understanding of his evolving vision of Soviet subjectivity, particularly in the post-Stalinist era. However, it is worth noting that applying subjectivity theories to works set in the Thaw period may yield less dramatic insights, as these texts already engage with themes of critique and reform.

Grossman's *Life and Fate* benefits uniquely from its dual temporal context, which allows for an examination of both Stalinist and post-Stalinist subjectivity. This duality may make it an ideal candidate for further studies of how Soviet literature grapples with the legacy of Stalinism. Similarly, applying subjectivity theories to social realist texts from the 1930s could yield valuable insights into the editorial and ideological processes that shaped Soviet literature during its formative years. For instance, Grossman's earlier works, such as *Stepan Kolchugin*, reflect Menshevik sympathies that were later erased or reshaped to align with

official doctrine, illustrating the complexities of ideological compliance and resistance in Soviet creative expression.

By bridging the study of Soviet subjectivity with literary analysis, this thesis has demonstrated the potential of this interdisciplinary approach to illuminate the inner lives of characters shaped by one of history's most totalitarian regimes. It invites further dialogue between literary scholars and historians to enrich our understanding of Soviet culture, ideology, and individual agency.

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