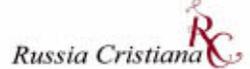


в дом в который. Этих немцев и из которого вышли
Давид



LIFE AND FATE

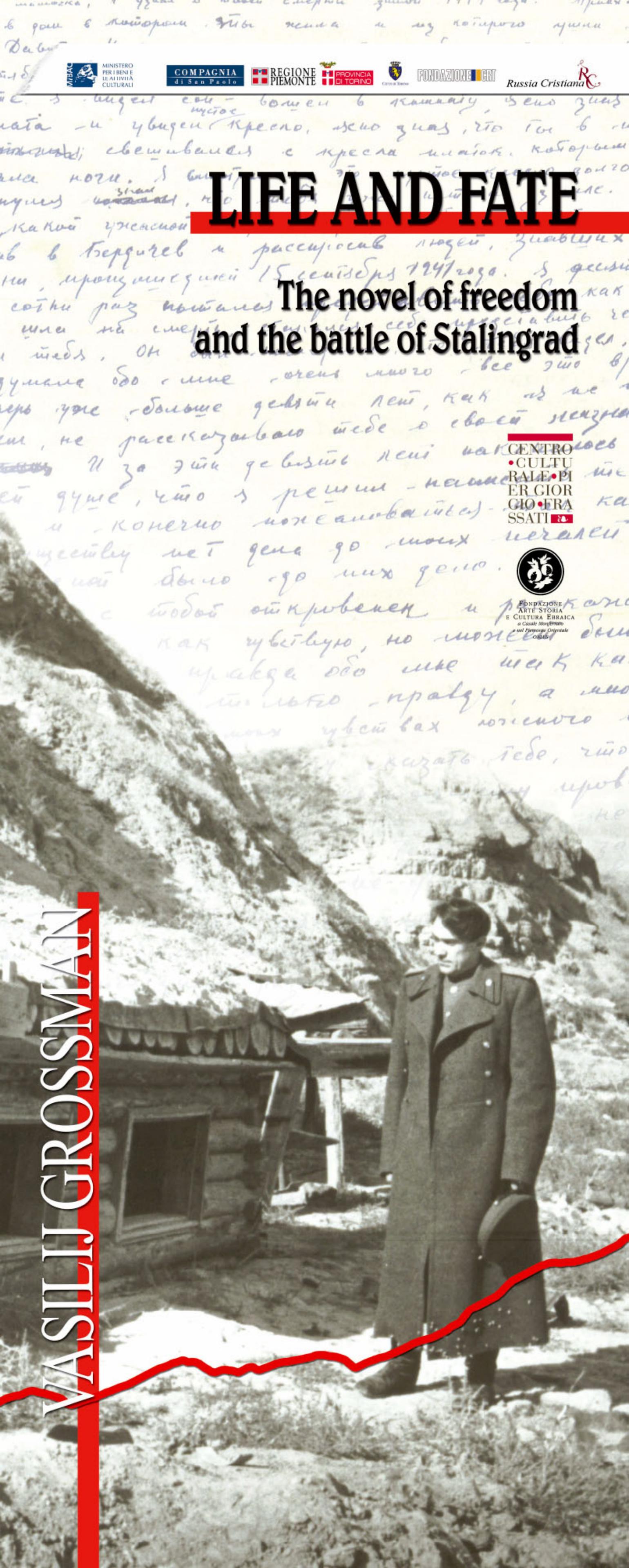
The novel of freedom and the battle of Stalingrad

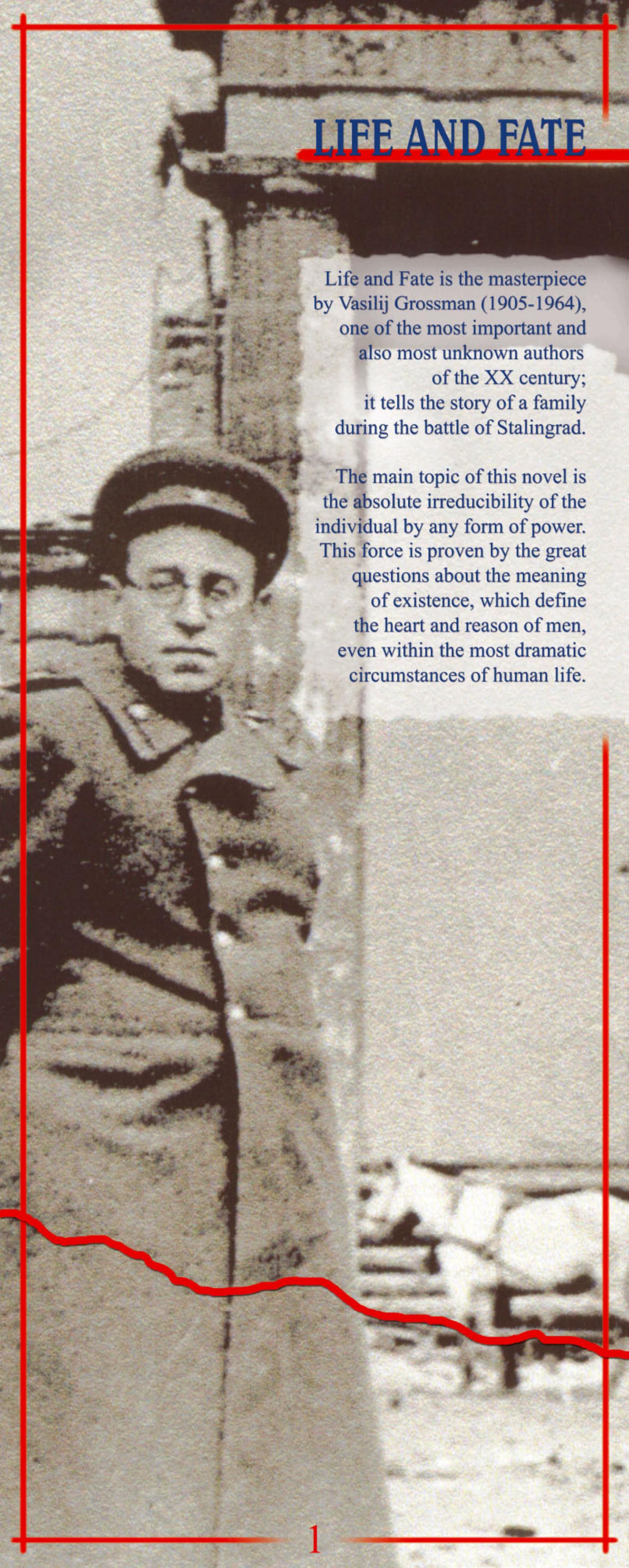
CENTRO
• CULTU
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ER GIOR
GIO • FRA
SSATI



FONDAZIONE
ARTE STORIA
E CULTURA EBRAICA
a Casale Monferrato
e nel Piemonte Orientale
ONLUS

VASILIJ GROSSMAN





LIFE AND FATE

Life and Fate is the masterpiece by Vasilij Grossman (1905-1964), one of the most important and also most unknown authors of the XX century; it tells the story of a family during the battle of Stalingrad.

The main topic of this novel is the absolute irreducibility of the individual by any form of power. This force is proven by the great questions about the meaning of existence, which define the heart and reason of men, even within the most dramatic circumstances of human life.

HOUSE 6\1

FREEDOM

The German advance in the Soviet Union was blocked in Stalingrad in the autumn of 1942.

The story of house 6/1 describes the heroic Russian resistance against the powerful German army. But what Grossman really depicts is the defeat of ideology. The soldiers of house 6/1, who at this point were alone in their fight against the enemy, rediscovered the roots of their own freedom, for which it is worth living and dying.

[When a person dies] the stars have disappeared from the night sky; the Milky Way has vanished; the sun has gone out; Venus, Mars and Jupiter have been extinguished; millions of leaves have died; the wind and the oceans have faded away; flowers have lost their colour and fragrance; bread has vanished; water has vanished; even the air itself, the sometimes cool, sometimes sultry air, has vanished. The universe inside a person has ceased to exist. This universe is astonishingly similar to the universe that exists outside people. It is astonishingly similar to the universes still reflected in the skulls of millions of living people. But still more astonishing is the fact that this universe had something in it that distinguished the sound of its ocean, the smell of its flowers, the rustle of its leaves, the hues of its granite and the sadness of its autumn fields both from those of every other universe that exists and ever has existed within people, and from those of the universe that exists eternally outside people. What constitutes the freedom, the soul of an individual life, is its uniqueness.

(Life and Fate, Collins Harvill, London, 1985, p.555)

THE BATTLE OF STALINGRAD

1933 *Hitler put into effect a singular contrast between internal and external politics: the German Communist Party was outlawed and its leaders arrested, while in foreign politics financial negotiations with the Soviet Union, related to the supplies of raw materials, continued.*

1939 *On 27 August, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs Molotov and Ribbentrop signed the “non-aggression pact”, ratifying the division between Germany and the Soviet Union of Eastern European territories. On 1 September 1939 Germany attacked Poland and the Second World War began. Germany, thanks to the agreement on the Eastern front, focused on the fight against France and England.*

THE GERMAN ATTACK

1940 *As he was incapable of winning the war in the West, in December 1940, Hitler decided to launch an **attack against the USSR**. Although he had been informed of this fact by the Soviet secret services, Stalin didn't believe this piece of information, and thought he had been misinformed. He therefore continued supplying Germany with strategic material until the month of June.*

1941 *At the dawn of 22 June **Operation Barbarossa** began. Taking advantage of the consternation caused in the Soviet government, the German advance was uninterrupted until the middle of November. The depletion of the troops and difficulties in receiving supplies obliged the Germans to stop twenty-nine kilometres from Moscow.*

THE SIEGE

1942 *In winter the Soviet counterattack began and a standstill was reached at the front. The German advance started again in the spring of '42 towards the south and south-west, to secure the oilfields of the Caspian Sea, which were necessary for Germany to be able to continue the war.*

Stalingrad, a big industrial centre on the bend of the Volga river, is a decisive strategic junction in that direction. On 17 July 1942 the German vanguard reached the gates of the city.

On 19 August, the sixth army, commanded by General Von Paulus, started the battle for the capture of Stalingrad.

The Russians, who were willing to let the city become a heap of ruins rather than give up, following Stalin's famous order "Not one step back", resisted the German attack until the end of October. In a half-destroyed city, the battle broke into an endless series of small clashes, in each individual building.

THE COUNTERATTACK AND THE VICTORY

NOVEMBER 1942 *The imposing Soviet armoured forces gathered beyond the Volga river, to the north and to the south, and began their counterattack on 19 November: mid-November about **two million men** fought on the Stalingrad front.*

On 23 November, with a large outflanking manoeuvre, the Soviets managed to surround the city. Von Paulus received the order from Hitler not to retreat and to wait for reinforcements. On 16 December the Soviets started to tighten the edges of the pocket in which the attackers of Stalingrad were enclosed: the Germans resisted until their supplies ran out.

1943 *On 31 January 1943 Von Paulus and the 90,000 surviving German soldiers surrendered. The defeat on the Eastern front was a hard blow for the Reich, and created concern among German allies, giving the European Resistance new impetus. From the breakthrough on the Stalingrad front, the Soviet advance began, and it was destined to end two years later. On 7 May 1945 Germany signed the “unconditional surrender”.*

This war cost the Russians untold bloodshed: thirteen million soldiers and seven million civilians.

Stalingrad

The great battle of Stalingrad was also witnessed by the story of the city, which was transformed for many months into an immense trench. The characters of the novel, as they rediscovered through the battle their passion for life and for fate, started to look with love even at the inert cement which becomes for them the symbol of the greatness and vocation of the human spirit.

“Every epoch has its own capital city, a city that embodies its will and soul. For several months of the Second World War this city was Stalingrad.”

(Life and Fate, p. 796)

Условные обозначения:

Линия фронта к 10 ноября 1942 г.

The city

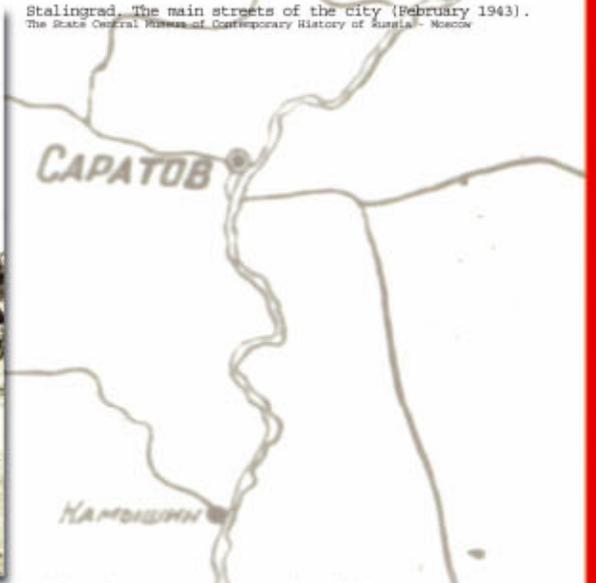
Линия фронта к 31 марта 1943 г.



Stalingrad. Air view (January 1943). The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



Stalingrad. The main streets of the city (February 1943). The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



Stalingrad. Streets after an air-raid (August 1942). The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

It was as though the buildings destroyed by bombs and shells, the central courtyard ploughed up by the war – full of mounds of earth, heaps of twisted metal, damp acrid smoke and the yellow reptilian flames of slowly-burning insulators – represented what was left to him of his own life.
(Life and Fate, p.262)



N. Plojakov, worker of the Red October factory of Stalingrad, defends his city. The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

*You don't even need matches
– you can just light up from
the wind or the Volga.
(Life and Fate, p.40)*



Station on fire after an air-raid (August 1943).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



Stalingrad. Oil stocks on fire after some Nazi air-raids (October 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

*When a man is plunged up to
his neck in the cauldron of
war, he is quite unable to
look at his life and
understand anything;
he needs to take a step back.
Then, like someone who has
just reached the bank
of a river, he can look round:
was he really, only a moment
ago, in the midst of those
swirling waters?
(Life and Fate, p. 255)*



Stalingrad. Destroyed tractor factory (January 1943).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



Destroyed tram (August 1943).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



The central post office building destroyed by the bombing (1943).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



Citizens of Stalingrad go back to their own city (1943).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

The battle

In the paradoxical events of the battle of Stalingrad, in which both armies went from victory to defeat, the soldiers of both sides experienced a rediscovery of themselves, free from the stifling restrictions of a totalitarian State. The more desperate the situation seems to be, the more the men regain their truest human aspects and needs.

In Grossman's tale this human story prevails, even when he is talking about commanders and generals.

Soldiers of the Red Army fight on the road.
Stalingrad (October 1942).

The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

The German attack

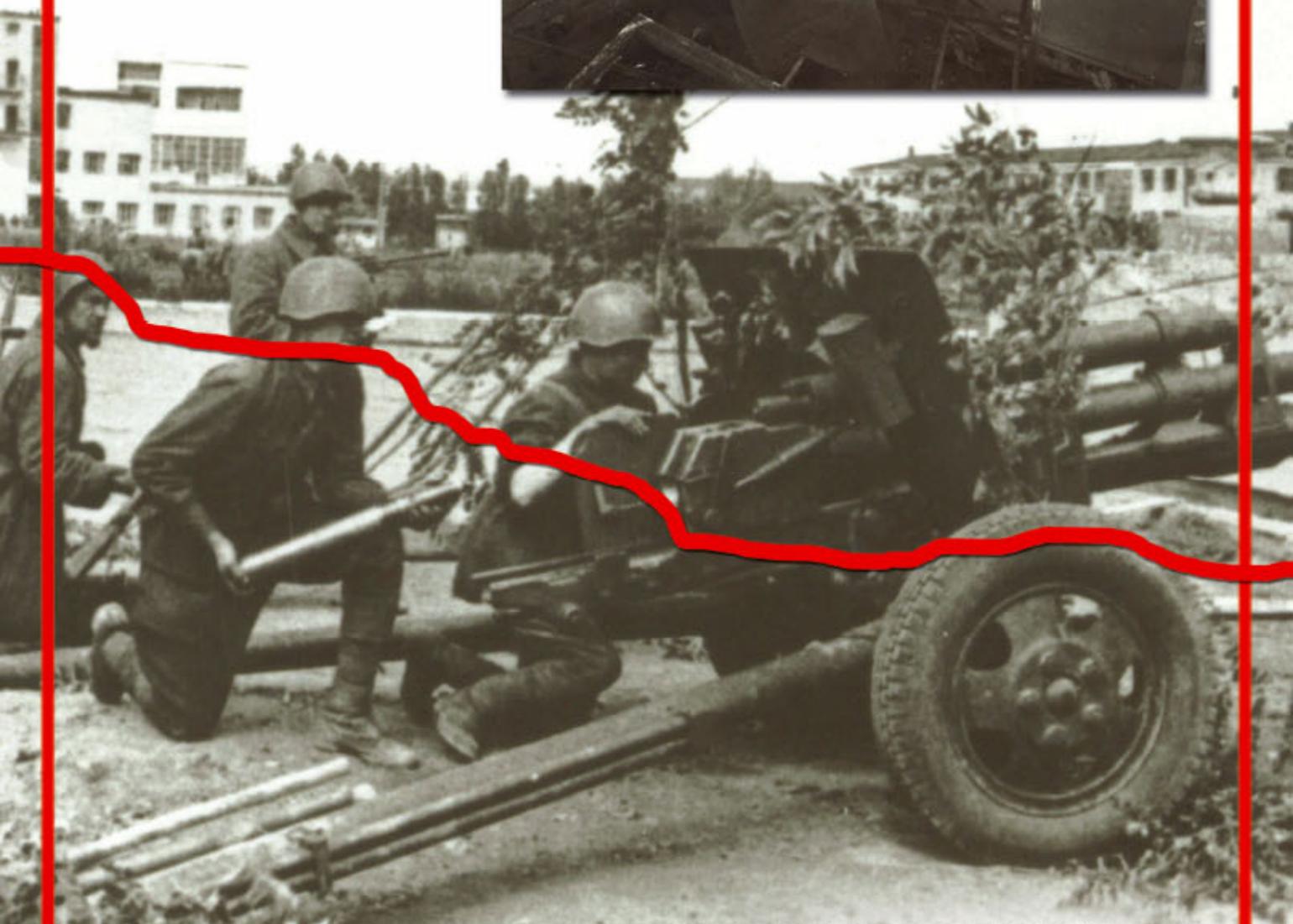


Members of the council of war of the Stalingrad front:
N.S. Chrušev, S.Čujanov, A.I. Eremenko
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

Yeremenko felt the same sadness in his own heart. Suddenly he had been sucked in by the war he was so used to directing from outside. There he was – a solitary soldier on the shifting sands, stunned by the fire and thunder, standing on the bank like tens of thousands of other soldiers. He knew now that this people's war was beyond his understanding and outside his power... This was perhaps the highest understanding of the war he was ever to reach.
(*Life and Fate*, p. 55)

Soldiers shoot at the enemy (September 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

The Germans were simply unable to believe that all their attacks were being borne by a handful of men.
(*Life and Fate*, p. 488)



Stalingrad . The first cannon of the Red Army soldiers (September 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

Stalingrad itself had continued to hold out. For all the vast forces involved, the German attacks had still not led to a decisive victory. (Life and Fate, p.488)



Anti-aircraft weapons have rejected German paratroopers (September 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



Sailors of the Volga motor pool led by the petty officer S. F. Buhlin shoot at the Germans (October 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



General N. I. Rodimtsev surrounded by his best soldiers (August 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

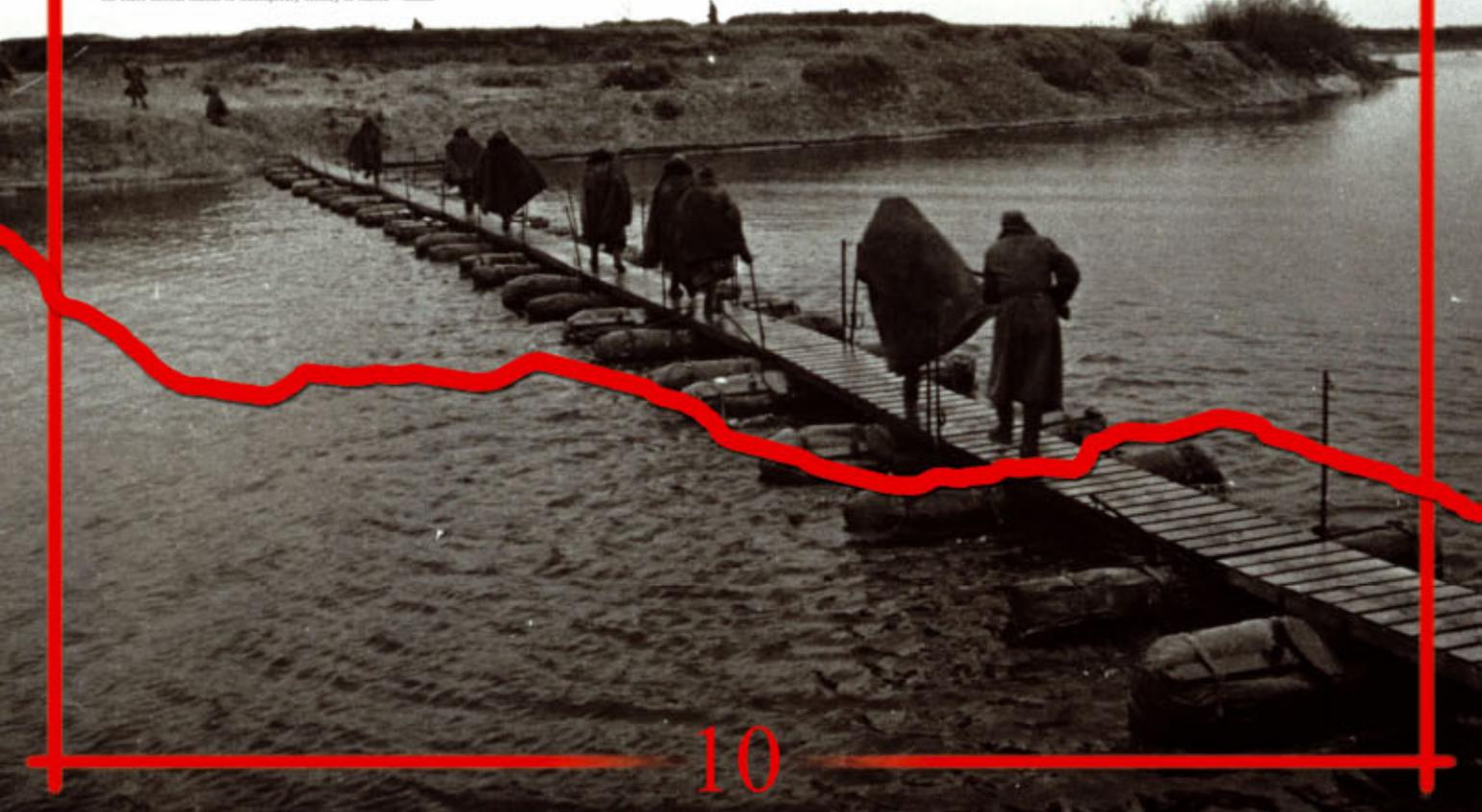


Stalingrad. A Nazi air unit down in a square (August 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

Almost every unit in the Army has its own style in relationships, which is different from all the others. In the General Staff of Rodimtsev's division, they were all very proud of their young general. [...] And yet, in spite of the confusion around him, he retained a clear sense both of his own strength and of the strength of the men beside him; he felt an almost palpable sense of solidarity with them, and a sense of joy that Rodimtsev was somewhere nearby. (Life and Fate, p. 45-47)

This strange clarity, which arose at a moment when it was impossible to tell whether a man three yards away was a friend or an enemy, was linked to an equally clear and inexplicable sense of the general course of the fighting, the sense that allows a soldier to judge the true correlation of forces in a battle and to predict its outcome. (Life and Fate, p. 47)

Bridge of ships on the Volga left bank (October 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



November 1942. The counterattack.

The silence returned. The silence was quite suffocating, both for the men who had been waiting to launch the attack on the Rumanian lines and for the men who were to make that attack.



Stalingrad. A few volunteers of the factories defend the city (November 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



The division of the lieutenant N. Farinov during the counterattack (November 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



At the ferry boat (November 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

*This silence was like the mute, turbid, primeval sea...
How joyful, how splendid, to fight in a battle that would decide the fate of your motherland.
How appalling, how terrifying, to stand up and face death, to run towards death rather than away from it.
How terrible to die young...
You want to stay alive.*

There is nothing stronger in the world than the desire to preserve a young life, a life that has lived so little. This desire is stronger than any thought; it lies in the breath, in the nostrils, in the haemoglobin and its greed for oxygen. This desire is so vast that nothing can be compared to it; it cannot be measured...It's terrible. The moment before an attack is terrible.

(Life and Fate, p. 640-643)



German soldiers charge fire position (19 November 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



At the command post of the General Rodin (November 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



Stalingrad. Chemical factory workers make some Molotov bottles (November 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

Nezi officers and soldiers killed in the Stalingrad area (November 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

After November 1942



Soldiers of the Red Army during a fight on the road (January 1943).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

*The torments of fear
and hunger,
the awareness
of impending disaster
slowly and gradually
humanized men,
liberating their core
of freedom.
(Life and Fate, p. 731)*

*The freedom brought
about by victory
was still the purpose
of the war,
but it also became [...]
a powerful instrument
of the war.
(Life and Fate, p. 485)*



Foot soldiers. Writing on the wall: "Remember, soldier! The Nazi will be able to reason just with a bullet. Only the slug will stop him. Kill the Germans without fear!" (1943).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



Liberation day. Square in the center of the city
(January 1943).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

*And this simple brotherhood
was so important that
they would happily have given
their lives for it.
(Life and Fate, p. 522)*



Soldiers during a fight on the road (January 1943).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



Machine gunners fight on the roads (January 1943).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



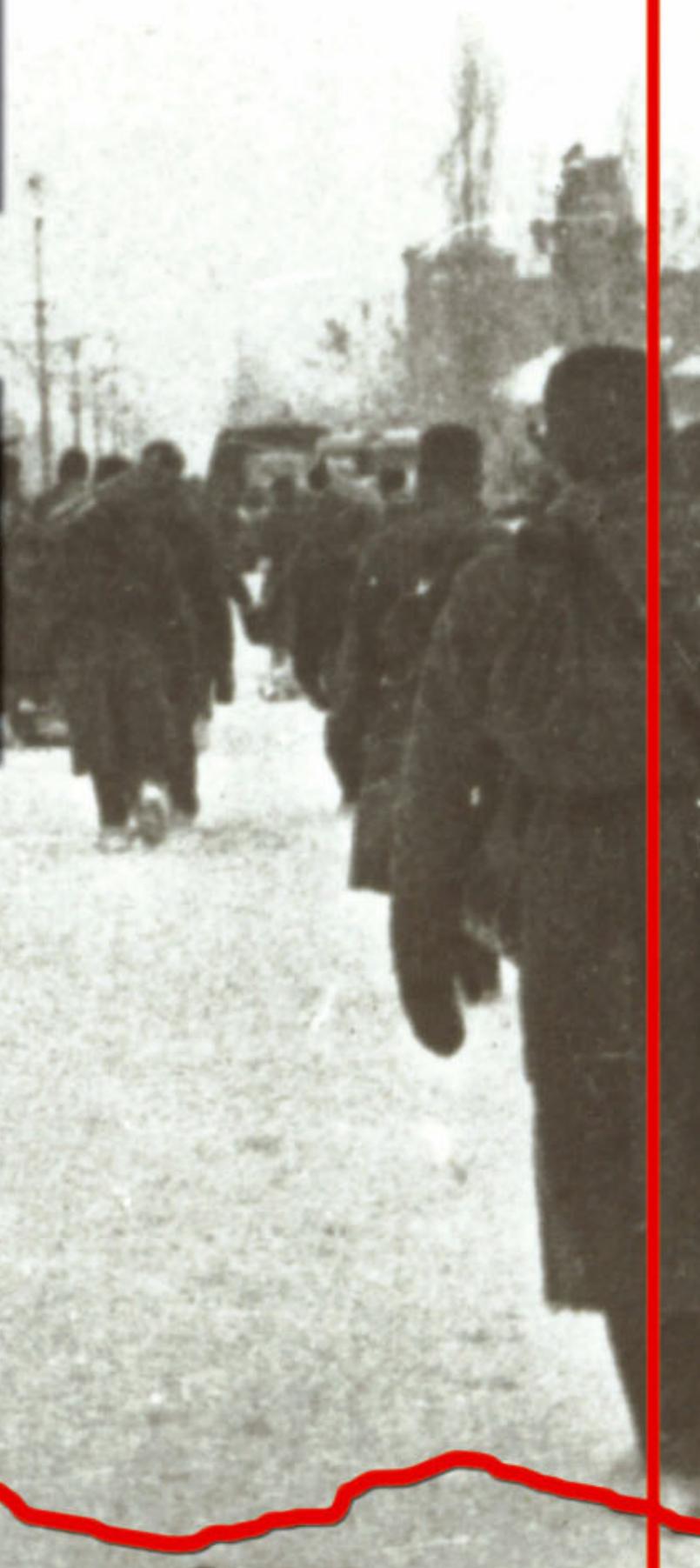
View of the Volga bank.
Command post of the sixty-second army (July 1943).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



Launch of the rockets "Katjuska" by night (January 1943).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



German cannon on the Volga bank (January 1943).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



Last fighting in Stalingrad (January 1943).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

Totalitarianism and Freedom

Stalingrad is a place in which two totalitarian regimes, which are alike and yet opposite are confronted, only to discover that they mirror each other.

Years before official – even Western – historiography, Grossman sensed that violence, of which anti-Semitism is a revealing index, is at the very heart of totalitarian systems.

Concentration camps and Gulags are the rule rather than the exception in a totalitarian State.

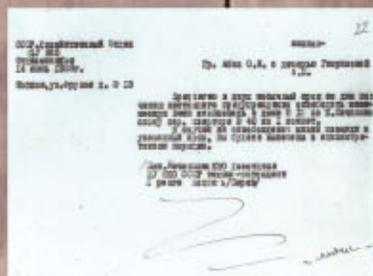
But in the hell of Treblinka or Siberia, man remains free, that is to say capable of totally selfless gestures.

This section describes the tragedy of German concentration camps and Russian Gulags, thanks to documents from the Moscow Memorial Foundation and stories of some of the characters in “Life and Fate”.

Memorial



Permission of a detainee.

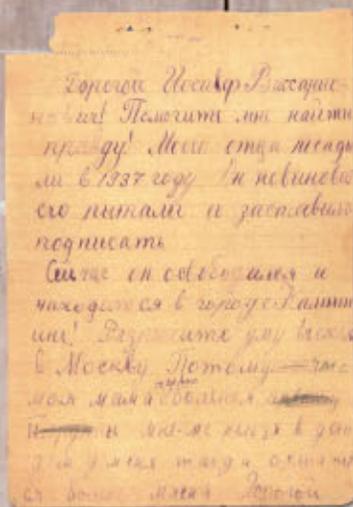


Injunction of expulsion from a house.



Living fee of a rest home.

Rest home "Archangel" Skoov for the period 15 December 1937 - 13 January 1938. Memorial Foundation - Moscow



Letter to Stalin.

Letter written by the student Masha Desnicks imploring Stalin to let her father live in Moscow (Moscow, 1946). Memorial Foundation - Moscow

Letters hidden in metallic buttons of a military jacket.

Clothing sent from the jail by Ivan Grogor' Evich Rudenko (Moscow, 1937). Memorial Foundation - Moscow

Pictures cut from the archive of Karmanov family.

Shapes of relatives and friends who have been victims of the repression had to be cut or torn up. Memorial Foundation - Moscow

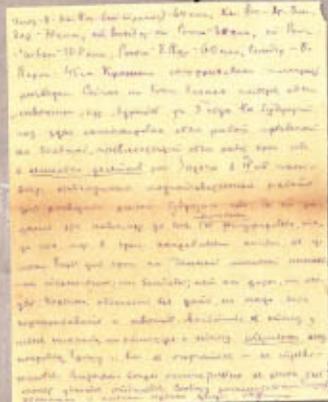


Authorization to relocation after a release.

Authorization given to Bella Isaakovna Alekseevna to transfer herself from Magadan to the area of Kiev after the release from the internment camp. (Dal'tetroj, 21 October 1945). Memorial Foundation - Moscow



Certificate of release of Arkadij Grigor' evich from Burle Burlo jail. (13 December 1954). Memorial Foundation - Moscow



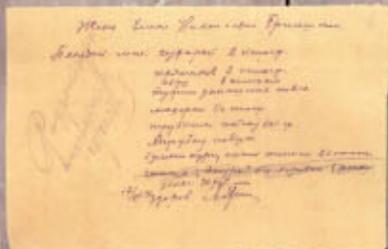
Letter from the internment camp.

Letter written by the detainee B.F. Rabinovich with a draft of train line under construction "... (Socialist soviet Republic of Komi, 1940). Memorial Foundation - Moscow



Note from the convoy.

Letter filled in an envelope made with cigarettes paper, thrown away from a running train so that who ever finds the letter may send it to the written address (September 1939). Memorial Foundation - Moscow



Notes of a detainee.

Notes written by M. F. Grishin to his wife Elena Nikolaevna Grishina, the letter is the list of the objects she has to send to him and the permission of the investigators. (Cheremhovo, 17 March 1938). Memorial Foundation - Moscow



Degree granted by the Jail Committee.

The Local Jail Committee of Jamalo-Neneckij has given to Aleksey Vasil' evich Below such a degree as a consequence of his active participation to the artistic initiatives (10 December 1950). Memorial Foundation - Moscow

Sof'ja Osipovna Levinton

Sof'ja Osipovna was thinking about what had come before: five years at Zurich University, a summer in Paris and in Italy, concerts at the conservatoire, expeditions to central Asia, her medical profession, which she had been practicing for thirty-two years. Locked in there in the goods wagon, she looked for lice in the collar of her jacket, while beside her two elderly women were talking quickly in Yiddish in a low voice.

The change which took place in most people lay in the fact that little by little they would lose the feeling of their individuality. The flavour of happiness had gone, and in its place there was only the torment of a multitude of desires and projects. While she was getting on the train, she had bumped into a young boy with a thin face and a prominent nose. He must have been six.

In the concentration camp Sof'ja moved with a heavy rhythmic tread and the boy held on to her hand. Little David awoke in her a particular feeling of tenderness. In the wagon, whenever she gave him a piece of her bread, David would turn towards her in the semi-darkness and she would feel like crying, holding him tight and covering him in kisses as mothers usually do with small children. She had realised that he was calmed by being close to her.

When it was their turn in the gas chamber, the boy's contortions filled her with compassion. They had killed him, he had ceased to exist. Sof'ja felt the boy's body go limp in her arms: David had left before her. "I'm a mother" she thought. That was her last thought.

Abarčuk

Abarčuk used to say: "They don't throw you in for no reason", and he thought that he was one of the few people who had ended up in there by mistake. They wanted to instil in him a doubt as to the rightness of the cause to which he had dedicated his life.

But his faith was unshakeable, his devotion to the party unlimited.

All his life Abarčuk had been merciless towards opportunism, he had always hated double-dealers, antisocial people. How sweet it was to be unshakable. By judging others he asserted his own inner strength, his ideals, his pureness. Herein lay his comfort, his faith. Not once had he avoided the mobilization of the party. In his opinion self affirmation lay in self denial.

One day he met a friend of his, the one with whom he had shared years of struggles, his greatest model of a revolutionary man.

His words were surprising:

"Well, I want to tell you...we were wrong. Do you see where our mistake has brought us?

Here's what I wanted to say to you.

Point number one.

Now point number two.

We didn't understand freedom.

We crushed it. That's point number two,

now listen to number three.

We cross the concentration camp, the taiga,

but our faith is the strongest thing.

And yet this isn't strength, but weakness."

His encounter with his old friend shattered him.

The Priest and God's Madman

In the concentration camp there were men from fifty-six different countries. Among these there was an Italian priest called Guardi. They called him Daddy Father thinking, naturally, that this "father" was his name.

At night, when the inmates started to fall asleep, Guardi would become another man. He would kneel on the plank bed and pray. It was as if in his ecstatic eyes, in that expressive black velvet, he could drown all the suffering of the city and of the convicts. He would pray for a long time, and Mostovskoj would fall asleep hearing the fast and soft whisper of the Italian priest.

*Once Ikonnikov said quickly:
"Here, Mostovskoj, from his point of view,
that may even be the way it is,
but I don't want to be absolved of my sins.
He mustn't say that those who force you are guilty,
that you are a slave, and therefore not guilty
because you are not free. I am free!
I am the one building a Vernichtungslager,
the one answerable to those who will
die in the chambers. But I can say no!
What force can forbid it, if I am capable of finding the energy
in me not to be afraid of annihilation?
I will say no! Je dirai non, my father, je dirai non!"*
*Guardi's hands stretched out towards Ikonnikov's grey head.
"Donne-moi votre main" he said.
«Good. Now we shall watch the advice
of the shepherd to the proud sheep» said Černecov
in an impulse of involuntary compassion,
and Mostovskoj nodded to his words.
But Guardi didn't admonish Ikonnikov:
he brought his dirty hand to his lips and kissed it.*

Faces

Even in the most dramatic circumstances, people's faces express their love for life.

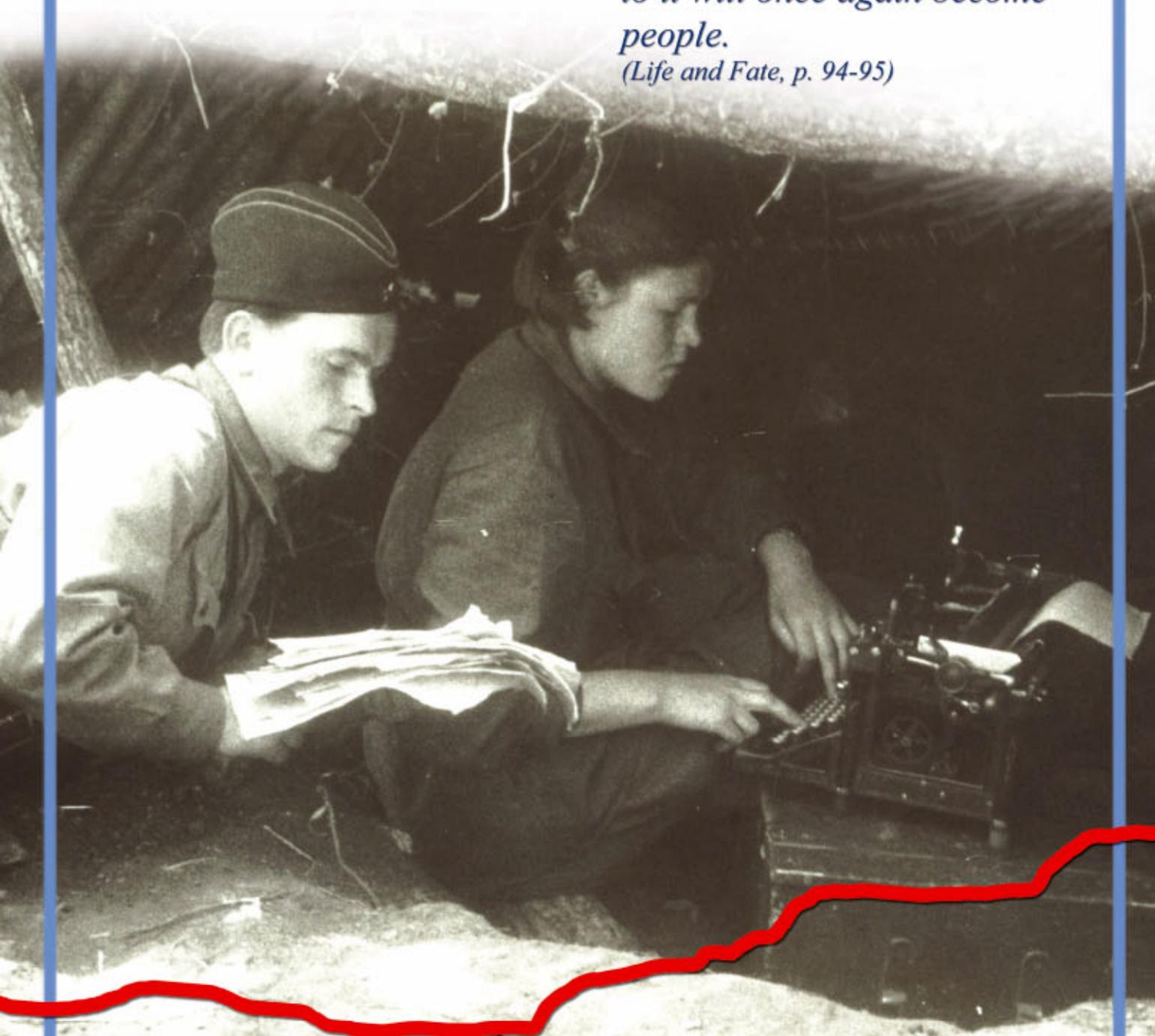


Soldiers use a small mortar fire in the South of Stalingrad (November 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

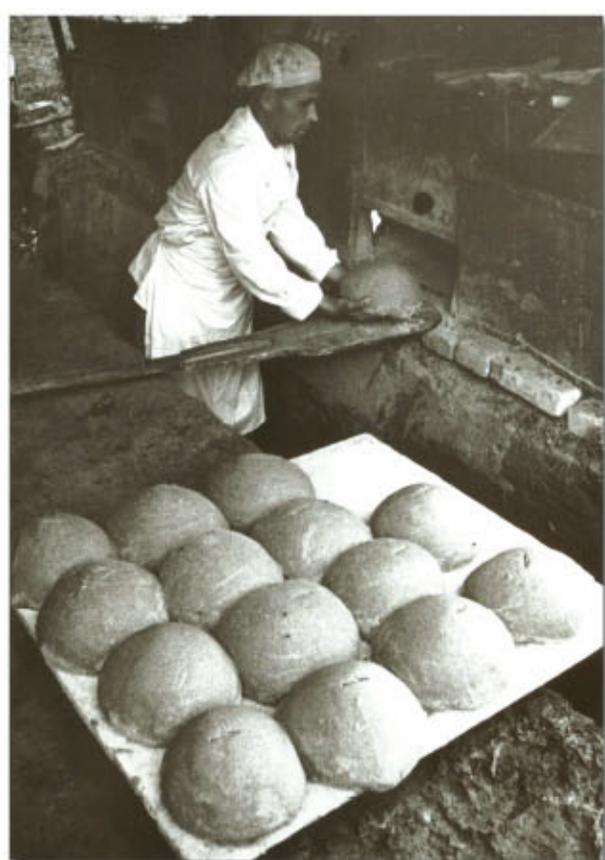


Soldiers of the Red Army near Stalingrad (Autumn 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

Man and Fascism cannot co-exist. If Fascism conquers, man will cease to exist and there will remain only man-like creatures that have undergone an internal transformation. But if a man, man who is endowed with reason and kindness, should conquer, then Fascism must perish, and those who have submitted to it will once again become people.
(*Life and Fate*, p. 94-95)



Secretariat of the thirteenth division of riflemen in a underground refuge (1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



Field bakery of the sixty-second army (November 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



A cooker of the Red Army cooks for the soldiers (October 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



Evacuation of the citizens from Stalingrad air-raided (August 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



Young soviet women voluntary do the laundry of the soldiers (September 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



An health officer and a nurse give medical aid to an injured man (1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



Representatives of the Soviet independent Republic of Baškiria workers led by A. Ibrahimov (November 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow



A nurse bandages an injured soldier of the Red Army (October 1942).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

Everything was still parched by the heat of summer; it was strange to find the air so cool. The soldiers were all busy with everyday concerns: one, sitting on top of his tank, was shaving in front of a mirror he had ropped against the turret; another was cleaning his rifle; another was writing a letter; there was a group playing dominoes on a tarpaulin they had spread out. [...] The sky was vast and the earth was vast; this everyday picture was full of the sadness of early evening. (Life and Fate, p. 493)



Stalingrad. Citizens of the free sector greet with joy the soldiers of the Red Army (January 1943).
The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia - Moscow

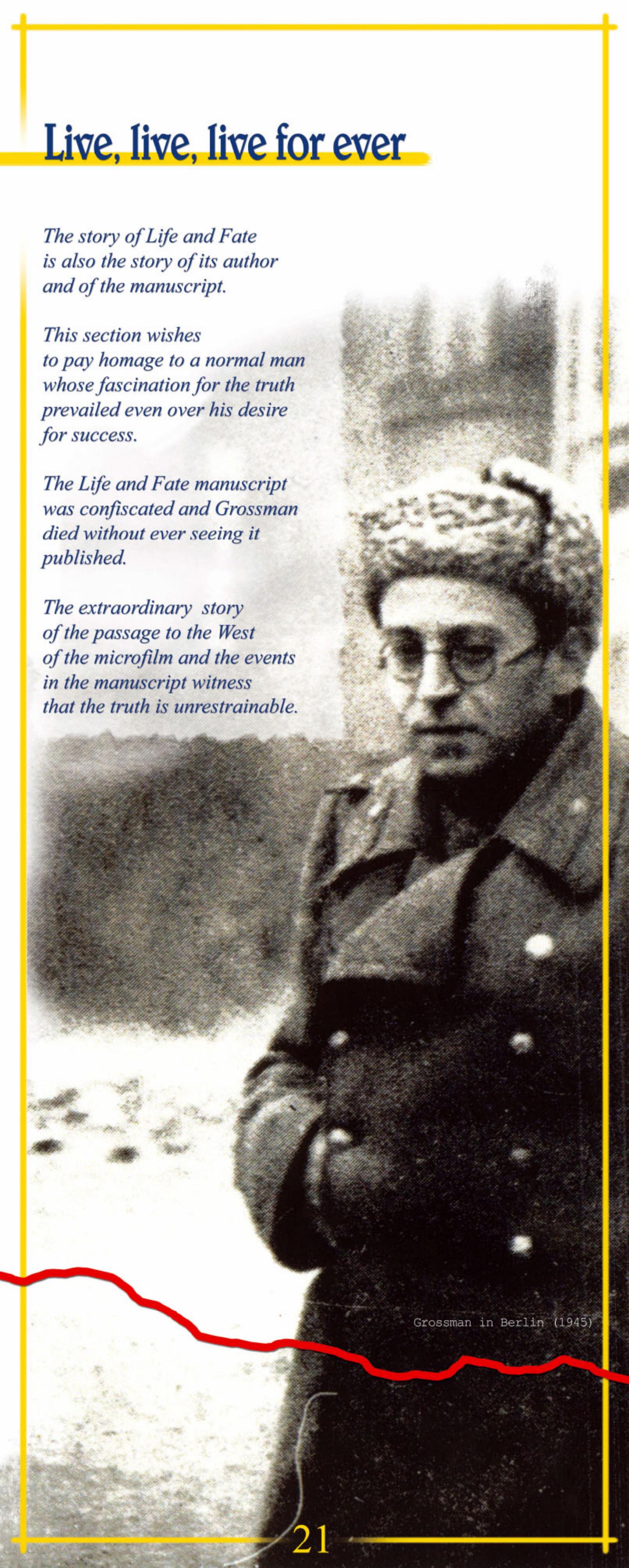
Live, live, live for ever

The story of Life and Fate is also the story of its author and of the manuscript.

This section wishes to pay homage to a normal man whose fascination for the truth prevailed even over his desire for success.

The Life and Fate manuscript was confiscated and Grossman died without ever seeing it published.

The extraordinary story of the passage to the West of the microfilm and the events in the manuscript witness that the truth is unrestrainable.



Grossman in Berlin (1945)

Life and works of Vasilij Grossman

1905 *Vasilij Semënovič Grossman was born on 12 December 1905 in Berdičev (Ukraine), where the biggest Jewish community in Eastern Europe lives. He studied in Kiev first and then in Moscow, where he attended the Faculty of Chemistry at university.*

the thirties: *He started writing realistic works about the lives of miners quite early on and in 1933 he moved permanently to the capital, where he met Gorkij. Thanks to the famous writer, in 1934 he published the short story Glückauf, set in the mines in Donbass. His most important work from these years is Stepan Kolčugin, a novel about the training of a young Bolshevik worker. Grossman was an “orthodox” writer, a member of the Union of Writers and worthy of great popularity.*

the forties: *In June 1941, with the outbreak of the “Great national war”, he was sent to the front as a war correspondent for Krasnaja zvezda (Red star), the newspaper of the Red Army. Grossman therefore witnessed the disastrous defeats of the first years, the gallant resistance in Stalingrad and the Soviet counterattack. Following the advance of the Red Army as far as Berlin, he was one of the first to become aware of the tragedy of the Holocaust. His short story “The Hell of Treblinka”, the first chronicle of the events which took place in a nazi death camp, is well known. After the war he worked together with Ilya Ehrenburg in writing “The Black Book”, a detailed reconstruction of the genocide of the Jewish population in occupied Soviet territories. Thanks to these experiences – among which the discovery that his mother had been murdered by the Nazis – Grossman became aware of his Jewish identity.*

After the war, faced with the anti-Semitism supported by Stalin and by the Soviet intelligentsia, Grossman started reflecting on those revolutionary ideals that he had always believed in. It was the beginning of an irreparable crisis which brought him to be a free and brave writer, tireless in his description of the truth.

“There are bitter and tragic pages in my book. Maybe reading them won’t be easy. But believe me when I say that they weren’t easy to write either.

And anyway I couldn’t have not written them”.

Taken from a letter by Vasilij Grossman to Nikita Chruscev

***the fifties:** In 1946 the comedy “If you believe the Pitagorics” was harshly attacked by Pravda, the official organ of the regime. Grossman was determined in his writing and he started writing a huge work, through which he wished to depict the heroic deeds of Stalingrad through the events in the lives of a family during the war. The first part, entitled “For a Just Cause”, was published in serial form in 1952 in the review “Novij Mir”. The book was heavily criticised because of “serious ideological mistakes” and was only published after Stalin’s death. That’s when Grossman started to write the second part: “Life and Fate”. The writing of the novel kept him fully occupied from 1955 to 1960 and the typescript was handed over to the review “Znamja”. But the contents of the book was too dangerous. Director Koževnikov, more out of fear than out of a desire to betray, informed the central committee.*

***the sixties:** On 14 February 1961 two KGB agents entered into Grossman’s home. They confiscated everything: handwritten sheets, carbon paper and typewriter ribbons. They intended there to be no more trace of “Life and Fate”. During the last three years of his life Grossman was physically and morally exhausted because of the loss of his novel, suffocated by a difficult financial situation, and isolated from people he had known all his life. He finished “Everything Flows”, a short novel about returning from a gulag, which he had started in the mid fifties, but hadn’t managed to get published. Between 1962 and 1963 he went to Armenia various times: he tells of these journeys in a few short stories which form his literary testament.*

***1964** He died of cancer in Moscow on 14 September 1964.*

The dedication to his mother

The “Life and Fate” manuscript has as a footnote the dedication:
“To my mother Ekaterina Savielevna Grossman”.

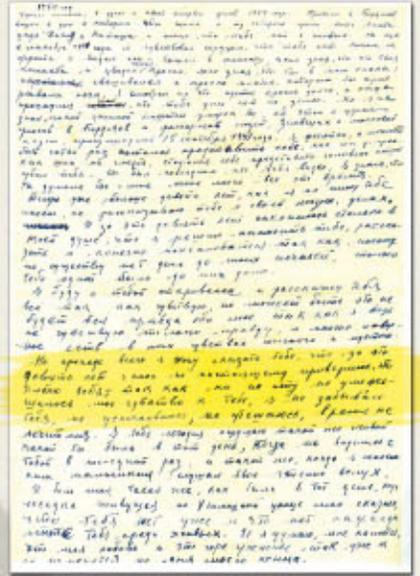
For all his life, Grossman had a strong feeling
of devotion and gratitude towards his mother,
a feeling witnessed by two unpublished
letters written in 1950 and 1961.

“First of all I want to tell you that in these
nine years I have been able to truly realize
how much I love you, as my feelings for
you haven't decreased in the slightest.
I can't forget, I can find no peace,
I can find no consolation.
Time doesn't heal my wounds”.

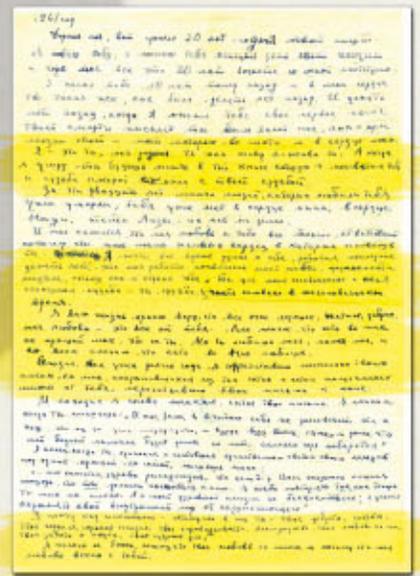
“I am you, my dear, and as long as I live,
you will also be alive. But when I die,
you will live on in the book that I dedicated
to you, and which has a fate similar
to yours”.

“I thought of you almost all the time,
as I worked in these last ten years:
my work is dedicated to my love,
to my devotion to people, and it is therefore
dedicated to you. For me you represent
all that is human, and your terrible fate
is the fate of man in an inhuman time.
All my life I have been convinced
that everything good, everything honest,
the love in me, I owe it all to you.
All the bad in me, you mustn't apologize
for it, that isn't you. But you love me,
mummy, even with all the evil
which is in me, you love me”.

“I cry over these letters, because in them
I see you: your kindness, your honesty,
your bitter bitter life, your common sense,
your noble-mindedness, your love for me,
your care for people, your exceptional
intelligence. I am not afraid of anything,
because your love is with me, and because
my love will eternally be with you”.



Letter from 1950



Letter from 1961

History of the manuscript

On 14 February 1961 KGB agents confiscated the manuscript and all typewritten copies of "Life and Fate". Grossman had entrusted two typed copies to two trustworthy people.

The first – typewritten – copy he had given to Semen Lipkin.

The second typewritten copy, with many autograph corrections, he had given to Viaceslav Ivanovic Loboda.

1st COPY: *After Grossman's death, Lipkin clandestinely tried to bring his copy into the West. Two microfilms were made of it: the first was made by Vladimir Voinovic and the second by Andrej Sacharov and his wife Elena Bonner in their clandestine laboratory. In 1978 Rosemarie Ziegler, an Austrian researcher in Slavic studies, crossed the border with the two microfilms in a "little box" no bigger than a packet of cigarettes. In Paris the "little box" was handed over to Efim Etkind, a famous critic and philologist. When he arrived in the West, no publisher wanted to publish the umpteenth "war novel". It was published by Vladimir Dimitrievic, a Swiss publisher of Serbian nationality. Together with Simon Markiš, Etkind did a scrupulous philological job to put together the two microfilms and reconstruct the parts which were incomplete due to the dreadful quality of the photographs. In 1980 the first edition of "Life and Fate" was published by L'Age d'Homme, in Russian, and with various lacunae. The first translations into French (L'Age d'Homme, 1981) and into Italian (Jaka Book, 1982) were made from this edition. In 1988 the novel finally arrived in Russia. "Life and Fate" was published in serial form in the review "Oktjabr'" and then in a volume by the publisher Knišnaja Palata.*

2nd COPY: *Viaceslav Ivanovic died in a car accident. Custody of the typescript was given to his wife, Vera Ivanovna, who hid it in her cellar. Only after the Lausanne edition came out in Russia, did Vera Ivanovna hand over to Grossman's heirs her copy of "Life and Fate" with the autograph corrections. It is finally the unabridged edition, published in Moscow in 1990. The heading says "true to the author's manuscript".*

From life to fate: man's questions

From a theoretical point of view Grossman reached his climax in the celebration of the absolutely unrepeatable status of an individual and his irreducibility by any form of power.

Where does this uniqueness go when a man dies? His answer is that, with him, a unique universe disappears.

However, there are moments in which Grossman is greater than himself: the questions arising from life witness the fact that "destiny" is not only the tragic "fate" of state culture, but also the positive horizon for which a man's heart yearns in each step of his existence. The most effective sign of this infinite kindness is the relationship between man's ultimate questions and nature: in each passage of the novel, nature takes part in human events and shares them.

That's how the Kalmuck steppe becomes a great symbol of the infinite freedom of man.

La steppa calmuca

“The Kalmuck steppe seems sad and lifeless when you see it for the first time, when you come to it full of preoccupations, when you watch absent-mindedly as the low hills slowly emerge from the horizon and slowly sink back into it. [...] Here the heart and the sky above have reflected one another so long that they have finally become undistinguishable, like a husband and a wife who have spent their whole lives together.

[...] What was the rider thinking as he galloped through the steppe? Of his fathers? Of his sons? Of the father of the Russia lieutenant-colonel whose jeep needed fixing? Darensky watched. One word pounded like blood at his temples: freedom...freedom... freedom...”

(Life and Fate, p. 291-293)

*Does human nature undergo a true change in the cauldron
of totalitarian violence?*

Does man lose his innate yearning for freedom?

*Jenny was in love with a boy with golden curls and light blue
eyes. What had happened to the boy with the curls and the velvet
jacket? What had happened to Jenny Genrikhovna?*

*What does a woman who has lost her children care
about a philosopher's definitions of good and evil?
But what if life itself is evil?*

Spare your men!

How do you think you can spare your men?

*If that's what you want, then you've got no business
to be fighting.*

What lay in store for those he loved? He didn't know.

*The lives of his loved ones were without harmony,
struck with doubts, pain, mistakes.*

*Whatever awaits them; whether fame, despair, misery,
they will live as men and as men they will die; herein lies for
eternity the bitter human victory over all forces in the world.*

The exhibition is dedicated to:

The memory of don Luigi Giussani, grateful to him for the "discovery" of "Life and Fate" and for his "sensitivity towards man's nature, which perceives the needs, the interests, the ideal aspirations with which the features of every man are weaved".

Salvatore Giorgio Ottolenghi in the 40th anniversary of his uninterrupted, untiring and far-sighted work as President of the Comunità Ebraica di Casale Monferrato.

Main project:

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dei Diritti e della Libertà;
Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane nella persona di Claudia De Benedetti.*

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