**Introduction: David Grossman's ethical turn in modern Hebrew literature in the light of Levinas’s ethical language**

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**The new grammar of Grossman’s literary fiction**

*At the deep-water port of Danzig he jumped into the sea. […] He had been forced to leave his hat behind in the gallery cloakroom, as well as his black briefcase with the manuscript of The Messiah inside. Four years of thinking and writing. It was a mistake that spread malignantly, before he realized that Messiah would never come in writing, would never be invoked in a language suffering from elephantiasis.* ***A new grammar and a new calligraphy*** *has first to be invented.[[1]](#footnote-1) […] [T]he explanation must be that Bruno, sensitive as he was, had guessed everything years before it actually happened. And for that reason, perhaps, he had begun to write, to train himself in* ***the new language and the new grammar****. He understood humanity and knew; he heard the rumbling long before anyone else heard it.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

David Grossman (born 1954) is considered the most important active Israeli writer of the twenty-first century. From the outset of his literary career, he has been deemed one of the three most prominent literary voices in Israel, alongside Amos Oz and A.B. Yehoshua. In addition to his literary work, Grossman is known as a political activist, and is an internationally sought-after and respected public speaker. While this book focuses solely on Grossman’s literary corpus, it is important to note that the ethical responsibility portrayed in his writing is not confined to fiction, but also finds expression in Israel and around the world.

Grossman’s literary works span a wide variety of genres, including novels, short stories, novellas, poetry and short songs, drama, and essays. He is also the author of a substantial body of children’s literature. His novels have been translated into over 30 languages, and he has been the recipient of a number of prestigious prizes both in Israel and abroad, including the EMET prize (2007), the Nelly Sachs Prize (1991), the Man Booker International Prize (2017), the Israel Prize (2018), and the Erasmus Prize (2022).

Throughout Grossman’s literary work, the desire to create a new grammar, and—based on it—a new language, shines through, both overtly and implicitly. In various of his works, the different situations and processes that serve as motivations for this desire are described. In this book I make the claim, for the first time, that the common thread that runs through this grammar is ethics—and that, further, there is a considerable similarity between the characteristics of ethical grammar in Grossman’s literary works and the characteristics of ethics in the thought of Emmanuel Levinas. Although Grossman’s literary works are rooted in different and varied contexts and are intended for a variety of age groups, it is nevertheless possible to identify an underlying existential problem that preoccupies the protagonists both of his serious, adult fiction and his children’s books, even when his plots cross the line from realism into fiction. This existential problem emerges as a result of conflict between the protagonist and the demands of the Other, and the question that subsequently arises is—what ought the protagonist’s responsibility be toward that Other?

The Other is always tangible, and prompts the protagonist to face his or her demands, regardless of whether he or she exists only as a figment of the protagonist’s imagination (for example, in the form of a rabbit or a monster), or whether he or she is a dog, a friend, a spouse, or a person who has been killed, murdered, or become insane. Many of Grossman’s works situate the question of the protagonist’s responsibility toward the Other as a result of his or her suffering, or potential suffering. In other words, the very separateness of the other person is what precipitates a confrontation with the protagonist—and first and foremost with the protagonist’s own fears.

This situation is not based on a sense of shared national sentiment or identity, but on various degrees of humanism—for example, the relationship of a child toward a friend, a father toward his son, a husband toward his wife, a boy toward a girl, or a writer toward a fellow writer. This universal humanism is almost certainly a major factor in the global popularity of Grossman’s fiction. Despite this, there has, as yet, been no comprehensive study of Grossman’s whole literary corpus that explores how the ethical grammar that is so central to the portrayal of his protagonists has been created and characterized. Since Grossman’s corpus is so very extensive, my attempt to address this question in this book is necessarily limited in scope. Nevertheless, I have incorporated a set of interpretive principles that can also be applied to Grossman’s works that there is no room to discuss here, and also more widely to literary criticism in general.

The epigraph to this chapter is taken from Grossman’s novel *See Under: Love* (1986), and reflects the hope that a new language may provide answers to the most horrific intentional injustice in modern human history—the Holocaust.[[3]](#footnote-3) The main argument that I put forward in this book is that this language is ethical and versatile, and cannot be defined unambiguously. My comparison of its characteristics, as they appear in Grossman’s various literary works, is undertaken with the help of the Wittgensteinian concept of “family resemblance.”[[4]](#footnote-4) The description of a “family resemblance” between the various depictions of ethics in Grossman’s literary fiction is also useful for a discussion of ethics in Levinas’s thought.[[5]](#footnote-5) Another important point of similarity between Grossman’s literary corpus and Levinas’s concept of ethics is expressed in Wittgenstein’s argument linking ethics and aesthetics, which situates both outside of the limits of language:

Ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental (ethics and aesthetics are one and the same). There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In the literature, scholars have debated the methodological implications of the inexpressibility and transcendentalism of ethics. Does this imply that ethical and aesthetic expressions cannot be discussed at all—or, conversely, that they *can* be discussed, but without presuming to point to their essence?[[7]](#footnote-7) The second possibility corresponds to another of Wittgenstein’s central methodological guidelines that is relevant to all language research—that is, to focus on description rather than on explanation.[[8]](#footnote-8) A focus on describing the actual use of a term, including terms like “imagination,”[[9]](#footnote-9) helps shed light on its nature, even if it deviates from an empirical description of reality—as in the case when discussing a work of literature.[[10]](#footnote-10) Further, it is worth noting Bob Plant’s argument, according to which Wittgenstein’s concept of ethics can be completed with the help of Levinas’s ideas.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Thus, it is possible to retrospectively shed light onto Grossman’s literary fiction as works in which poetic language does not openly declare its aesthetic intentions or ethical moves. This may be the reason why the terms “ethical language” or “ethical grammar” do not appear in any existing scholarship on Grossman’s literary fiction. Although scholars have made references to ethics, they have yet to explore the question of how grammar operates in Grossman’s fiction in terms of the construction of ethical meanings. This is despite the fact that the reader plays an active role in the reading process, and accompanies the protagonists in their various struggles, including their ethical struggles. Grossman’s fiction employs numerous poetic means to help activate the reader in this way, including the use of different genres and writing that appeals to readers of different ages, and the creation of “private languages” and body languages. These poetic means create a poetic-ethical language that is based on linguistic mechanisms like metaphorical realization (the “Nazi beast” in *See Under: Love*), personal grammar (internal grammar in the novel *The Book of Intimate Grammar*), or feminine grammar (in the novel *Life Plays with Me*).

In each of Grossman’s literary works discussed in this book, ethical language is reshaped in a different way, such that it becomes a response to various existentialist problems. Alongside my claim that there exists a thematic similarity between the characteristics of ethics in Levinas’s thought and Grossman’s literary fiction, I further contend that there is also a *methodological* similarity. That is, the ways in which ethical language is characterized are indirect, and are activated via linguistic mechanisms. While language is the medium that enables the operation of ethical language, it also marks its limits. The reasons for personal choices regarding ethical behavior cannot be justified in language, and the essence of ethics cannot be defined.

The aim of this discussion is therefore to offer a mutual interpretative contribution of the two corpora of work to each other. Levinas’s thought represents a longstanding philosophical movement that articulates the importance of ethics and its centrality in human life. For this reason, Levinas is considered the father of the ethical turn.[[12]](#footnote-12) Indeed, Levinas was the first philosopher who preceded ethics to philosophy itself in his famous article “Ethics as first philosophy.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Levinas’s philosophical starting point served as a major source of inspiration for the “ethical turn” in the twentieth century, and is considered an aspect of the counterreaction to the crisis in relation to the Other, as reflected in the teachings of thinkers such as Heidegger and Sartre.[[14]](#footnote-14) It should be noted that Levinas’s approach, according to which there exists in the mind of every person a sense of responsibility that precedes any philosophical thought, had previously been formulated by Kant.[[15]](#footnote-15) However—and this is a crucial difference—Kant’s concept of duty is intended for the improvement of the individual. It does not arise out of any responsibility toward the Other, but out of the individual’s duty to realize the sacred humanism within his own self.[[16]](#footnote-16) Kant, like Levinas after him, emphasized that ethical duty is not deduced from sensory experience, but arises from an individual’s inner consciousness.[[17]](#footnote-17) However, the significant difference between Kant and Levinas lies in the fact that, while Kant claimed the origin of the imperative to be within the human mind, Levinas argued that this cannot be internal to the individual himself, as Catherine Chalier has noted.[[18]](#footnote-18) The origin of the ethical imperative, according to Levinas, is necessarily transcendental, since a concept according to which an individual is faced with an internal edict in every event that requires an ethical decision, led, *inter alia*, to totalitarian regimes, something that I expand upon in this context later.

Few philosophers have addressed the philosophical consequences of the Holocaust, especially when it comes to the possibility of reestablishing humanist ethics. A striking example of this lack of direct confrontation can be seen in the philosophy of Hans Blumenberg, who was of Jewish extraction and lived in Germany throughout his life. Although he was directly and personally affected by Nazi persecution (he was incarcerated in a forced labor camp during the Second World War), Blumenberg developed a distant attitude that is illustrated in the metaphor he used in his famous article, “Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Blumenberg’s paradigm for the metaphor of existence-destruction is that of an outside observer of events, where even if those events involve death and destruction, they do not insist on a renewed philosophical formulation of ethics, but rather on locating a metaphor from the semantic field of events at sea. Blumenberg was careful not to include any personal or biographical statement, as if his own lived experience was not relevant to the neutral philosophical course he created.

The fact that Grossman and Levinas felt and acted in a manner completely opposite to that of Blumenberg in the aftermath of the Holocaust is crucial to the analysis I offer in this book. Both Grossman and Levinas argued that the total absence of humanism during the Holocaust, as well as the reality of absolute evil—both of which are human-caused phenomena—instilled in them a strong and uncompromising sense of responsibility to bear witness to the Holocaust and propose a humanist ethic that could facilitate and justify a humanist life. This was the Archimedean point for both, where they were able to formulate an awareness of their mission to establish a humanistic ethics in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Grossman’s most influential—and apparently most important—literary work is his novel *See Under: Love*. Indeed, this novel is the most prominent of all Grossman’s literary fiction, not least in terms of the tremendous importance it has gained as a result of its original treatment of the Holocaust. This is a topic that has been discussed extensively by scholars, and which I also explore in this book. *See Under: Love* is a prominent novel also because it includes Grossman’s most profound attempt to establish a “post-Holocaust ethics.” This argument will be treated to an extensive discussion later, but at this stage I find it sufficient to note the point of similarity between Grossman and Levinas—that is, their urgent sense of mission to offer a response to the disintegration of humanism and the takeover of cruelty and evil, the catalyst of which is racism. In each of the novel’s four parts, this sense of urgent mission is shaped through the perspective of the main protagonist at a particular stage in his life. However, this question goes beyond literary discussion, and is also formulated as a first-person testimony by Grossman himself. Grossman describes his encounter with the work of Bruno Schultz, and how he learned about Schultz’s fate as proving a decisive turning point in his writing of the novel.[[20]](#footnote-20) Grossman relates how he experienced feelings of deep melancholy after becoming aware of Schultz’s work and death. Subsequently, he describes the sense of responsibility he felt to rewrite Schultz’s history to enable him to escape that fate:

After reading this account, I felt that I did not wish to live in a world in which such monstrosities of language could be uttered. […] I wanted to write a book that would tell readers about Bruno Schulz. It would be a book that would tremble on the shelf. The vitality it contained would be tantamount to the blink of an eye in one person’s life—not “life” in quotation marks, life that is nothing more than a languishing moment in time, but the sort of life Schulz gives us in his writing. A life of the living. I know that many readers of *See Under: Love* found it difficult to get through the chapter on Bruno Schulz. But for me, that is the core of the book, the reason I wrote it, the reason I write. […] The book has since been translated into several languages, and nothing makes me happier than the fact that in each language in which the book has appeared, new editions of Bruno Schulz’s writings have soon followed, and more and more people have become acquainted with this wonderful writer.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Grossman’s initial response to reading about Schultz’s fate was to rewrite his story so that it would become “a book that would tremble on the shelf.”

Grossman described Schultz as a man who had devoted his life to his writing, and who, “in return,” had suffered the most ignominious death. Therefore, even though he is aware of the difficulties inherent in reading the chapter on Schultz in his novel, Grossman nevertheless points to this chapter as a key to the novel’s importance—and even to the significance of his literary fiction as a whole. When Grossman claimed that redeeming his debt to Schultz was “the reason I write,” he was in effect setting out the Archimedean point of his act of creation—that is, his ethical-poetic responsibility in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Some critics of the novel have found it to have the characteristics of a postmodern novel without a moral stance, and to be ambivalent regarding the unity of its protagonist. They have argued that the novel poses a challenge to common perceptions regarding the Holocaust (vis-à-vis both those Jews who collaborated with the Nazis and the Nazis themselves).[[22]](#footnote-22) These interpretations emphasize Grossman’s (successful) attempt to retell the Holocaust by deviating from convention and popular ideas.

Meanwhile, however, my analysis in the first chapter of this book attempts to show how *See Under: Love* outlines a new ethics, after the foundations of modern-Western ethics were trampled by the Holocaust. The plight of the novel’s narrator, Shlomik, who struggles with repeated attempts to write the story of Bruno Schultz, stems from his sense of responsibility toward contending with the events of the Holocaust. Shlomik wonders: “It's so horrifying. How can you go on living and believing in humanity once you know?”[[23]](#footnote-23) And he answers: “When you're writing about things that happened Over There, you have to stick to the facts. Otherwise, what right do I have to touch the sore?”[[24]](#footnote-24)

At this point, an immanent tension is revealed, which is embodied in Shlomik’s soul and is unique to this chapter in the book. This is the tension between Shlomik’s need to relate the facts, and his failure to adhere to them. Shlomik admits that he has not been able to create a direct connection between the characters he has invented, and that as a result, his story has stopped. At this point, he realized that he had to go beyond the limits of facts and the language of reality, to poetry—but Adorno’s famous “warning” stopped him. In Shlomik’s conversation with Ayala, his lover, she convinces him that it is possible to write poetry—but in a different way:

‘I was still sidestepping. Adorno says after Auschwitz, poetry is no longer possible.’ […] ‘I mean’ – Ayala beamed, […] ‘not poetry with rhyme and meter and all that, just two people trying to connect in a faltering, self-conscious way.’[[25]](#footnote-25)

And this is when the plot jump occurs. Shlomik manages to continue to tell Schultz’s story, and develops an ethical grammar with the help of “poetic-fiction”: in *this* story, Schultz succeeds in escaping his fate. This spectacular move, which incorporates another possibility for poetry, is remarkably consistent with Levinas’s position on literature, which I discuss in detail later. In brief, Levinas was also opposed to art that purports to imitate reality, and was interested in—and greatly influenced by—ethics-oriented literature such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s novel *Crime and Punishment* or Paul Celan’s dialogue poems.

A special place is dedicated to ethical grammar in the fourth part of the novel, the Encyclopedia, which I also discuss later. At this stage, it is worth tying up a few loose ends. The novel’s title, *See Under: Love*, refers to an encyclopedia written by an “editorial staff,” which is actually one specific person—that is, Shlomo Neuman, the narrator (a fact that is casually revealed toward the end of the introduction to the Encyclopedia, something that has gone unnoticed by many scholars). Another loose end concerns the unity of the narrator—the child Momik in the first part of the novel, who leaves and reemerges behind the scenes in the second and third parts, and who becomes the “editorial staff” of the Encyclopedia in the final part. The stated attempt to relinquish literary tension and adhere to the facts, is embodied, as it were, in the definitions of 75 concepts such as “suffering,” and “conscience.” These concepts were formulated in the wake of the Holocaust as described in the novel, and indeed some refer to characters and other details from the novel’s three previous parts. In fact, the fourth part of the novel incorporates an internal struggle between three aspects, and retrospectively sheds light on the novel as a whole and on Grossman’s work in general. The first aspect concerns the aspiration to confer meaning on life by establishing a new ethics; the second is a reality-check, as a result of which trust in human beings is repeatedly disappointed; while the third aspect is the narrator’s responsibility to create an ethical-poetic grammar that can reflect his choices—which cannot be justified empirically. This tension jolts the reader between feelings of unfathomable seriousness and all-embracing irony, but nevertheless, he is pierced by Grossman’s insistence on continuing to adhere to the ethical path.

Furthermore, in other of Grossman’s literary works, one can also find repeated attempts to establish an ethical grammar in various contexts in which everyday grammar is insufficient for dealing with an unbearably difficult existential reality. This phenomenon is directly evident in the titles of novels like *The Book of Intimate Grammar* (1991) and *Falling Out of Time* (2011). In Grossman’s other novels, even where the attempt to create a new ethical grammar is implicit, it is intended to help contend with the difficulties of communication in marital or parent-child relationships, and with two extremes of human suffering—grappling with the possibility of the death of a child, and grieving a fallen child.

On July 21, 2023, as part of a conversation during a conference at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, Grossman was asked whether it is possible to express the grief of bereavement in language, or alternatively whether words cannot describe the grief felt by a bereaved parent. Grossman’s answer was unequivocal: “Language can express my grief.” This sentence summed up Grossman’s description of the process of writing his novel *Falling Out of Time* (2011). Grossman related how he felt the strongest connection to his son Uri, who was killed in battle in 2006, while he was writing his novel about a fictional search for him. In other words, the language of fiction became an experiential platform where the author could express in language the entire range of the emotions that he was experiencing.

Meanwhile, the fictional language of Grossman’s novel *To the End of the Land*, which he began writing in 2003, operates differently. The novel was published in 2008, two years after his son Uri was killed. In the novel, which Grossman has called an “echo chamber” of the experience of bereavement, a variety of complex emotions arise and trouble the main protagonist, Ora, as she prepares herself for—and tries to escape from—the news of her son’s death. The novel raises questions about parental responsibility versus an individual’s attachment to her country, the meaning of loyalty to one’s spouse, and the relationship between this loyalty and Ora’s relationship with her soldier-son. The character of Ora articulates a plethora of ethical questions that surface as a result of her anxieties over the death of her son, but that are also connected to a multitude of other aspects of her life. The common denominator of these, and other, ethical questions in Grossman’s novels is directly linked to Levinas’s argument: “We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the other, ethics.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

In other words, it is one’s relationship to the Other that places in a question mark the “I” who acts spontaneously according to his or her personality—and this ought to lead one to act out of consideration of the other, not according to the spontaneous tendencies of the “I.” Compared to grief, which is a complex but specific emotion, the ethical aspect is spread across various arenas of human activity. There is ethics in the context of family relationships (between spouses, parents, siblings), ethics in a romantic context, ethics in a national and international context, and ethics in the context of the goals of poetic writing. During the same July 21, 2023 discussion, like in many other of his lectures, Grossman expressed an uncompromising commitment to ethical responsibility in his life in general, and in his writing in particular. However, due to the breadth of the canvas of his portrayals of ethics, and the abstract nature of the matter, I focus here only on certain aspects of ethical language in Grossman’s literary work, in the hope that this type of analysis can develop further.

One of the possible dichotomies that exist between Grossman’s protagonists is between those who feel that certain things cannot be expressed in language, and those who feel that they can express *anything* in language. Alongside this, we can propose another dichotomy that concerns the way in which language operates—a language-action that expresses how a thing is done versus a language-action that expresses the essence of a thing. As well as expressing the essence of private grief, Grossman’s literary fiction, from his first collection of short stories, *The Jogger* (1983) through his most recent novel *Life Plays with Me* (2019), also depicts various modes of ethical language. There are a few direct statements that can be said to articulate a definition of ethics, and there are numerous prisms through which Grossman’s poetic language describes how to behave ethically. At this point, an important question arises, which concerns whether there is a link between the various characteristics of the ethical aspect in Grossman’s literary fiction, even in different or distant contexts such as the Holocaust and the experience of grieving a fallen son. The answer is positive. A striking example of a common characteristic of the ethical aspect that appears in several of Grossman’s literary works is the description of suffering in the final section of his novel *See Under: Love*:

Suffering: […] The compass or lighthouse, the criterion for every human decision. Wasserman sees sensitivity to suffering and consciousness of it as the highest goal of mankind. Moreover, it is man's protest, and the highest expression of this freedom. [[27]](#footnote-27)

The words that Grossman chooses in order to articulate the nature of suffering bear a surprising and unconscious resemblance (according to Grossman’s own testimony, when asked about it) to the philosophical position of the creator of the ethical turn, Emmanuel Levinas. Placing the suffering of the Other as a compass or a beacon for one’s own behavior, sensitivity to suffering, and the priority of ethics within the freedom of self-realization, are fundamental elements of Levinas’s philosophy, and run as a second thread throughout it, despite the shifts that occurred within it.

Another significant point of similarity between Levinas’s thought and Grossman’s literary fiction is the centrality of language as a medium that enables ethical action in practice. Many of Grossman’s works incorporate in-depth discussions regarding the nature of how language works, and even suggestions for alternative languages. These include the Encyclopedia in the novel *See Under: Love* or internal grammar in the novel *The Book of Intimate Grammar*.[[28]](#footnote-28) Despite the important place Grossman gives to language, it is not directly linked to the ethical aspect. However, in Levinas, interdependencies between language and ethics are formulated, as I detail later. At this stage, I will note only the term *ethical language*, which Levinas coined in his later writings when he set out how communication in everyday life enables ethical action.

It was not until 2024 that a monograph was published that offers a review of Grossman’s whole corpus.[[29]](#footnote-29) Its author, Gabriel Zoran, emphasizes in his introduction that his monograph is not organized as a scholarly book, since it neither discusses a particular research question, nor presents any thesis regarding Grossman’s corpus.[[30]](#footnote-30) Expressions of the author’s (that is, Zoran’s) own position and interpretation do appear at certain points in the monograph, within the context of a discussion of specific controversial points—but without reference to an overall interpretive position, philosophical or otherwise. In addition to Zoran’s comprehensive monograph, only two other books on Grossman’s work have been published. The first of these, by Marit Ben-Israel, focuses on just one of Grossman’s novels, *The Book of Intimate Grammar*.[[31]](#footnote-31) The second book, by Amir Klugman, analyses the body language in some of Grossman’s works from a psychoanalytic and Lacanian perspective.[[32]](#footnote-32)

This book is therefore the first attempt to comprehensively link Grossman’s literary corpus to a philosophical ethos, which I argue can be best understood and described through the ethical philosophy of Emmanual Levinas. In this discussion, I propose to focus on the ethical aspect that runs as a second thread throughout Grossman’s literary fiction, which is intended for people of different ages (children, teenagers, and adults). The ethical aspect of Grossman’s literary work has been discussed in several studies, but only with reference to a specific work or another, and not as part of an overview of Grossman’s entire body of work.[[33]](#footnote-33)

The main argument I make here is that the ethical aspect is central to the nature of Grossman’s protagonists and their actions in three main ways. The **first** of theseis embodied in the centrality of ethical choice in the plots of Grossman’s works. The **second** is shaped by the conflicts experienced by the characters, and reflects their personalities, as well as values such as sensitivity toward others, responsibility, and compassion. The **third** is the creation of an ethical language that is used in speech-actions in everyday language and that reflects, through features of that language, certain ethical values such as dialogue, diversity, and development. Since in most of Grossman’s literary fiction, these ethical aspects are shaped indirectly, in this discussion I propose an interdisciplinary interpretative methodology that is based on the thought of Emmanuel Levinas.

**Ethical literary criticism**

Before moving to Levinas’ thought and its unique contribution to ethical criticism in general and to criticism of Grossman’s literary work in particular, I must make reference to the broader context—that is, to ethical literary criticism. In undertaking a chronological examination of the relationships between ethical criticism and literary criticism in Western thought, one ought to begin with the writings of Plato and Aristotle. Plato discussed literary genres in his *Republic*, as part of his discussions on appropriate practices for the good of the state. He described an external ethical criterion for literature—its intended contribution to society. Thus, Plato judged each of the three genres of literature according to the effects they had on citizens.[[34]](#footnote-34) Since, in his opinion, all literary genres are focused on imitation rather than on a specific purpose or on improving the consciousness of citizens—and are thus art for art’s sake—literature is inherently inferior.[[35]](#footnote-35) It is interesting to note that Levinas’s famous essay on literary criticism, “Reality and its Shadow,”[[36]](#footnote-36) starts from a very similar point of departure to that of Plato—literature that is not aimed at an ethical goal, but instead focuses on imitating reality, is unworthy. Jumping to the modern era, Kant and the literary critic Northrop Frye saw literary judgement an expression of taste, with Frye succinctly defining each work of literature as being “one more document in the history of taste.”[[37]](#footnote-37) There is a clear interdependence between the definition of ethics and the possibility of its application in literary scholarship. Referring to Kant’s thought as a starting point for modern philosophy, which placed at its center individual autonomy and freedom to choose “duty” (or the better-known concept, “the ought”) we can see that the Kantian concept lacks positive content. Further, even if we were to rely on the rule established by Kant, people may justify any choice on the pretext that an Other, who is familiar to them, would also be interested in it.

The term has taken shape from the 1980s. Literary scholarship has also preoccupied itself with exploring the meaning behind the late flowering of the relationship between the two disciplines of philosophy and literature. Adia Mendelson-Maoz, for example, emphasized the fact that “until the last decades, the two disciplines were totally distanced.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Meanwhile, Jane Adamson and other scholars have pondered the meaning of this distancing of the disciplines.[[39]](#footnote-39) It is possible to dissent from this accepted distinction, however, and refer—following scholars such as Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan and Ken Hirschkop[[40]](#footnote-40)—to the thought of Mikhail Bakhtin, which was not available in English until the 1990s. Bakhtin’s ideas, such as dialogism, heteroglossia, and speech-genres, influenced the disciplinary study of literature and ethics, and will also be used in this current discussion. However, Bakhtin deliberately avoided a direct theoretical discussion of ethics after he formulated his *Philosophy of the Act*.[[41]](#footnote-41) Consequently, he turned to literature, and in particular to the novel, as a space for the practical realization of ethical action.[[42]](#footnote-42) Taking a high-level view, Erdinast-Vulcan and Hirschkop demonstrated the sequence of Bakhtin’s shift from formulating a new philosophy focused on action to the study of literature and discourse. Bakhtin’s ideas are interdisciplinary methodological tools, which are useful for casting light on the ethical aspect.

Further to this, it is important to note that Bakhtin’s thought had a tremendous influence on Wayne Booth, who is considered to be responsible for formulating and bringing about the most significant shift, and who even coined the term “ethical criticism”: as Booth noted, ‟Ethical criticism attempts to describe the encounters of a story-teller’s ethos with that of the reader or listener.”[[43]](#footnote-43)

The fact that ethics is external to the creation of literature permits a range of positions vis-à-vis ethical criticism. These range from the extreme stance of the need for a dichotomous separation between aesthetics and ethics, to its polar opposite as formulated by Booth, according to whom “ethical criticism is relevant to all literature.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Alongside this assertion, Booth also described the problems inherent in applying ethical judgement to works of literature. Frequently, ethical judgement encourages the forcing of an apparently moral position, which may lead to sexism, racism, antisemitism, or classism. Also, contrary to the spirit of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, ethical judgement may also lead to censorship. Finally, we must raise the question of the unique nature and role of an aesthetic work. If such a work aims to please the reader through its aesthetic design, then these are two goals that do not share a common denominator with ethics. Alongside these motivations, the deepest problem that Booth raised is a philosophical problem. The pretense of evaluating and judging the ethical aspect of a literary creation is based on a concept of “knowledge”—as it were, one must find the foundations of ethics and judge the effectiveness of its expressions in the literary work. All this, while—certainly from Kant onwards—the prevailing philosophical position has been that ethics is based on will and choice, and not on drawing empirical conclusions that are based on knowledge.

Despite the relevance of ethical criticism to every work of literature, Booth devised a position that he called “rhetorical-pragmatic,” according to which responsibility for the content of ethical criticism lies with each reader.[[45]](#footnote-45) Booth defined his method as “critical pluralism—a pluralism with limits.”[[46]](#footnote-46) However, as a basis for the reader’s responsibility, a literary work must stimulate him or her to exercise ethical judgement through its content, in particular via the way in which the work raises ethical conflicts:

[The] story itself *consists* of the conflict of defensible moral or ethical stances; the action takes place both within the characters in the story and inside the mind of the reader, as he or she grapples with conflicting choices that irresistibly demand the reader's judgment.”[[47]](#footnote-47)

Monica Johnstone has posited a number of questions that guide the mode of investigation developed by Booth, *inter* *alia*:

What are the distinctions between the narrator, the implied author, and the actual author?; Should I believe the narrator?; Am I willing to be the kind of person the storyteller is asking me to be?; what are the text's implicit norms?; To what extent do readers take in the values of what they read?; Has something been achieved that is *in its own terms* admirable?; What is the judgment community in which the text exists?[[48]](#footnote-48)

Johnstone emphasized Booth’s rationale, according to which an ethical judgement that is exercised while reading of a work of literature occurs in the context of a discourse-community, such that all the questions posited above go beyond the work itself, and enter into the reader’s personal and social world. The interdependence that Johnstone demonstrates between the literary work and the reader’s real life even includes questions such as whether a particular character or characters in the story could become the reader’s friends. It seems to me that this is a problematic exception, since a story may be successful on an ethical level in the opinion of an excellent reader, even if he or she did not wish the characters to become personal friends. A reader may well feel empathy for the character of Ora in Grossman’s novel *To the End of the Land*, for example,but have no desire to befriend her.

At this point, I find it appropriate to make two remarks. First, in many of his lectures, Grossman has related the following anecdote regarding the character of Ora: during a writing crisis that occurred when he was creating the novel, Grossman decided to write Ora a letter asking her to surrender herself to him so that he could continue with his book. Ora “replied” that it was Grossman who should surrender himself to her—and when he understood this, the author was able to release Ora from his control and allow her to simply direct him. In other words, Ora’s voice became a kind of independent voice. Further to this, my second remark regards the shift that took place in Booth, inspired by Bakhtin, in the perception of the role of the author. Booth claimed that the author should voluntarily allow different voices to enter his or her work, even when those voices were fundamentally not in line with the author’s own ideology. In his essay ‘How Bakhtin woke me up,’ Booth explains the shift that occurred in his perception, as inspired by Bakhtin:

When novelists imagine characters, they imagine worlds that characters inhabit, worlds that are laden with values. Whenever they reduce those multiple worlds to one, the author’s, they give a false report, an essentially egotistical distortion that tells lies about the way things are. Bakhtin’s ultimate value—full acknowledgment of and participation in a Great Dialogue—is thus not to be addressed as just one more piece of ‟literary criticism”; even less is it a study of fictional technique or form […]. It is a philosophical inquiry into our limited ways of mirroring – and improving – our lives[[49]](#footnote-49)

Booth describes a process that is the exact *opposite* of what happened to Bakhtin. Bakhtin transitioned from philosophy to the study of literature, while Booth describes how reading literature can function as a philosophical process of self-constitution that improves human life. In a similar way, Daniel Schwartz also described the ethical turn as being the main turn of the millennium, which is clearly expressed in the study of literature and which unites the main currents that preceded it:

Now we are able to see that the New Critics, Aristotelians, […] and literary historians share a number of important assumptions: authors write to express their ideas and emotions; the way humans live and the values for which they live are of fundamental interest to authors and readers; literature expresses insights about human life and responses to human situations, and that is the main reason why we read, teach, and think about literature[[50]](#footnote-50)

Schwartz devised a common denominator for all the currents that preceded the ethical turn, as being a focus on the humanistic aspect that is embodied in the literary text. This starts from the existence of the text as a “creative gesture of the author,” continues with the literary text containing processes of “imitating the external world,” and incorporates the role of the critic in recapturing the world in which the text was written, including ‟knowledge of the historical context and author.”[[51]](#footnote-51)

Ethical-humanist interpretation places at the center the fact that a literary text was written by an individual in a human context. The text interacts with a variety of human factors that are woven into it, and on the basis of which it was created in the first place. Generally speaking, even a formalistic analysis of a text is a particular expression of humanism. According to Schwartz, the humanistic perspective demands a stake and an ethical position—we never break away from the values system by which we live, and as readers, our every response to a text is an act of communication that transcends the ethical dimension.[[52]](#footnote-52) The methodical question of how one can locate ethical grammar was seemingly answered by Aristotle, who showed how in drama, intersubjective events occur on an ethical level. Schwartz focused on the common denominator shared by the literary scholars who outlined the ethical turn as the “premise of a strong connection between art and life.”[[53]](#footnote-53)

Here, however, I must proffer a caveat—a “connection between art and life” does not necessarily include an ethical aspect, and certainly not one that is based on a responsibility toward another person. The two most prominent examples of this are Heidegger and Sartre—both viewed the existence of the individual as the main subject of philosophical inquiry as well as of literary creation.[[54]](#footnote-54) The problem, or flaw, that is shared by this roster of scholars is the lack of any criteria, or of even a single agreed-upon criterion, for ethics. Thus, the concept of freedom (of the reader or of the artist), for example, may be an expression of ethics according to Sartre or an expression of the *absence* of ethics according to Levinas. Levinas opposed the possibility of freedom without responsibility, and this theme is also key to understanding the ethical aspect of Grossman’s work.[[55]](#footnote-55)

In conclusion, in 2024, Nie Zhenzhao provided a comprehensive explanation for the emergence of an interdisciplinary method of ethics research and literary criticism, which is embodied in the shift from the interchangeable use of the terms “ethical criticism” and “moral criticism,”[[56]](#footnote-56) to the establishment of the term “ethical criticism”:

Ethical criticism studies a wide spectrum of texts—both philosophical and literary—and covers a wide range of issues, such as the moral and ethical themes of literature, the influence of literature upon man and society, the relationships between literature and other disciplines, and the ethical relationships between readers, narrators, and authors. It must be noted, however, that Western ethical criticism has so far failed to fulfill its task of theoretical construction as a methodology, leaving a lacuna to be questioned and attacked.[[57]](#footnote-57)

This contemporary summary of methodological lacunae justifies reference to Levinas’s thought, which proposes a complex conception of ethics, and following it, a methodology that developed over time in his writing.

**Levinas’s ethics: the lived experience of authentic humanity**

*Ethics: a comportment in which the other, who is strange and indifferent to you, who belongs neither to the order of your interest nor to your affections, at the same time matters to you. His alterity concerns you. A relation of another order than that of knowledge, in which the object is given value by knowing it, which passes for the only relation with beings. […] Placed in an ethical relation, the other man remains other. […] It is banality, but one has to be surprised by it. The idea of transcendence arises perhaps at this point.[[58]](#footnote-58)*

The nature of ethics is, without dispute, the central theme that Levinas addresses in his books. It is part of a repeated attempt to articulate the inevitable—that the transcendent nature of ethical responsibility does not allow for any definition in ontological language, and makes it difficult to clarify its characteristics. In one of Levinas’s conversations, we find the above citation in which he emphasizes that ethics is behavior. The Other is not an object, and therefore recognizing him or her is not a function of knowledge, and neither does this occur rationally (as, for example, in Kant’s description). The ethical relationship to the Other does not reduce his or her alterity, but rather the opposite—and this is precisely the point of the connection to the transcendental, whose otherness is eternal. Further to its transcendental nature, ethics cannot be given to rules—and here we find another point of tension in Levinas’s discussion of the subject. While we cannot establish moral rules, Levinas also characterizes how the “I” awakens with respect to ethical behavior toward the Other:

Ethics is no longer a simple moralism of rules which decree what is virtuous. It is the original awakening of an I responsible for the other; the accession of my person to the uniqueness of the I called and elected to responsibility for the other. The human I is not a unity closed upon itself, […] but rather an opening, that of responsibility, which is the true beginning of the human and of spirituality. In the call which the face of the other man addresses to me, I grasp in an immediate fashion the graces of love: spirituality, **the lived experience of authentic humanity.**[[59]](#footnote-59)

Behavior that expresses openness and responsibility toward the Other is the realization of being called, that is, of being elected to realize one’s human destiny, which is to listen to the call that is embodied in one’s encounter with the face of the Other. The discovery of the grace of love is the lived experience of authenticity.

These descriptions by Levinas prompt a question that scholars have yet to pose directly—that is, how can one confer meaning upon an ethical action, starting from an individual’s consciousness of him- or herself and ending with an external expression that is understood by the Other as being an ethical action? How can meanings of sensitivity, of responsibility, and of compassion, be conferred on ethical action? In other words, we might ask—what is the place of language in the ethical process? Levinas’s starting point, according to which ethics is transcendental and precedes self-recognition, does not connect to the fact that, in practice, human understanding (even with the primacy of ethics) is realized through the act of thought, which is based on the use of language.

At the same time, in his famous article in which he expresses the primacy of ethics, Levinas also clarified the dependence of ethical development on language:

Language is born in responsibility. One has to speak, to say I, to be in the first person, precisely to be me. But, from that point, in affirming this me being, one has to respond to one's right to be. […] The proximity of the other is the face’s meaning. […] Prior to any particular expression and beneath all particular expressions, which cover over and protect with an immediately adopted face or countenance, there is the nakedness and destitution of the expression as such, that is to say extreme exposure, defenselessness, vulnerability itself.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Scholars have not yet addressed the fact that Levinas divided the process of ethical development into three stages, and described these in a grammatical manner—a person speaks by his or her very nature, and self-constitution begins with the use of the first person, which allows me to recognize myself and that which pertains to me. After confirming the existence of the self, one’s ability to recognize the precedence of the Other develops, and this is embodied in the encounter with the Other’s countenance or face. This meeting sheds light on the recognition that, before and after any plausible expression, a person is obligated to responsibility. The face is not a tangible object, or at least there is no condition for it to be a tangible object, but it embodies the Other in many aspects: in its nakedness, destitution, extreme exposure, defenselessness, and vulnerability. This passage reflects an interesting complexity—on the one hand, language is created within a context of responsibility. At the same time, the “I” must recognize itself with the help of language, and only then does it understand the priority of its relation to the Other. That is, there is a contradiction inherent in the claim that the Other precedes me in time, and the claim that self-recognition is necessary to understand the precedence of the Other.

It is interesting to note that, only in a relatively late study was reference made to the existence of the tension to which these questions give rise behind the scenes—it was not until 2019 that Robert Bernasconi stated directly that “One cannot emphasize sufficiently that although Levinas concluded that ethics was first philosophy, it could never serve as a starting point.”[[61]](#footnote-61) Although ethics cannot be a methodological point of departure, Levinas struggled, according to Bernasconi, with the need for the formation of an ethical language:

[Levinas] claimed that ethical language, the language of responsibility, imposed itself on him: ‘a description that at the beginning knows only being and beyond being turns into ethical language.’ (Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 193).” [[62]](#footnote-62)

In a collection of essays published in 2019, a coherent discussion of this idea was presented for the first time, and deepens the connection between language and ethics that Levinas established in his writings.[[63]](#footnote-63) William Large argued unequivocally that “the relation to the Other is the relation of language.”[[64]](#footnote-64) Large also referred to the language in Levinas’s writings as being “a problem” and explored the tension inherent in the inability to express in language content that is outside its boundaries. Language is central to Levinas’s thought, but at the same time, there appears to be a constant struggle between schools of thought that place language at the center of philosophical discussion. Levinas emphasized, for example, that the encounter with the face of the other takes place outside of any system: “The face has turned to me—and this is its very nudity. It *is* by itself and not by reference to a system.” [[65]](#footnote-65)

The face turns to me when it is exposed and vulnerable, and expresses an ethical claim, which does not arise from any “system.” But how does the face operate without relation to any system of meaning? How is the meaning of an ethical claim expressed in a way that is understood by the person to whom the face is addressed? To clarify this, Levinas created a new concept—that is, ethical language.

Levinas used the term ethical language on only a handful of occasions, and it is only after his death that one can find the first scholarly reference to the subject, in an essay by Paul Davies.[[66]](#footnote-66) Davies addresses the difficulty of deciphering Levinas’s intent in using this concept, noting that the attempt to interpret this intent runs counter to a longstanding tradition of Levinas studies that has ignored it. Ostensibly, there is a methodological difficulty, since the concept of ethical language did not develop in Levinas’s writings linearly. Furthermore, Davies emphasizes that, although Levinas did use this idea, his intention was actually to differentiate—and even to compare and contrast—between the two parts of the idea and between any existing conceptions regarding each of these.[[67]](#footnote-67) It is interesting to note that, embedded within this concept that has been overlooked by scholars, there is an important innovation of Levinas’s that is of particular relevance for application in ethical literary criticism. Davies notes the enigmatic nature of the ethical situation, as expressed mainly in the writings that preceded Levinas’s final book. In that book, *Otherwise than Being* *or Beyond Essence*[[68]](#footnote-68) Levinas devised a complex response by proposing a renewed semantic field, which includes the concepts of “the said” (*le dit*), “the saying” (*le dire*) and “ethical language” (*langage éthique*). For our purposes, since literature is a linguistic art, and its investigation is based on studying the operation of poetic language, it is especially important to discover how ethics is embodied in language and how it can be investigated.

**Levinas’s ethical language: The saying and the said**

*In the approach of a face, the flesh becomes word, the caress a saying*.[[69]](#footnote-69)

The act of communication takes place within everyday reality, and is embodied in language. Even prior to that, a person consolidates the ability to think and self-recognize through language. At the moment of encountering a face, its recognition takes shape as a word, a gentle process of utterance. Levinas draw a distinction between the propositional content of discourse, which he labeled “the Said,” and the act of interlocution, the relation to the other, which he labeled “the Saying.” He proposed a new insight: the refusal to synchronize the Saying and the Said, which instead have a relationship of *affirmation and negation*. To understand this paradoxical situation, one must distinguish between an action that establishes an ethical relationship and an action that negates it in the present by describing it.

The Saying and the Said are two different levels of expression, between which there exist relationships of subordination and correlation.[[70]](#footnote-70) The Said includes the linguistic system, that is, everything that can be expressed in language. The Saying reflects an ethical attitude, which originates outside the boundaries of language and is embodied within it through proximity, which is conceived as a responsibility:

Saying states and thematizes the said, but signifies it to the other, a neighbor, with a signification that has to be distinguished from that borne by words in the said. This signification to the other occurs in proximity. Proximity is quite distinct from every other relationship and has to be conceived as a responsibility for the other; it might be called humanity, or subjectivity, or self.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Levinas constructs an ethical language through the creation of two semantic fields. In the first field, he includes a multitude of linguistic concepts, which function as a communicative action, as shown in the above quotation: *saying*, *said*, *word*, *signifies*, and *signification*. Alongside the linguistic concepts, there are several others that represent an ethical meaning: *responsibility*, *humanity*, *subjectivity*, *neighbor*, *proximity*, and *relationship*. This semantic field summarizes Levinas’s main philosophical innovation, following which the overall term of ethical language is proposed. That the concept of the face is missing from this passage is no coincidence—as has already been noted, in his final book, Levinas greatly curtailed his use of the face metaphor.[[72]](#footnote-72) While it does appear, it does so only in a limited scope, and is supplanted by linguistic terms used to describe ethical action. This fact is very important when justifying the use of the concept of “ethical language” as one that encompasses Levinas’s movement in the final analysis. The picture that emerges from this semantic field is of an ethical action that occurs as an act of communication, within which there are two planes of linguistic performance—the first, preceding in time and importance, is the Saying: this is a plane that cannot be established and summarized verbally, and contains a trace that alludes to the transcendental source of ethical responsibility. The second plane of linguistic performance is the Said, which includes all the components of the language system that transcribe the traces of the ethical action and make it ontological. In this way, the action undergoes a reduction of its transcendental nature, but as long as the two planes operate simultaneously, the tension between the transcendental and the ontological is maintained.

Methodologically, this recalls other pairs of contrasting terms that de Saussure used to characterize the linguistic system. Levinas applied this to the ethical context, although the Said refers to the linguistic system. The Saying is abstract and of transcendent origin, while the Said is tangible and of human origin. However, Levinas referred to both concepts as being ancillary and emphasized the correlation between them.[[73]](#footnote-73) De Saussure argued that it is not possible to separate the pairs of contrasting terms that characterize the linguistic system. For Levinas, the contrasting pairs constitute a whole. According to Levinas, devoting oneself to ethical action, during which subjectivity and the self are adjusted, “is the very fact of finding oneself when losing oneself.”[[74]](#footnote-74)

Simon Critchley describes how Levinas came to devise the concept of ethical language via the delightful term “creative defamiliarization.”[[75]](#footnote-75) In fact, this is a paradoxical move that is reflected in the epigraph above—subjectivity according to Levinas means a complete disconnection from time and place, so that a “suspension” is created.[[76]](#footnote-76) Critchley described the conundrum of why the ethical language that supposedly communicates with concepts like duty, obligation and so forth, becomes for Levinas a second semantic field of negative concepts like trauma, hostage, obsession, and persecution. Levinas’s answer is that lingering in a negative being (non-time, non-place) is a condition for taking responsibility, the occurrence of which makes subjectivity positive: “[a]ll the negative attributes, which state the beyond of essence, become positive in responsibility, a response answering to a nonthematizable provocation and thus a nonvocation, a trauma.”[[77]](#footnote-77) Therefore, the “negative language of obsession, hostage, persecution, trauma, and the rest becomes a positive ethical language.”[[78]](#footnote-78)

Alongside Levinas’s terms the Saying and the Said, his term ethical language already incorporates tension and raises the following question—can language be used for an ethical purpose, despite the impossibility of describing the essence of ethics in language? This tension is maintained on a verbal level when ethical language operates through the synergistic and simultaneous speech-acts of the Saying and the Said. As Levinas’s words quoted in the epigraph above show, the Saying is indeed unsayable—but on a literal level, the Saying merges with the Said.

To increase the difficulty of transcribing and formulating a clear template for ethical language, similar to the template of the speech-act devised by John Searle,[[79]](#footnote-79) one must trace the individual descriptions in which Levinas used the term. In the following description, Levinas claimed that ethical language is not a product of a particular moral experience, but is derived as a result of a mode of behavior that is expressed in the Saying:

The ethical language we resort to does not proceed from a special moral experience, independent of the description developed until then. It comes from **the very meaning of approach**, which contrasts with knowledge, of the face which contrasts with phenomena. […] Ethical language alone succeeds in being equal to the paradox in which phenomenology is abruptly thrown: starting with the neighbor, it reads this paradox in the midst of an absence which orders it as a face, but in a way that we would be wrong to confuse with an indication or a monstration of the signified in the signifier, according to the facile itinerary in which pious thought too quickly deduces theological realities. The trace in which a face is ordered is not reducible to a sign for the simple reason that a sign and its relationship with the signified are already thematized. But an approach is not the thematization of any relationship; it is this very relationship.[[80]](#footnote-80)

In the text in which he laid the foundation for his discussions of ethical language, Levinas described how ethical language contains a paradox, since there is an encounter with an absence, from which the order of the face occurs—but not in the usual way where the signified is found in the signifier. Levinas points to another type of signification—the trace, which is not reducible to a sign that has substantive relations with the signified. The approach embodies an attitude whose content cannot be transcribed.

A similar process is set out in Levinas’s main work, *Otherwise Than Being*, in which the concept of ethical language appears on three more occasions. In the first of these (from which the quotation in the epigraph above is taken), Levinas emphasized the necessity of ethical language:

In the approach of a face the flesh becomes word, the caress a saying. The thematization of a face undoes the face and undoes the approach. *The mode in which a face indicates its own absence in my responsibility requires a description that can be formed only in ethical language.*[[81]](#footnote-81)

In an ethical situation, there is an encounter with a face, which emerges as a word—while, at the same time, an attempt to pour content into the encounter disrupts both it and the face. This is because the face represents an absence, the transcendental source of the ethical imperative, which cannot be transcribed. The essence of this encounter unfolds with the discovery of responsibility, and this unfolding can only be described in ethical language—that is, through a language that allows the absence to be preserved by means of a trace—something that was mentioned above and is also referred to in the following passage from *Otherwise Than Being*, in which Levinas discusses ethical language:

The ethical language we have resorted to does not arise out of a special moral experience, independent of the description hitherto elaborated. The ethical situation of responsibility is not comprehensible on the basis of ethics. […] The constraint that does not presuppose the will, nor even the core of being from which the will arises […], and that we have described starting with persecution, has its place between the necessity of “what cannot be otherwise” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* E). […] The tropes of ethical language are found to be adequate for certain structures of the description: for the sense of the approach in its contrast with knowing, the face in its contrast with a phenomenon.Ethical language succeeds in expressing the paradox in which phenomenology finds itself abruptly thrown. […] Starting with the approach, the description finds the neighbor bearing the trace of a withdrawal that orders it as a face.[[82]](#footnote-82)

The opening of this passage became the title of the first comprehensive article that Levinas wrote on ethical language.[[83]](#footnote-83) Taken with the first quotation from *Otherwise than Being*, we can identify the following pattern: in the first stage, an encounter takes place that has not arisen out of a prior moral experience. This encounter creates a “situation of responsibility” that is not subject to will or any other human factor. In this situation, tropes of ethical language exist that reflect the contrast between ethical language, planes of knowledge, and the world of phenomena. Ethical language expresses a paradox, because the person in the encounter encounters a trace, which marks the transcendental source of the imperative. In his final mention of the term ethical language, in a footnote, Levinas reiterates its characteristics: its origins lie in approach and not in knowledge; it includes the paradox with which phenomenology deals, since it also contains the *beyond* *being*; and a transcendental sign that is expressed in ethical action.[[84]](#footnote-84)

Several scholars have already addressed the tension inherent in Levinas’s concept of ethical language. According to Paul Davis, Levinas perceived ethical language as essential to the philosophical process of describing an ethical situation, even though such a situation is ‟irreducibly enigmatic […] as a situation of and for which philosophy can give no account […but also; D.L.] unavoidable.”[[85]](#footnote-85) Davis also noted that Levinas described the paradoxical nature of ethical language in both of the contexts in which he applied the concept.[[86]](#footnote-86) He claimed that Levinas’s approach made no connection between ethics and language, and cited as proof Levinas’s claim that:

The ethical language we resort to does not proceed from a special moral experience, independent of the description developed until then. It comes from the very meaning of approach, which contrasts with knowledge, of the face which contrasts with phenomena.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Davis described ethical speech acts that apparently require a response to an ethical obligation. He also returned to what preceded that obligation, that is, to the transcendental.[[88]](#footnote-88) The interpretive solution is interesting. According to Levinas, an ethical language that simultaneously combines the saying and the said operates on the basis of linguistic characteristics:

In bringing out substitution in the saying which is in responsibility, it will then have to justify, starting with this saying which is in substitution, the order of the said, thought, justice and being, and to understand the conditions in which philosophy, **in the said, in ontology, can signify truth**. It will do so by linking to the alternating fate of skepticism in philosophical thought - refuted and coming back again - the alternating or diachrony, resisting assemblage, of the *otherwise than being* or transcendence, and its exposition.[[89]](#footnote-89)

Philosophy is embodied in the Said, which is able to express truth. However, to do so, it is necessary to express the transcendence or the “otherwise than being” that is embodied in the Saying. The ability to represent the truth that is embodied in the Said is a basic characteristic of language. The correlation between the Said and the Saying is also a characteristic of language (the ability to link the tangible and the abstract through linguistic tools). Finally, although Levinas does not make the following claim explicitly, it can be deduced from his description—the existence of language does not limit one’s relationship to what lies beyond its limits, but quite the opposite—it enables it.

Finally, I must emphasize two important points that are key to understanding the innovation that Levinas formulated with the help of his three concepts of the Saying, the Said, and ethical language. These relate to the performative aspect of the two types of speech, and the fact that both planes exist simultaneously. Simon Critchley refined and emphasized the performativity of the two speech-acts:

The Saying is my exposure—corporeal, sensible—to the Other, my inability to refuse the Other’s approach. It is the performative stating, proposing, or expressive position of myself facing the Other. It is a verbal or non-verbal **ethical performance**, whose essence cannot be caught in constative propositions. It is a performative *doing* that cannot be reduced to a constative description. By contrast, the Said is a statement, assertion, or proposition (of the form S is P), concerning which the truth or falsity can be ascertained.[[90]](#footnote-90)

Critchley coined a new and important term—"ethical performance”—which emphasizes Levinas’s claim that ethics should take place in action, and that it is not a set of theoretical-intellectual principles. Furthermore, ethical performance cannot be reduced to verbal expression. On the other hand, the Said is a literal formulation, and can even be judged as true or false. Here, Wittgenstein’s statement in *Tractatus* resonates, according to which everything that is formulated in language can be verified (true or false), while ethics—along with aesthetics, logic, and faith—cannot be verified, because they cannot be expressed in language. This first point of similarity between Wittgenstein and Levinas also leads to the second point of similarity—Wittgenstein claimed that will lies outside the boundaries of the world and language, and neither can it be verbally expressed. Good will, or bad will, is a function of each individual’s choice. Neither can will be explained empirically, and it is not possible to bring evidence that will convince a person to behave in a certain way. This move is not surprising for Wittgenstein, since the purpose of his book was to draw the limits of thought and expression in language. However, it is interesting to note that Levinas also formulated a claim regarding free will, although (unlike Wittgenstein), in Levinas, will and choice are at least in tension, if not contrary to the course of his entire thought, in which he attempts to demonstrate the primacy and vitality of ethics:

One can detach from it, or isolate from it, and think the idea of God on its own. One can think it or know it while forgetting the ethical circumstances of its meaning and even find within it […] a religious experience. Religious and theologies live from that abstraction, as do mystics from that isolation. But so do religious wars.[[91]](#footnote-91)

The claim that an individual can elect not to behave ethically is seemingly trivial, but it is embedded in Levinas’s writings—and, as noted, works against his stated tendency to affirm the desire of each individual for transcendentalism.

In the final part of my introduction, I seek to connect Levinas’s ethical concept to the study of literature, and set out a pathway for the interpretation of Grossman’s literary fiction. In each chapter of the book, I clarify the concepts relevant to the topic of discussion and to specific of Grossman’s literary works. At this stage, I will discuss Levinas’s main motivations, both in relation to his references to literature in his writings, and to the role of literature in the reestablishment of ethics in the aftermath of the great humanistic crisis that he experienced firsthand—that is, the Holocaust.

**Interpreting literature: the Levinasian organizational aspect**

*Too many novels, too much suffering transformed on paper, too many sociological explanations and too many new worries have dulled the acuity of the apocalyptic experience lived between 1933 and 1945.[[92]](#footnote-92)*

*One kind of aspect might be called ‘organizational aspects.’ When the aspect changes, parts of the picture belong together which before did not…[[93]](#footnote-93)*

In these words regarding how the events of the Holocaust have been processed, Levinas expresses his criticism of the lack of discussion of this topic in various scholarly fields, and his opinion on the need for an “organizational aspect,” as Wittgenstein called it. According to Levinas, the Holocaust resulted in “useless suffering”[[94]](#footnote-94) (an original term that will be used later in my analysis of Grossman’s fiction), and the question is—how is it possible to arouse people’s ethical responsibility? Literary works, according to Levinas, are measured according to the degree of ethical commitment they succeed in expressing and inspiring, and not by any aesthetic, romantic, or philosophical criteria (such as, for example, revealing the truth).

As of 2010, the study of Levinas’s thought began to be referred to as the “Third Wave of Levinas Scholarship.” This term refers to the expanding influence of Levinas’s ethics on a variety of social sciences and the humanities, including on literature (and children’s literature).[[95]](#footnote-95) In his essay ‘Introduction: The Double “Turn” to Ethics and Literature,’ Michael Eskin reviewed the development of the interdisciplinary study of ethics and literature since the 1980s.[[96]](#footnote-96) Eskin named this development “the Double Turn”: “a ‘turn to ethics’ in literary studies and, conversely, a ‘turn to literature’ in (moral) philosophy.”[[97]](#footnote-97)

These two referents can be included in the term “the ethical turn,” and both are relevant to the examination of the connections between Levinas’s ethical thought and the study of literature. In the first part of my Introduction, I noted some key insights into the study of works of literature from an ethical perspective, both as inspired by Levinas and in general. In this section, I present Levinas’s own complex attitude toward works of literature, both in terms of the direct influence of literature on his writings, and in terms of his position regarding the ability of literature. The question of Levinas’s own attitude toward literature has been discussed in various studies and remains controversial. However, there is consensus in the scholarship that Levinas’s position regarding literature and art in general was at least ambivalent, and some have attributed this to hypocrisy, or likened it to *pharmakon*.[[98]](#footnote-98)

The approach common to most scholars has been already articulated by Jill Robbins, and claims that there is an immanent tension in Levinas’s treatment of literary works.[[99]](#footnote-99) On the one hand, Levinas incorporated diverse references to writers and poets into his writing, and discussed with interviewers the importance of his literary education in the formulation of his philosophy. Meanwhile, in a well-known early paper published in 1948, Levinas listed several reasons for the detachment between aesthetic work and ethics:[[100]](#footnote-100) the focus of the artist (especially the narrator in a lyrical work) on the expression of his or her inner feelings; the artist’s desire to innovate for the audience and surprise them; and an intentional distancing from concrete reality.[[101]](#footnote-101) Levinas argued that, while literature has the potential to describe the singular, unique, and personal Other; conversely, the very act of literary writing distances the concrete Other and conceals him or her behind a screen of fiction, pretty words, or metaphorical writing. However, Levinas’s influence on the study of literature has reached far beyond the limits of his complicated attitude toward it.[[102]](#footnote-102)

In his book *Proper Names*, Levinas explored a number of writers whose works clearly exemplify how poetic language can render the voice of the Other present.[[103]](#footnote-103) Levinas showed how the poetic language of writers such as Shmuel Agnon, Maurice Blanchot, and Paul Celan allows them to reach beyond the symbolic mechanism of quotidian language, in which the link between a word and a thing is arbitrary. He further noted the double action of poetic symbolism, which represents the voice of a single speaker, and at the same time dismantles this voice and creates another voice, allowing the reader to encounter the Other. Levinas demonstrated how Agnon, Blanchot, and Celan created, each in his own way, a language that contended with the trauma of the Holocaust, by developing a poetic language representative of the lost Jewish experience. Levinas argued that this language contains within it another level of meaning that articulates survivors’ responsibility and commitment to preserve and remember the extinguished Jewish experience. For instance, Levinas claimed that Agnon’s stories revived the mentality of the lost Jewish experience: Agnon’s language expresses a sense of belonging to the past while bringing the past into the present.[[104]](#footnote-104)

 This artistic language can “signify between the lines,” as Levinas put it, and generate an additional voice that expresses Agnon’s *ahavat Israel* (love of Israel). Levinas suggested reading Agnon’s language as poetry, which strays beyond the boundaries of an anecdotal description of life in the Jewish town in which it was created.[[105]](#footnote-105) This language is not merely what is “said in the saying,” but expresses the beyond.[[106]](#footnote-106) Through the mechanism of symbolization, Agnon structured his stories as a “sign”: the “sign” presents questions and not answers, is rich in implications, and shows how “life is in death, death in life.”[[107]](#footnote-107) In his discussion of Agnon’s poetic language, Levinas began to mark out the way in which symbolism operates in writing. Agnon’s language functions as a poem, and not realistically. Agnonian symbolism organizes the past and present, and connects various points in the history of the Jewish people in which fractures occurred, and thereby attributes additional significance to the memory of the Holocaust.

 Levinas also discussed Maurice Blanchot, a scholar and literary author. Blanchot was also a close friend of Levinas, and had smuggled Levinas’s wife and daughter out of the Nazis’ reach.[[108]](#footnote-108) Although Levinas and Blanchot did not share the same philosophical stance (Blanchot did not agree with Levinas on the precedence of ethics and its transcendental origins), Levinas devoted a section of his book *Proper Names*, which comprises four essays, to Blanchot. In one of the essays, “The Poet’s Vision,” Levinas demonstrated how, according to Blanchot, the work of poetic language can be characterized as deviating from reality.[[109]](#footnote-109) Poetic language enables understanding of the Other by means of poetic imagery; thus, it promotes the understanding of the Other in real life, while functioning transcendentally.[[110]](#footnote-110) Thus, inspired by Blanchot, in another essay, Levinas articulated how language signs may be used in poetry to dismantle concrete reality and enable movement toward another person.[[111]](#footnote-111) Also inspired by Blanchot, Levinas described how poetic language generates symbolic movement “in the manner of the meta-language … which ‘unlocks’ the symbolism of writing.”[[112]](#footnote-112)

The language of poetry signals to its readers that there is meaning beyond that revealed by the regular codes of the linguistic system. By abandoning the customary way of instilling meaning via a sign that references something specific, poetic language leads the reader to an understanding that there is language beyond ordinary language. This language, which in itself is an expression of alterity, brings the reader to the understanding that there is a command that is not uttered explicitly, but rather emerges from the reader’s willingness to encounter and commit to the Other. As noted, the language of prose can also occasionally function in this way, as in the case of Agnon.

Alongside these examples, the writer that Levinas mentioned more than any other artist as a source of inspiration was Dostoevsky.[[113]](#footnote-113) The significant difference between Levinas’s use of Dostoevsky compared to the examples above is twofold—both at the point of origin and in the analysis. The starting point for the chapters of *Proper Names* is the interpretation of the corpus of a particular artist, to demonstrate the ethical process that is shaped by that body of work. Meanwhile, the mention of Dostoevsky in Levinas’s writings appears as a springboard, a source of inspiration that helps him illustrate the Levinasian concept of ethics. Levinas does not devote a separate analysis to Dostoevsky, but in a comment in his essay “Useless Suffering,” Levinas points to Dostoevsky’s protagonists as illuminating the search for suffering, and thus representing the idea of universal humanism that is embodied in openness to the suffering of the Other.[[114]](#footnote-114)

In another essay, titled “Philosophy, Justice, and Love.” Levinas explains the important principle of the “asymmetry of intersubjectivity” (the focus of the debate between Levinas and Buber, who advocated symmetry). To clarify the reason for the asymmetry, Levinas turns to Dostoevsky, and quotes a sentence that he also cites in many other places:

[My] central idea is what I called an ‘asymmetry of intersubjectivity’: the exceptional situation of the *I*. I always recall Dostoyevsky on this subject. One of his characters says: ‘We are all guilty for everything and everyone, and I more than all the others.’ But to this idea—without contradicting it—I immediately add the concern for the third and, hence, justice. […] If there were no order of Justice, there would be no limit to my responsibility.[[115]](#footnote-115)

In describing one of his central ideas, Levinas based himself on Dostoevsky’s concept of guilt, according to which a person ought to feel guilt more strongly than all other human beings, and this would lead him or her to act ethically. To Dostoevsky’s perception, Levinas adds the source of this—a perception of justice, vis-à-vis which an obligation must be established. That is, ethics does not arise from the person themselves, but the feeling of guilt is related to the concept of justice, which is external to the person. Levinas makes use of the quote about the perception of guilt in Dostoevsky in other places, as noted above. Below, I make another reference to illustrate the centrality of Dostoevsky’s concept of guilt to the understanding of Levinas’s ethics. In his last book. *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas explains how ethical responsibility precedes everything, including freedom, and therefore—in obedience to the ethical obligation that originates in the “glory of the infinite,” in the willingness to stand up—there is a fundamental perception of guilt, as Dostoevsky described:

The subjectivity of the subject, as being subject to everything, is a pre-originary susceptibility, before all freedom and outside of every present. It is accused in uneasiness or the unconditionality of the accusative, in the ‘here I am’ (*me voici*) which is obedience to the glory of the Infinite that orders me to the other. ‘Each of us is guilty before everyone for everyone, and I more than the others,’ writes Dostoyevsky in *Brothers Karamazov*.[[116]](#footnote-116)

 The choice to conclude by emphasizing the importance of Dostoevsky’s assertion in Levinas’s writings is important in order to clarify the mutual contribution made in this book between Grossman’s literary fiction and Levinas’s thought. Levinas’s concept of ethics will be separated into different aspects, and in each of the chapters—one of the aspects of the concept of ethics will guide the discussion, along with other of Levinas’s ideas. At the same time, various of Grossman’s novels analysed in this book serve as sources of inspiration for shedding fresh light onto Levinas’s concept of ethics. Thus, for example, Levinas’s conceptions of femininity and motherhood are redescribed with the help of an analysis of *To the End of the Land,* and *Life Plays with Me*; the relationship between humans and animals in Levinas’s thought is reilluminated and fresh aspects added with the help of *Someone to Run With*; while the question of moral development from childhood to adulthood is explored with the help of an analysis of *See Under: Love*. In this way, an interdisciplinary and reciprocal dialogue is created in each chapter, whereby Levinas’s ethical thought provides a theoretical infrastructure for understanding a particular aspect of Grossman’s literary work, and analysis of Grossman’s novels enrich Levinas’s thought. This is achieved by a discussion of a variety of Grossman’s complex protagonists, whose ethical performativity demonstrates how ethics is realized in everyday reality.

1. David Grossman, (1986) *See Under: Love*, trans. Betsy Rosenberg (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1989), 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Grossman, *See Under: Love*, 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Of all Grossman’s works, this novel has received the most extensive attention. It is considered to have shaped the memory of the Holocaust in a rich and unique way. In 2016, a special edition of the periodical *Prooftexts* was published to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the novel’s publication. See: Naomi Sokoloff (ed.), *Prooftext* 35, no 1 (2016). See also: Marc De Kesel, Bettine Siertsema and Katarzyna Szurmiak, eds., *See Under: Shoah: Imagining the Holocaust with David Grossman* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). The novel has been widely praised by literary scholars, and many have described it as one of the best novels written in the aftermath of the Holocaust. See, for example: Gershon Shaked, “The Children of the Heart and the Monster: David Grossman: See Under: Love. A Review Essay,” *Modern Judaism* 9, no. 3 (1989): 311–323; Leon I. Yudkin, “The Holocaust in the Fiction of David Grossman,” *World Literature Today* 76, no. 3/4 (2002): 62–67; Nordholt Schulte “Writing the Memory of the Shoah at the Turn of the Century. An Introduction,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 5, no. 2 (2006): 183–187; Ulrich Baer, “The Hubris of Humility. Ginter Grass, Peter Schneider, and German Guilt after 1989,” *Germanic Review* 80, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 50–73. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ‟Consider, for example, the activities that we call “games” [. . .] What is common to them all?—Don’t say: “They *must* have something in common, or they would not be called ‘games’”—but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all.—For if you look at them, you won’t see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that [. . .] And we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way, can see how similarities crop up and disappear [. . .] And the upshot of these considerations is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: similarities in the large and in the small. I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “family resemblances”; for the various resemblances between members of a family—build, features, color of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth—overlap and crisscross in the same way.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th ed., ed. P. M. S. Hacker and J. Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and J. Schulte, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 66-67. Wittgenstein pointed to ethics as a clear example of “family resemblance”—a concept for which no single agreed-upon common denominator can be found: “Suppose we say,̔ What is it all games have in common̕? The justification of a generic name need not be a property in common. This is what has happened in ethics.” Arthur Gibson and Niamh O'Mahony, eds., *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Dictating Philosophy: To Francis Skinner—The Wittgenstein-Skinner Manuscripts* (New York: Springer, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This concept, coined by Wittgenstein, served as an inspiration both for the comparison between Wittgenstein and Levinas and in reference to the characteristics of ethics in Levinas’s writings, since it is not possible to find an unequivocal definition, but rather a “family resemblance” between the characteristics of ethics in Levinas’s various discussions. Søren Overgaard explored the similarity between Levinas and early Wittgenstein, and presented the relevant scholarship. See: Simon Critchley’s introduction in: Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 1–32, esp. 18–19, as well as Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and* *Levinas* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992): 7; Jean Greisch, “The Face and Reading: Immediacy and Mediation,” trans. S. Critchley, in *Re-Reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (London: Athlone, 1991) 67–82, 71–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. David F. Pears and Brian F. McGuiness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961): & 6.421. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Over the years, there has been a trend change in research on this topic. Wittgenstein scholars in the1960s and 1980s—Leter Hacker, Gordon Baker, et al—were analytical philosophers, and did not deal with ethics and aesthetics almost at all. Toward the end of the twentieth century, a corpus of work began to take shape that showed how ethics and aesthetics inspired by Wittgenstein could be studied. For more, see, for example, John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer, eds. *The Literary Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 2004); Tim Labron, *Wittgenstein’s Religious Point of View* (London: Continuum, 2006); Genia Schonbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Tim Labron, *Wittgenstein and Theology* (New York: Continuum, 2009); Dorit Lemberger, *A Red Rose in the Dark: Self-Constitution through the Poetic Language of Zelda, Amichai, Kosman, and Adaf* (Brighton MA: Academic Studies Press, 2016), in particular chapters 1 and 3. Further to this, it is important to note the parallel of Wittgenstein’s approach to that of Levinas. See, for example, Bob Plant, *Wittgenstein and Levinas: Ethical and Religious Thought* (London: Routledge, 2005); Søren Overgaard, ‟The Ethical Residue of Language in Levinas and Early Wittgenstein,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 2007; 33, no 2: 223-249. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, && 43, 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, & 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For an expansion of Wittgenstein’s discussion of the concept of imagination, see: Dorit Lemberger, “Imagination in Wittgenstein's Writings,” in *Platonism*, eds. Herbert Hrachovec and Jakub Mácha, (Contributions of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society, 2022) Volume XXVIII: 100-102. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. “Wittgenstein never systematically worked out his views on religion and ethics. What is beyond serious dispute, however, is that he firmly believed that the religious and ethical dimensions of human life are intimately connected—so much so that no real sense could be made of the former without reference to the latter. Wittgenstein’s fragmentary reflections on religion thus call for supplementation, and […] Levinas provides this” (Plant, *Wittgenstein and Levinas*, 7) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Jill Robbins, for example, has described Levinas as someone who revived the question of ethics in modern philosophy while criticizing its neglect and rethinking the various possibilities for dealing with ethics. See: Jill Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999): xiii. Likewise, Levinas is recalled in every academic discussion about the place of ethics in the postmodern era, in particular as being responsible for situating ethics as the focus of being, *inter alia*, at the focus of the act of textual interpretation. See, for example: Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack (eds.), *Mapping the Ethical Turn* (Charlottesville and London: The University Press of Virginia, 2001): 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Emmanuel Levinas, “Ethics as First Philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader,* ed. Seán Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989): 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For a reasoned expansion of Levinas’s ethical thought as a counterreaction to Heidegger and Sartre, see: Brock Bahler, “The Parent-Child Relation and the Decentered Self,” in *Philosophy of Childhood Today: Exploring the Boundaries,* ed*.* David Kennedy and Brock Bahler(Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), 53-65. Further, the “ethical turn” has been described as a counterreaction to deconstruction, as outlined at Yale University, where it was not possible to place a stable value based on a moral claim. Further, this developed as the same time as the feminist, LGBT, and African American multicultural revolutions as narrative theory, which advocated for, and opened up the possibility of creating a distinct “narrative identity” for each cultural group. Thus, from a methodological perspective, it is mainly a matter of the interpretation of texts that represent the “narratives of others.” For more detail and examples, see: Davis and Womack, *Mapping the Ethical Turn*, 107-108. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Kant’s formulation is a key to understanding the movement created by Levinas, according to which it is not possible to think in general, and about ethics in particular, from a starting point of absolute freedom: “I ask from what our cognition of the unconditionally practical starts, whether from freedom or from the practical law. It cannot start from freedom, for we can neither become conscious of freedom directly, because the first concept of it is negative**, nor infer it from experience**, since experience allows us to cognize only the law of appearances and hence the mechanism of nature, the exact opposite of freedom. Therefore, it is the moral law of which we become conscious directly (as soon as we draft maxims of the will for ourselves), which first offers itself to us.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub Co., 2002): 43, sec. 30; emphasis mine, D.L.). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. ‟Duty! - you sublime, grand name which encompasses nothing that is favored yet involves ingratiation, but which demands submission, yet also does not seek to move the will by threatening anything that would arouse natural aversion in the mind and terrify, but merely puts forth a law that on its own finds entry into the mind and yet gains grudging veneration. […] The human being is indeed unholy enough, but the humanity in his person must be holy to him. In all of creation everything one wants, and over which one has any power can also be used merely as a means; only the human being, and with him every rational creature, is a purpose in itself. For by virtue of the autonomy of his freedom he is the subject of the moral law, which is holy. Precisely on account of this autonomy, every will, even every person's own will directed to himself, is restricted to the condition of harmony with the autonomy of a rational being, viz., the condition not to subject such a being to any aim that is not possible in accordance with a law” (Kant, *Critique*, 111-112). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See: emphasis in *supra* note 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. ‟The principle of ethics, according to Kant, is found neither in nature nor in being; no certainty regarding the order of the world or of society guides human beings toward virtue. No submission to the necessity of what is via the progression of adequate ideas, […] instructs a person on what he or she has to do. That principle, says Kant, is not found in nature but in the subject. It does not stem either from an act of speculation that would reserve its privilege for intelligent people or from experience, which is always partial, but rather from an internal disposition he calls ‘good will.’ […] Unlike Kant, however, he does not think that a principle (*arche*), even a categorical one, is a satisfactory guide. He dares use the vocabulary of anarchy to describe the subject sensitive to ‘the voice of the ethical conscience.’ This means that the origin or beginning (*arche*) of such a subject is not within itself, and that no guideline, not even one established by the subject, marks out the terrain of its morality in advance. The moral subject described by Levinas cannot rely on any great, universally valid principle that would dictate its conduct in the individual situations it faces.” Catherine Chalier, *What Ought I to Do? Morality in Kant and Levinas*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), 25-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, trans. Steven Rendall (Boston: The MIT Press, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. ‟I read the entire book (Cinnamon Shops & Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass, published in Hebrew by Schocken) without knowing a thing about Bruno Schulz, and when I reached the end, I read Yoram Bronowski’s afterword, where I learned the story of Schulz’s death. In the Drohobycz ghetto, Schulz had a protector and employer in the form of an S.S. officer named Landau, who had Schulz paint murals in his home and stable. The officer had a rival, another S.S. officer named Günter, who lost a card game to Landau. Günter met Bruno Schulz on a street corner and shot him dead to hurt his employer. When the two officers later met, the murderer said: “I killed your Jew.” To which the other responded: “Very well. Now I will kill your Jew.” David Meir Grossman, ‟Books That Have Read Me,” *Tablet*, October 23, 2008, https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/books-that-have-read-me (Accessed: May 1, 2024). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Grossman, “Books That Have Read Me,” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See for example: Gilead Morahg, “Holocaust, Storytelling, Memory, Identity: David Grossman in California: Creating Wasserman: The Quest for A New Holocaust Story In David Grossman’s See Under: Love,” *Judaism* 51, no. 1 (2002): 51-60; Smadar Shiffman, *As We See It Now—David Grossman, Orly Castel-Bloom and Meir Shalev: Beyond Modernism?* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Grossman, *See Under: Love*, 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Grossman, *See Under: Love,* 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Grossman, *See Under: Love*: ADD PAGE NO. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969): 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. David Grossman, (1986) *See Under: Love*, 389. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. David Grossman, (1991) *The Book of Intimate Grammar*, trans. Betsy Rosenberg (London: Picador, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Gabriel Zoran: *The Thin Crust of Earth: A Reading in David Grossman's Fiction* (Tel-Aviv: Siman Kri'a, 2024) (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Zoran, *Thin Crust*, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Marit Ben-Israel, *When David Grossman Met Vito Acconci* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 2010) (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Amir Klugman, *Body and Language Encounter: A Psychoanalytic Reading in David Grossman's Stories* (Tel-Aviv: Resling, 2022) (Hebrew). Klugman’s book is an adaptation of a doctoral thesis written under my supervision (D.L.). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. For example, Grossman’s contribution to the expression of ethics on the literary-narrative level has been interpreted by Hanna Meretoja, who studied the dialogues in Grossman’s novels *To the End of the Land* and *Falling Out of Time*. Meretoja examined how Grossman created openness and sensitivity toward others in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as did Adia Mendelson-Maoz (2019). See: Hanna Meretoja, *The Ethics of Storytelling: Narrative Hermeneutics, History, and the Possible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): ADD PAGINATION. Moreover, in the context of attempts to process the Holocaust, Grossman's novel *See Under: Love* has received particular attention in the scholarly literature (Sokoloff 1993, 2016; Bernstein, 2005). Idit Alphandary (2014) proposed a comparison between Levinas and Grossman on the topic of innocence using the novel *To the End of the Land*, but did not refer to morality as a developmental process. See: Idit Alphandary, “The Ethics of Lévinas's Temimut and Kristeva's Abjection in ‘To the End of the Land’ by David Grossman,” *New Centennial Review* 14, no. 3 (2014): 183-217. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. ‟In Plato’s eyes, poetry is savagely chaotic and a definite threat to the order of the republic. By encouraging acting, impersonation, and pretense to science, it imperils the Delphic wisdom of knowing oneself. Literature entices citizens to play more than one role, destroying the possibility of justice. […] Plato repeatedly described drama and poetry in terms of their ability to bring disorder into the order of the state.” Tobin Siebers, *The Ethics of Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. “Plato in *The Republic* divides art that concerns all things into three categories: one that uses, another which creates, and a third that imitates things. He claims that tragedy, comedy, epic, music, dance, and painting are all imitative/mimetic arts. He further explains three different levels of imitation: the highest is the gods’ creation of forms in imitation of themselves; the second is craftsmen’s creation of concrete things in imitation of forms; and the lowest is painters’ creation of art works in imitation of concrete things. Forms are true, while concrete things are untrue because they are imitations of forms. Plato thinks that artistic imitation is an inferior kind of imitation of the untrue, and thus is twice removed from the truth.” Nie Zhenzhao, *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2024),39. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Levinas, “Reality and Its Shadow,” in Hand, *Levinas Reader*,130–43 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (N.J.: Princeton, 1957), 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Adia Mendelson-Maoz, “Ethics and Literature,” *Philosophia* 35 (2007): 111–116. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Jane Adamson, “Against Tidiness: Literature and/versus Moral Philosophy,” In *Renegotiating Ethics in Literature, Philosophy and Theory*, eds. Jane Adamson, Richard Freadman and David Parker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 84-110, 92-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, *Between Philosophy and Literature: Bakhtin and the Question of the Subject* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Ken Hirschkop, *The Cambridge Introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. *1921–22/1986,* trans. Vadim Liapunov; ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. We can see in Bakhtin’s writings that this shift from philosophy to literature and the study of discourse moved ethics behind the scenes of the current discussion, and it is almost impossible to find direct references to this. In her comparison between the concepts of ethics in the thought of Bakhtin and Levinas, Erdinast-Vulcan notes two key differences—the first is the presence of the “I” over the “Other” in Bakhtin, in contrast to the precedence of the “Other” in the establishment of the Self in Levinas. A second difference is that, in Levinas, there is a difference between the ontological and the ethical, while in Bakhtin, in contrast, the ontological and ethical are united in the concept of “utterance” (Erdinast-Vulcan, *Between Philosophy and Literature*, 197). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Wayne Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California

Press, 1988), ADD PAGE. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Wayne Booth, “Why Ethical Criticism Can Never Be Simple,” in Todd E Davis and Kenneth Womack, eds., *Mapping the Ethical Turn* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 16-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Booth, *The Company We Keep,* 489. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Booth, *The Company We Keep,* Add Page [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Booth, ‟Why Ethical Criticism,” 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. |  |  |  |
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|  Monica Johnstone, “Wayne Booth and the Ehics of Fiction,” in *Rhetoric and Pluralism: Legacies of Wayne Booth*, ed. Amczak Frederick (Chelsea, MI: The Ohio State University Press, 1995), 59-70. |  |  |

 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Wayne Booth, *The* *Essential Wayne Booth,* ed. Walter Jost (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 141-153, 152-153. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Daniel Schwarz, “A Humanistic Ethics of Reading,” in Davis and Womack, *Mapping the Ethical Turn*, 3-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Schwarz, “A Humanistic Ethics,” ADD PAGE [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Schwartz, “A Humanistic Ethics,” 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. ‟What unites ethical critics-Martha Nussbaum, Stanley Cavell, Richard Rotty, Wayne Booth, and, more recently, Adam Zachary Newton-is the premise of a strong connection between art and life. Rather than being divorced from life, our reading experience-if we read actively and with intelligence-is central to life and contributes to the development of the mature personality. Literature provides surrogate experiences for the reader, experiences that, because they are embodied within artistically shaped ontologies, heighten our awareness of moral discriminations” (Schwarz, “A Humanistic Ethics,” ADD PAGE). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. “Although literature is one thing and morality a quite different one, at the heart of the aesthetic imperative we discern the moral imperative. For, since the one who writes recognizes, by the very fact that he takes the trouble to write, the freedom of his readers, and since the one who reads, by the mere fact of his opening the book, recognizes the freedom of the writer, the work of art, from whichever side you approach it, is an act of confidence in the freedom of men. And since readers, like the author, recognize this freedom only to demand that it manifest itself, the work can be defined as an imaginary presentation of the world in so far as it demands human freedom.” Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature? And Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. “In opposition to the vision of thinkers…who require, among the conditions of the world, a freedom without responsibility, a freedom of play, we discern…a responsibility whose entry into being could be effected only without any choice…Responsibility for the other, this way of answering without prior commitment, is human fraternity itself, and it is prior to freedom.” Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. “The widespread acceptance of the term “ethical criticism”—rather than “moral criticism”—suggests the growth of the theory in research scope and approach. Ethical criticism takes a departure from moral criticism in its primary thesis that the esthetic evaluation of literary works is a legitimate and integral aspect of ethical criticism in literature.” Zhenzhao, *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Zhenzhao, *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism,* 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Jill Robbins, ed. *Is It Righteous To Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Levinas, *Is It Righteous to Be*, 182 (emphasis mine.). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Levinas, ‟Ethics as First Philosophy,” 82-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Robert Bernasconi, “Subjectivity Must Be Defended: Substitution, Entanglement, and the Prehistory of the Me in Levinas,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas,* ed, Michael L. Morgan. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Bernasconi, “Subjectivity,” 264. See also: Dorit Lemberger, “Like a Battering-Ram: The Place of Language in Levinas’s Thought,” *Athens Journal of Humanities and Arts*, 7 (2020): 1-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. William Large, “Levinas on the Problem of Language: Expressing the Inexpressible,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas*, ed, Michael L. Morgan. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 749-768. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Large, “Levinas on the Problem of Language,” 750 [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Paul Davies, “On Resorting to an Ethical Language,” in *Ethics as First Philosophy*, ed. Adrian Peperzak (London: Routledge, 1996), 95-104. Davies was the first to write an essay that places the term “ethical language” as a key to understanding Levinas’ paradoxical conception of language. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Davies, “On Resorting,” 96-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Davies, “On Resorting,” 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. “The correlation of the saying and the said, that is, the subordination of the saying to the said, to the linguistic system and to ontology, is the price that manifestation demands. In language qua said everything is conveyed before us, be it at the price of a betrayal. Language is ancillary and thus indispensable.” Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. See: Dorit Lemberger, “The Function of the ‘Face’ as a Conceptual Metaphor in Levinas’s Ethics,” *Judaica Petropolitana* 11 (2019): 122. Diane Perpich wrote a comprehensive essay on the changes that took place in the description of the concept of the face in Levinas’s various writings, and it was no coincidence that she did not refer to the concept in *Otherwise than Being*. See: Diane Perpich, ‟Levinas and the Face of the Other,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas*, 243-258. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. “The correlation of the saying and the said, that is, the subordination of the saying to the said, to the linguistic system and to ontology, is the price that manifestation demands. In language qua said everything is conveyed before us, be it at the price of a betrayal. Language is ancillary and thus indispensable. At this moment language is serving research conducted in view of disengaging the *otherwise than being* or *being's other* outside of the themes in which they already show themselves, unfaithfully, as being's *essence -* but in which they do show themselves. Language permits us to utter, be it by betrayal, this *outside of being,* this *exception* to being, as though being's other were an event of being. Being, its cognition and the said in which it shows itself signify in a saying which, relative to being, forms an exception; but it is in the said that both this exception and the birth of cognition show themselves. But the fact that the exception shows itself and becomes truth in the saidcannot serve as a pretext to take as an absolute the apophantic variant of the saying, which is ancillary or angelic.” Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being,* 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Simon Critchley, *The Problem with Levinas,* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Critchley, *The Problem with Levinas*, ADD PAGE. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Emmanual Levinas, “Essence and Disinterestedness,” in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, trans./ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Critchley, *The Problem with Levinas*, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. John R. Searle, *Speech Acts* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Emmanuel Levinas, "Language and Proximity," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 120-121. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Davies, “On Resorting,” ADD PAGE [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. “Ethical language, which phenomenology resorts to in order to mark its own interruption, does not come from an ethical intervention laid out over descriptions. it is the very meaning of approach, which contrasts with knowing. No language other than ethics could be equal to the paradox which phenomenological description enters. […] A description that at the beginning knows only being and beyond being turns into ethical language. The enigma in which transcendence comes to flush has to be distinguished from arbitrariness and illusions.” Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being,* 193, n. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Davies, “On Resorting,” 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Levinas, *Language and Proximity*; Levinas*, Otherwise Than Being*. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Levinas, *Language and Proximity*, 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Davis, “On Resorting,” 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 19-20 [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 3rd edition 2014), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Levinas, ‟The Meaning of Meaning,” in Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence,* trans. Michel B. Smith (London: Athlone Press, 1999), 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Wittgenstein, & 220 [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Emmanuel Levinas, “Useless Suffering,” in *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*. Translated by Michael Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 91-102. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. This is the term that Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco refer to in the introduction to their edited volume on Levinas, regarding the interpretive use of Levinas’s ethical concept in various cultural contexts, such as feminism, veganism, and the attitude toward Judaism, psychoanalysis, and literary criticism. See: Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco, eds., *Radicalizing Levinas* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), ix-xi. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Michael Eskin, “Introduction: The Double ‘Turn’ to Ethics and Literature,” *Poetics Today* 25, no. 4 (2004): 557-572. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Eskin, “Introduction,” 557 [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. “At once poison and medicine, descent into egoism and senselessness, but also orientation toward the Other. On the one hand, then, Levinas adopts a cautious, even critical approach to literature, […] the sensations of which draw the subject from reality to its shadow, from objects to their images, from concepts that refer to objects in the world to pure sensations that refer the subject back to the formally complete work of art. Levinas’s critique of art and literature is essentially Platonic, reiterating the old suspicion of pleasures roused by mimetic idols. It is articulated most severely in “Reality and its Shadow” and the contemporary work, Existence and Existents, where the phenomenological sense of a work of art is again situated in the shadows of being.” Michael Fagenblat, “Introduction” in *Levinas and Literature: New Directions*, eds. Arthur Cools and Michael Fagenblat, (Berlin: De Gruyter,2020), xiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Robbins, *Altered Reading*. This approach is also taken in the following papers: Gerald Bruns, “The Concepts of Art and Poetry in Emmanuel Levinas’s Writings,” in Critchley and Bernasconi, *Companion to Levinas*, 206–33; Hanoch Ben-Pazi, “Emmanuel Levinas: Hermeneutics, Ethics, and Art,” *Journal of Literature and Art Studies* 5, no. 8 (2015): 588–600. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Emmanuel Levinas, “Reality and Its Shadow,” in Hand, *Levinas Reader*, 130–43. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Levinas, “Reality and Its Shadow.” [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. See, for example, Michael Fagenblat, “Introduction: Levinas and Literature, a Marvelous Hypocrisy,” in *Levinas and Literature,* ed. Michael Fagenblat and Arthur Cools (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021), ix–xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names*, trans. Michael Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. “It is of the essence of art to signify only between the lines—in the intervals of time, between times—like a footprint that would precede the step, or an echo preceding the sound of a voice.” Levinas, *Proper Names*, 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Levinas, *Proper* *Names*, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Levinas, *Proper* *Names*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Levinas, *Proper* *Names*, ADD PAGE [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Blanchot wrote an important book that interrogated the nature of the literary space, in which he described the power of poetic language to represent experience that diverges from realistic reality. See: Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. A. Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982). [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Levinas, *Proper Names,* 129–30. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. “According to Blanchot, “a prior transcendence … is required in order for things to be able to be perceived as images, and language as poetry. In this sense, the image precedes perception.” Levinas, *Proper Names*, 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. “To give a sign, without its standing for anything. … Poetry, … transforms words—indices of a manifold, moments of a totality—into signs set free, that break through the walls of immanence, disrupting order. … To introduce a meaning into Being is to move from Same to the Other, from I to the other person; it is to give a sign, to undo the structures of language.” Levinas, *Proper Names*, 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Levinas, *Proper* *Names,* ADD PAGE. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. I would like to point out that Bakhtin also saw Dostoevsky as the ultimate creator of literature who illuminated the ethical leap, and even devoted an entire book to analyzing his work. See: ADD REF [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. “It is as suffering in me and not as suffering in general that welcome suffering - attested to in the spiritual tradition of humanity—can signify a true idea: the expiatory suffering of the just who suffers for others, the suffering that illuminates, the suffering that is sought after by Dostoyevsky's characters.” Levinas, “Useless Suffering,” in *Entre Nous*, 241, n. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Levinas, “Philosophy, Justice and Love,” in *Entre Nous*, 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)