**Dinka’s Language in *Someone to Run With*: Animal-Human Relations as Ethical Performativity**

**ABSTRACT**

How can language move a person to show responsibility for and sensitivity to the suffering of another? What speech acts are required to influence a person to make an ethical commitment? How can a dog express ethical sensitivity, and what is the common denominator between a dog’s ethical performance and a human’s ethical speech act? Surprisingly, these questions, which have yet to be examined in the research literature, are relevant to both David Grossman’s novel *Someone to Run With* and the writings of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas made a linguistic shift in his last book, *Otherwise than Being*, which consisted of basing ethical action on two linguistic concepts: the Saying (*le dire*) and the Said (*le dit*). This shift goes somewhat counter to Levinas’s well-known assertion that ethics is transcendental and cannot be transcribed. The current discussion will try to deal with this tension with the help of an interdisciplinary methodological concept that has not yet been used in the study of literature or philosophy: ethical performativity. This concept is based on a combination of Levinas’s ideas and the study of speech acts founded by John Austin and John Searle. The main argument that will be presented here is that an examination of human-animal relations from the point of view of ethical performativity makes it possible to answer the three questions above and to clarify Levinas’s contribution to the understanding of human-animal relations.

**Key words:** Grossman; Levinas; Austin; Searle; ethical performativity; saying; said; human-animal relationships

The following discussion will consist of two main parts. In the first, methodological part, I will present key concepts from speech act theory and from Levinas’s philosophy as an interpretative infrastructure for the analysis of ethical performativity. We will look specifically at John Austin and John Searle’s ideas pertaining to speech acts, as well as Levinas’s concepts for investigating the ethical aspects of a speech act. In the second part, we shall employ an interdisciplinary approach to examine key elements in David Grossman’s *Someone to Run With*, with an emphasis on human-animal relations.

**Introduction:**

Grossman’s work frequently deals with the paradox of language use: on the one hand, language is a central theme, and one can see extraordinary creativity in attempts to establish secondary languages ​​such as Aaron’s grammar in *The Book of Internal Grammar* or an encyclopedia that allows for the description of the events of the Holocaust in the novel *See Under: Love*. On the other hand, many of the characters in Grossman’s novels face difficulties when it comes to using language, starting with difficulties verbalizing experiences such as love, grief, the construction of sexuality and gender, and ending with the tension between the individual experience and communication with others.

In the novel *Someone to Run With*, we find different kinds of tension regarding the use of language. What drives the plot is a dialogue between a man and a dog. Dinka, the dog, expresses meaning that is formulated and understood by the main character, Assaf. While Assaf formulates the dialogic speech acts, it is Dinka who indicates the correct illocutionary meaning that he must infer from her behavior. The joint speech acts are aimed toward fulfilling an ethical imperative: to find Tamar, Dinka’s owner, who has disappeared and may be in danger. The concept of a speech act takes on a different meaning in this novel because, rather than speaking herself, Dinka’s actions elucidate speech. Throughout the novel, Dinka not only acts but also activates Assaf and other characters, thus demonstrating the ability to perform perlocutionary speech acts. Dinka’s main action—the search for Tamar—is an ethical one in that it expresses ethical agency, including all the elements of ethics formulated by Levinas: obligation to the Other, willingness to sacrifice oneself, and dialogical ability to care for others. Dinka is “someone to run with,” and very quickly, she also turns Assaf into someone to run with: an agent who chooses to devote himself to an ethical commitment at the expense of his personal needs. No wonder that when they find Tamar, Dinka expresses the bond that has formed between her and Assaf by saying that she prefers to obey him rather than Tamar. They share a bond as ethical agents.

The title of the novel reflects a dialogue in the Levinasian sense of the word. Even before one begins to read the book, the importance of an ethical Other is evident in the title—someone to accompany one when running, probably for the purpose of searching for something, or escaping, or both. The title does not identify a specific Other, therefore allowing for a variety of interpretations. The reader is left to assume that at some point, there was a conversation between two interlocutors in which they agreed to run together. These two elements—the importance of the Other and consensual dialogue—form the basis for the thought of two ostensibly unrelated philosophers: John Austin and Emmanuel Levinas. Though both operated in Western Europe during the twentieth century, culturally and ideologically, there is a significant gulf between the two. Nevertheless, the current discussion will show that the concept of ethical obligation as embodied in discourse according to Levinas can be integrated with the analysis of speech acts as conceptualized by Austin. This interdisciplinary view shines a different light on Grossman’s novel, which some consider a bildungsroman and/or a suspense novel for young adults.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The title draws our attention to three details: the first is the need for “someone” to run with; the second detail is the act of running; and the third detail is the lack of a specified reason for running. The ambiguity of the title is resolved, however, on the second page of the novel, when it turns out that the “someone” is Dinka, the dog that Assaf, the novel’s protagonist, rescues from a dog shelter with the intention of finding her owner.

The choice of a dog as the main character that drives the plot is far from obvious. In the existing scholarship about the novel, this choice is either ignored or interpreted as the introduction of a foil that allows Assaf to complete his coming of age.[[2]](#footnote-2) This would thus be the first discussion that treats Dinka as a character in her own right, with an independent will and an ethical position, and not just as a mediating device. Dinka can be seen as a figure who operates on two levels: on the philosophical-existential level, she represents the Other who makes an ethical claim of Assaf; on the literary level, she is a round character who drives the plot and reveals new aspects of it. Assaf’s first encounter with Dinka is an encounter with her face, in the broad Levinasian sense of “face,” which includes the cry for help and the taking of responsibility for the suffering of another:

The sound was unmistakable: It was impossible to think that Danokh had brought Assaf down here for just one dog: eight or nine were penned in separate cages. But only one dog was animated; it was as if it had absorbed the others into its own body. […] The dog wasn’t very big, but it was full of strength and savagery and, mainly, despair. Assaf had never seen such despair in a dog.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Dinka’s primary characteristic when Assaf meets her is her eagerness to run and look for her owner. This qualifies running not as a signifier of wildness but as an expression of loyalty, commitment, and responsibility, which the dog demonstrates toward her owner, Tamar, through her actions. Over the course of the novel, running takes on another connotation: Dinka becomes attached to Assaf, and running becomes not just running toward someone but also running alongside someone—an ally. This shift takes place both for Dinka and for Assaf. During their first meeting, Assaf does not understand Dinka’s behavior at all. With time, however, he learns to interpret the meaning of her speech acts, even though they are carried out wordlessly. At the same time, Dinka gets to know Assaf and becomes attached to him, so much so that when she finally finds Tamar, Dinka expresses commitment and loyalty to Assaf as well as to her original owner.

The novel’s title refers us to one of the central features of speech act theory in literary research: a focus on doing instead of saying, “not being but acting,” as Sandy Petrey puts it.[[4]](#footnote-4) Beyond the act of running, the title also conveys an ethical dimension: needing others is based on relationships of responsibility and commitment. The title of the novel represents a central aspect of the plot, which, based on Austin and Levinas, we might call: ethical performativity.[[5]](#footnote-5) Dinka the dog is the main representative of this concept in the novel, but the other two protagonists—Assaf and Tamar—engage with it as well. In light of Grossman’s remarks on various occasions, it can be argued that his intention as a creator is to develop in both the characters and the readers their sensitivity to the suffering of others and to the complexity of their personalities.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Dinka’s characterization raises many questions; however, the current discussion will focus on just two of them: First, what is the relationship between performativity and ethics? And second, how is this relationship embodied in Dinka’s speech acts? Dinka is seen as an incomprehensible Other, whose dominant mode of action is wildness, determination, independent will, and even threat. At the same time, Dinka leads Assaf to Tamar and expresses the human values ​​that Levinas sees as cardinal: seeing the Other and exhibiting responsibility and loyalty toward them in a way that puts the Other’s needs before one’s own. How does Dinka manage to express understanding through her actions? How is the communication between her and Assaf and other characters in the novel shaped, with Dinka limited to wordless noises and actions?

The portrayal of Dinka is realistic: all of her behaviors are typical dog behaviors. Yet, at the same time, the descriptions of her actions create a unique character, with an independent and defined will, even if it is one humans sometimes struggle to decipher. However, when they do, they recognize the values ​​embodied in her behavior, which inspires admiration for her well-placed loyalty. For example, as will be demonstrated later, Dinka does indeed lead the search for Tamar, but during the meeting, when Tamar attempts to sic Dinka on Assaf, Dinka does not respond to her. In this scene and others, Dinka makes an informed choice to treat people based on her personal obligation to them rather than following orders, even when those are issued by her owner.

The novel is set in the world of teenagers who feel different and alienated. Their communication with their parents is limited, and the two main protagonists take on responsibilities and attempt to solve problems that the adults appear to be unable to solve. Assaf looks for Tamar, who has disappeared, while Tamar is looking for her brother Shai, who is a drug addict. Dinka, too, takes responsibility for others’ troubles. She forms close relationships with Tamar and Assaf (in the chronological order of the novel, the relationship with Assaf is described before the relationship with Tamar), and she sees their “faces” in the Levinasian sense of the term. Dinka is the “someone to run with,” and her actions express ethical meaning that can be deciphered with the help of Levinas. In order to understand how Dinka’s face functions as the Other that motivates ethical action and how it is possible to express the taking of ethical responsibility via an act of communication that precedes verbalization, we must elucidate the concept of “face,” as well as the concepts of the Saying and the Said. For the purpose of this discussion, these concepts must be presented from an angle that has yet to be explored: that of human-dog relations.

**From the Metaphor of the Face to the Saying and the Said: Constituting Ethical Performativity**

“Language in its expressive function is addressed to and invokes the other.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

The culmination of Levinas’s ethical thought is formulated in his last book, *Otherwise than Being,* using two concepts that are ostensibly taken directly from discourse research: the Saying (*le dire*) and the Said (*le dit*). These concepts appear marginally in earlier writings; however, in this last book, they are placed as the focus of ethical action. It is interesting to note that Levinas chose to coin neologisms rather than use Saussure’s familiar concepts of “*langue*” and “*parole*,” of which he was well aware.[[8]](#footnote-8) Levinas’s Saying and Said are, on the one hand, rooted in the linguistic system but, on the other hand, contain tension and resistance to linguistic-disciplinary examination, which reflects the immanent tension in his relationship to language throughout his writings.[[9]](#footnote-9) The following passage demonstrates the centrality of these concepts:

Saying is not a game. Antecedent to the verbal signs it conjugates, to the linguistic systems and the semantic glimmerings, a foreword preceding languages, it is the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach, the one for the other, the very signifyingness of signification. […]

But this pre-original saying does move into a language, in which saying and said are correlative of one another, and the saying is subordinated to its theme. […] 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.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Levinas here clarifies that the speech act of Saying precedes the linguistic system, and is based on a sense of closeness and commitment to the Other. However, after the Saying is done, the transition to Said takes place. This means that even though the position required to perform the Saying precedes the linguistic system, there is an inseparable dependence of the two concepts on one another. This distinction is important to the current discussion, because Dinka can *express* closeness and commitment without the use of language, but these expressions cannot be *understood* without the use of language. The writer and the reader use language to understand Dinka. As Levinas put it in the quote I just read: “This pre-original saying does move into a language.”

Another important concept that Levinas employs is that of the “face” of the Other. In his early writings, the concept of the face is the central inspiration for ethical action. The most in-depth discussion of the term can be found in the book *Totality and Infinity*, and it is important to emphasize that even in his discussion of the “face” of the Other as the key to ethical action, Levinas insists that this ethical action takes place during a conversation:

The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves Me. […] *It expresses itself*. The face brings a notion of truth which, in contradistinction to contemporary ontology, is not the disclosure of an impersonal Neuter, but *expression*. […] This is not achieved by some sort of modification of the knowledge that thematizes, but precisely by ‟thematization” turning into conversation.[[11]](#footnote-11) This “saying to the Other” - this relationship with the Other as interlocutor, this relation with an *existent-precedes* all ontology.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Here and elsewhere, Levinas underscores the metaphorical nature of the face. Furthermore, his use of the terms “Saying,” “conversation,” and “interlocutor” reflects the fact that the ethical action takes place as a dialogue between two people in the present continuous (Saying). The most important function of the face, for Levnias, is its expressiveness. Dinka expresses meaning through her face. Although the face is metaphorical in Levinas, it can be said that an animal, like Dinka, embodies the presence of others in her face, given the fact that she has no verbal capacity.

Austin’s theory of speech acts has already been described at length. For the purpose of the present discussion we shall highlight two important aspects of it, which have not yet been touched upon: Austin’s identification of three types of speech acts, and his important remarks on the subject of first-person certainty. Austin indentifies three types of speech acts:

We first distinguished a group of things we do in saying something, which together we summed up by saying we perform **a locutionary act**, which is roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference, which again is roughly equivalent to “meaning” […]. Second, we said that we also perform **illocutionary acts** such as informing, ordering, warning, undertaking, &c, i.e. utterances which have a certain (conventional) force. Thirdly, we may also perform **perlocutionary acts**: what we bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading. Here we have three, if not more, different senses or dimensions of the “use of a sentence” or of “the use of language.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

Austin’s distinction between the three types of speech act remains important in pragmatic linguistics, despite criticisms expressed, for example, by Austin’s successor, John Searle.[[14]](#footnote-14) This insight is important for the current discussion because it implies that it is possible to express meaning outside of an agreed procedure, with the meaning then being locutionary rather than illocutionary.

Austin’s assertion that speech acts must be evaluated in terms of success or failure and not according to the criteria of true or false[[15]](#footnote-15) is also important for the ethical context. In the present novel, there are two levels of ethical performativity: the first is that of personal expression of ethical motivation, as articulated in the first-person speech act. Dinka decides to look for Tamar, and Assaf decides to join the search. On the second level, ethical performativity is embodied in dialogues: between Dinka and Assaf, between Assaf and Tamar, and between Tamar and Shai.

The present discussion will focus on the second, dialogic level, which is the dominant plane in Austin’s writings and the only ethical plane according to Levinas. However, it is important to note that Austin wrote a seminal article on first-person certainty and the problematic nature of knowing what takes place in the minds of others.[[16]](#footnote-16) Austin argued that only the speaker themself has certainty about their inner feelings.[[17]](#footnote-17) Analogy is not sufficient to know with certainty what is going on in another’s mind. Therefore, since the success of a speech act depends on cooperation, the question arises of whether a common denominator can be defined for all types of speech acts. In the end, Austin offers no answer to the question of how the speaker and the listener might be guided to adjust their intentions, thoughts, and feelings for the successful performance of the speech act.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Before we launch into our examination of the ways in which ethical performativity takes place in the novel, we must answer a fundamental question: According to Levinas (and in general), can a dog, or any other animal for that matter, be said to have the ability to sacrifice itself for the benefit of the Other, to express responsibility and loyalty toward them, and to put the Other’s needs before its own?

**Levinas’s Bobby: the last Kantian in Nazi Germany**

Levinas hardly ever touched on the subject of the treatment of animals in general and dogs in particular. The entirety of his thought was dedicated to the description of worthy ethical behavior, which he called the “humanism of the other man,” as described by Peter Atterton.[[19]](#footnote-19) It is, therefore, not surprising that the link between his thought and environmental issues, including the treatment of animals, began to flourish only at the beginning of the 21st century.[[20]](#footnote-20) However, it can be argued that Levinas’s ethical thought has had a significant impact on how we consider animals, from two perspectives. The first is that the phenomenology of the Other can easily be applied, according to Levinas, to animals.[[21]](#footnote-21) The second is based on Levinas’s personal experience, which he formulated in a special article he dedicated to all the dogs in the world, titled “The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights.”[[22]](#footnote-22) The article opens with a quandary about the biblical verse where the behavior of a dog symbolizes the height of humiliation: in Exodus 22:31, a dog is described as an animal that will eat any flesh, including that of a man who has been mutilated by beasts.[[23]](#footnote-23) Attributing such behavior to a dog reminds Levinas of Bobby, a dog he and his friends adopted in the concentration camp: “I am thinking of Bobby.”[[24]](#footnote-24) This leads Levinas to consider another biblical quote, also from Exodus, in which a completely different behavior of a dog is described in the context of the Plague of the Firstborn. The dog is noted as the first to understand the solemnity of the moment and therefore remains silent (Exodus 11:7).[[25]](#footnote-25) Levinas interprets the dog’s silence as an expression of loyalty and transcendence— the dog is a moral being and, therefore, supports the liberation of the slaves:

Man’s freedom is that of an emancipated man remembering his servitude and feeling solidarity for all enslaved people. A rabble of slaves will celebrate this high mystery of man, and “not a dog shall growl.” At the supreme hour of his institution, […]*,* the dog will attest to the dignity of its person. This is what the friend of man means. There is a transcendence in the animal! […] It reminds us of the debt that is always open.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Bobby, a street hound adopted by Levinas and the other inmates of the concentration camp, was another such dog:

About halfway through our long captivity, for a few short weeks, before the sentinels chased him away, a wandering dog entered our lives. One day, he came to meet this rabble as we returned under guard from work. He survived in some wild patch in the region of the camp. But we called him Bobby, an exotic name, as one does with a cherished dog. He would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us as we returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight. For him, there was no doubt that we were men.

[…]

This dog was the last Kantian in Nazi Germany, without the brain needed to universalize maxims and drives. He was a descendant of the dogs of Egypt. And his friendly growling, his animal faith, was born from the silence of his forefathers on the banks of the Nile.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Levinas calls Bobby “the last Kantian” because, of all the Germans in the camp, only the dog exercises an internal categorical imperative and treats the Jews as human beings. Kant’s legacy was forgotten by the Germans but continued beating in the heart of that dog. Likewise, Dinka, in *Someone to Run With*, is the significant Other of both Tamar and Assaf, the two protagonists. Both, prior to meeting Dinka, lived with the feeling that there was no one in the world who understood them and would be willing to join them on their journey. For both, Dinka functions as someone they can run with. Here too, the dog understands the person, and expresses loyalty and responsibility toward them, more so than their family members and friends who might be expected to behave this way but do not.

In an interview he gave in 1986, Levinas addressed ethics toward animals in a rather minimalist way.[[28]](#footnote-28) He described the attraction of humans to the vitality of animals, as well as the ethical transference that humans make in order to attribute a “face” to an animal, in the human-ethical sense.[[29]](#footnote-29) Similarly, he spoke of the attribution of suffering to an animal.[[30]](#footnote-30) On the one hand, Levinas recognized the uniqueness of animals, on the other hand, however, he denied their ability to connect to the transcendental dimension, even if in their behavior expresses this dimension.[[31]](#footnote-31) Levinas scholars have criticized his lack of attention to animals, and it was only in 2019 that Peter Atterton wrote an article in which he proposed, inspired by Levinas’s article about the dog Bobby, that animals are able to express responsibility toward others, a position that is very relevant to our discussion of the novel.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Atterton claims that there is a certain tension between the innovative position expressed in the Bobby article regarding animals’ abilities, and the imperative of the Exodus verse: “You shall be men consecrated to me; therefore you shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs” (Exodus 22:31).[[33]](#footnote-33) In addressing the criticism leveled at Levinas, Atterton draws attention to the philosopher’s ascription of Kantian attributes to Bobby the dog.[[34]](#footnote-34) Citing Scheler, who claimed that dogs have expressive abilities (Scheler maintained that we understand dog and bird expressions due to the existence of a universal grammar),[[35]](#footnote-35) Atterton argues that dogs can also be ascribed with “the capacity to witness and respond to the suffering of others.”[[36]](#footnote-36) He bases his claims on studies conducted on therapy dogs, which show that the dogs respond to stress experienced by their owners. The dogs responded through “look,” “approach,” and “touch.”[[37]](#footnote-37) All three are expressions of what Levinas called “responsibility”:

Responsibility, that is, an existence already obligated. It places the center of gravitation of a being outside of that being. The surpassing of phenomenal or inward existence does not consist in receiving the recognition of the Other, but in offering him one’s being. To be in oneself is to express oneself, that is, already to serve the Other. The ground of expression is goodness.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Atterton, therefore, concludes that Levinas’s moral conception of animals evolved over the course of his lifetime so that he ultimately attributed an ethical capacity to animals, even if they do not have the ability to think or yearn for the transcendental, which, according to Levinas, is the source of ethics.

Levinas’s attitude toward animals can be linked to his attitude toward literature, thus justifying the use of his concepts for the interpretation of Grossman’s novel. There is an interesting similarity between Levinas’s attitude to animals and his attitude to literature: in both cases, Levinas denied the ability to aspire to the transcendental, even though both an animal and a work of literature may express an ethical attitude or an ethical position. In fact, Levinas claimed that all literature is to be evaluated based on ethical criteria. He strongly opposed criteria such as aesthetic innovation, creativity, or verisimilitude and stated that the creation of literature that does not promote ethical propositions is unworthy.[[39]](#footnote-39) Nevertheless, Levinas published a collection of essays in which he dealt with a variety of authors whose work he admired because it includes a dominant ethical dimension (Paul Celan, S. Y. Agnon, etc.).[[40]](#footnote-40) Levinas’s ambivalent attitude toward literature has already been widely discussed in the research, and a comprehensive collection of articles dedicated to the subject was published in 2021.[[41]](#footnote-41) For our current purposes, similarly to his stance in relation to animals, I propose to distinguish between Levinas’s direct relationship to literature and his concepts, which can be applied in the interpretation of literary works, even if Levinas himself did not use them this way.

**Dinka’s Ethical Performativity**

How can Dinka express an ethical choice without the use of language, yet one that can be formulated in language? This tension is relevant to the entirety of Levinas’s oeuvre. In *Someone to Run With*, Dinka acts through Levinasian speech acts: Sayings. The other characters then translate Dinka’s actions into Saids. Dinka’s manifestations of commitment, loyalty, and responsibility toward Tamar, and eventually toward Assaf, can be identified and understood because they occur within speech acts, or Sayings to use Levinas’s terminology, which he distinguished from the use of linguistic systems, which he called the Said.

First, it should be noted, inspired by Austin’s categories, that Dinka manages to express her will in many contexts; that is, she creates illocutionary speech acts. To answer the question of how Dinka can express an ethical choice without the use of verbal language, we only need to refer to Levinas’s first definition of Saying, which implies that there is a system of meaning that precedes the language of verbal signifiers. Not only that, but this primary system also provides the possibility of creating meaning in the language of signifiers. Levinas refers to a consciousness that exists separately from the language of signifiers, in which the creation of meaning is possible. In this framework, it is possible not only to create meaning but also to signal it and pass it on to another:

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.**[[42]](#footnote-42)

Levinas proposes that ethical meaning can be expressed without words by expressing proximity, which is equivalent to taking responsibility. This is the meaning expressed by Dinka in her behavior: by leading Assaf to find Tamar and by refusing to attack Assaf despite Tamar’s order, Dinka shows closeness and responsibility to each of them. In addition, Dinka illustrates and reflects in her behavior other characteristics that Levinas proposes to clarify ethical conduct, which makes it possible to establish subjectivity and selfhood only from an ethical attitude toward the Other: Humanity, subjectivity, and self (as mentioned in the quote I just read out).

Based on her behavior, and despite her lack of verbal communication, Dinka can be seen as a subject that expresses selfhood and humanity—the same characteristics that the dog Bobby expressed in the camp where Levinas was imprisoned during the Holocaust. However, Dinka, like Bobby, does not operate in a vacuum: in order for the speech act of Saying to have a practical ethical meaning, it must be activated—as Austin described— not as a constative proposition but as a speech act.

Dinka stands out from other dogs, not thanks to her appearance but thanks to her expressive actions, which help the addressee, Assaf, recognize despair. However, beyond expressing despair, Dinka’s act is perlocutionary: “Assaf had the strange feeling that if he ever saw a human being behave that way, he would feel compelled to rush up and offer his help – or else leave, so the person could be alone with his sorrow.”[[43]](#footnote-43) Dinka behaves like a human, at least in terms of the meaning Assaf attributes to the sorrow she expresses: he detects despair and sorrow in her barking, forcing him to come to her aid as if she were a person asking for help. Her barking therefore functions as a speech act—a call for help (illocutionary) or even a request for help (perlocutionary). Following this, Dinka forms a direct connection with Assaf:

But then it happened: the dog heard Assaf’s voice and stood still. It stopped running back and forth in the cage, approached the wire mesh, and looked at Assaf. Its ribs were still heaving, but it moved more slowly. Its eyes were dark and seemed to focus intensely on him. It cocked its head to the side, as if to get a better look at him, and Assaf thought that the dog was about to open its mouth right then and say in a completely human voice, Oh yeah? You’re not exactly a model of sanity yourself. It lay on its stomach, […] and out of its throat a new voice emerged, thin and delicate like the cry of a puppy, or a little boy.[[44]](#footnote-44)

This description of the dog involves Assaf’s point of view, and after Assaf looks into her eyes, “He knew – […] the difference between talking at a dog and talking with a dog.”[[45]](#footnote-45) Assaf treats the dog as an interlocutor to be talked *to*, not *at*. He takes the dog, and the dog, as promised by Danokh, starts to run toward its destination. This is apparently where the novel gets its name. Yet, so far, this is all typical dog behavior. Further on, we shall see how Dinka expresses her ethical uniqueness.

First, Dinka leads Assaf to the pizza man, where it becomes clear to him that Dinka is female. Assaf is slightly disappointed when he finds out that he is being led by a female dog: “Assaf liked to imagine that they were a team, him and his dog, sharing between them a silent, manly oath.”[[46]](#footnote-46) From the moment Assaf pays for the pizza and the seller tells him that the dog’s destination is unknown, Assaf puts his faith in the dog to lead him to her owner. Dinka’s act of expression is running, which frees Assaf from all the limitations and everything else that oppressed him until now.

As a result, Dinka becomes closer and more significant to Assaf than even his close friends. As the novel advances, Assaf becomes more and more estranged from his peer-group friends, and in particular from Roi, who threatens him that if he stops being his friend, all the other friends will follow suit. Assaf looks into Dinka’s eyes and realizes how lonely he has been despite all his social activities. After a disappointing conversation with his parents, he decides to commit an act of rebellion and goes with Dinka to paint some graffiti. When he wakes up the next morning, he is happy as he recalls the night and remembers how Dinka comforted him:

The next morning, feeling purified and refreshed after a full night’s sleep, Assaf went on his way, with an easy heart and his bike. In the middle of the night, he had felt a big warm body – not the cleanest – tossing and cuddling up to him in bed. Without opening his eyes, as if it has always been like this, he hugged her, learning from her how she liked to sleep, curling over into a crescent, pushing her back into his stomach, her nose softly blowing into her open palm. Every once in a while she shivered, as if she were dreaming about a hunt. In the morning, the two of them opened their eyes and smiled at each other.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Dinka’s behavior can be seen as the regular behavior of a loyal and loving dog. However, as mentioned, her actions are described in the context of Assaf’s loneliness, and his estrangement from his peers. His parents are abroad, and in all actuality, Dinka is his only friend. Not only does she function as the significant and empathetic other, she leads him to find ethical meaning in life by devoting himself to helping another person in need.

Throughout the novel, Dinka leads Assaf to find Tamar, her owner—a task that begins as a routine assignment (the returning of a dog to its owner) but turns into a journey of getting to know landmarks in Tamar’s life: the meeting with Theodora, the nun, the entanglement with the police, etc. This culminates in the meeting between Assaf and Tamar at the end of the novel, in which Dinka shows loyalty and commitment to both, to Tamar’s surprise. As soon as Dinka hears Tamar’s voice, “The dog simply tore the belt off the bush and flew to her. A cloud of dust rose where they met, and cries of amazement, and barks. Assaf watched it and, even with all the pain, had to smile.”[[48]](#footnote-48) Immediately after this, Tamar, who does not know Assaf, tries to sic Dinka on him. However,

Dinka’s ear pricked up and she didn’t move. “Go, Dinka, go!” Tamar yelled, frightened. […] Dinka took a few steps, went over to Assaf, rubbed her head against his knee, and put her nose into his palm. Tamar stood, amazed. She had never seen Dinka make this gesture to anyone but her. […] Tamar looked at Dinka, as if asking her to confirm his words. Dinka looked right, looked left, passed her tongue over her muzzle, then rose on her hind legs and placed her paws on on Assaf’s chest. Tamar let the wood fall from her hand.[[49]](#footnote-49)

At this climactic point of the novel, as Assaf finally finds Tamar, Dinka wordlessly demonstrates, through ethical performativity, her independent thinking to the humans: she is very happy to see Tamar, but expresses better discernment than Tamar about Assaf. Having made this long journey together, Dinka is now loyal and committed to him as well. Assaf has learned from Dinka to run, not as part of a sport or a competition, but as a way of freeing himself on the one hand, and of finding the person he is committed to, on the other hand. A relationship of warmth and friendship has grown up between them, which manifests itself, for example, after he is released from the detention or in their cuddling in bed. However, Dinka always knows better than Assaf where to go, led by her loyalty and commitment to Tamar, the significant other in her life.

Does literary language possess advantages over everyday language that make this kind of characterization possible? The beauty of Dinka’s character is that she is realistic. Grossman’s choice is very different from Agnon’s choice in how he portrays the dog Balak in the novel *Only Yesterday*. Sometimes, the character of Balak merges with the character of Yitzhak Kumer, and much has already been written about the abundant symbolism in Agnon’s descriptions of Balak.[[50]](#footnote-50) As Benjamin Harshav astutely clarifies in the introduction to the book (in line with many other scholars), Balak the dog is a symbolic figure that symbolizes not only Yitzhak Kumer himself but the mentality of an exiled Jew.[[51]](#footnote-51)

Dinka, on the other hand, is not a symbolic figure but a realistic one: she behaves like a dog, granted, an extremely smart dog, yet her intellect remains within the boundaries of the plausible. Therefore, her ethical performativity is an important demonstration of the idea that on the level of human-animal relations, an animal like Dinka can outline an ethical path. Dinka is the character who drives the plot in the novel. Whether she leads Assaf or accompanies him, she is never assimilated into him but always remains a distinct character, an Other who has their own independent consciousness. Although Dinka’s characterization in the novel is given in the third person, from the point of view of an omniscient narrator, the narrator creates a distance between himself and Dinka, a distance with which he makes sure to distinguish between expressions of meaning that are understandable to him, and those that are not understandable to him. The strict maintenance of this gap in consciousness creates a round character, in literary research terms, and a figure of the Other in the terms of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas.

To conclude, we might ask how Dinka expresses knowledge that goes beyond that of Assaf and ties all the plot lines together. Levinas’s distinction between the Said and the Saying makes it possible to understand the gaps in knowledge between Dinka and Assaf, gaps that the reader also has to deal with:

Language would exceed the limits of what is thought, by suggesting, letting be understood without ever making understandable, an implication of a meaning distinct from that which comes to signs from the simultaneity of systems or the logical definition of concepts. This possibility is laid bare in the poetic said. […] It is shown in the prophetic said, scorning its conditions in a sort of levitation. It is by the approach, the-one-for-the-other of saying, related by the said, that the said remains an insurmountable equivocation, where meaning refuses simultaneity, does not enter into being, does not compose a whole.[[52]](#footnote-52)

The character of Dinka is imbued with poetic and prophetic qualities, and thus she drives the plot and directs Assaf to fill his life with ethical meaning. She does this through ethical performativity, which gradually leads Assaf to rediscover his subjectivity through the development of humanism toward the Other.

1. Thus defined, for example, by Michal Ephratt. “Someone to Be Silent with, Someone to Be Silent to: The Means and Functions of Eloquent Silence in the Novel ‘Someone to Run With’ by David Grossman,” *Dappim: Research in Literature*, 17/16 (2007): 423–73. For more on maturation process undergone by Assaf in the novel, see psychoanalytic perspective presented by Zvi Carmeli, “Someone to Run With: Adolescence as Movement in Psychic and Cultural Space, *Dappim: Research in Literature* 17/16 (2007): 474–91. See also a discussion of this novel as a coming-of-age novel that allows the voice of the silenced teenager to be heard in Ilana Elkad-Lehman, *Magic in the Web: Intertext, Reading, Thinking and the development of Thinking* (Tel-Aviv: Mofet, 2007), pp. 186-190. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Carmeli, “Someone to Run With”; Elkad-Lehman, *Magic in the Web*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. David Grossman, *Someone to Run With,* trans. Vered Almog and Maya Gurantz(London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sandy Petrey, *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 131. Belinda Morrissey also refers to the ethical aspect of performativity, but although she references key concepts by Levinas among others, she does not mention it him in her discussion. See: Belinda Morrissey, ‟The Ethical Foundation of Performativity,” *Social Semiotics,* 2005, 15:2, 165-184. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Belinda Morrissey also refers to the ethical aspect of performativity, but although she references key concepts by Levinas among others, she does not mention it him in her discussion. See: Belinda Morrissey, ‟The Ethical Foundation of Performativity,” *Social Semiotics,* 2005, 15:2, 165-184. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “When I write, I try to enlarge my being and my emotional dictionary, not to surrender to apathy or paralysis; to show nuances. Every human story is complicated that no one side is 100% right or wrong; each has its justice and its suffering. When I write stories, I reclaim things that have been confiscated and the right to be a human being is a situation that tries to obliterate my human qualities” (“David Grossman: Author–Israel,” *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 55, no. 4 (2017): 24). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Emmanuel Levinas, “The ego and the totality” in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987): 25-46, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ferdinand de Saussure distinguished between two levels of language: *langue* and *parole*, and claimed that the level of *langue* is virtual and exists in the mind of each speaker, while the level of *parole* is the actual performance of the speaker in practice and can be investigated. De Saussure did not refer to an ethical aspect of language, but according to his method one of the levels of language is abstract and cannot be transcribed while the other is tangible. Another important difference between de Saussure and Levinas is that according to de Saussure, language research should focus on parole, while according to Levinas, the abstract level (the Saying) is what is important. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In his article on the development of the concept of language in Levinas, William Edelglass claimed that Levinas resolved the tension between language and ethics only in his last book, when he developed the concepts the Saying and the Said: “Much of the task of *Otherwise Than Being* […] is to articulate, and practice, a language that […] resolves the tension between Levinas’s philosophy and his own writing. This task is accomplished through his distinction between the saying and the said, a distinction already present in his early works, but not fully developed, or realized, until *Otherwise Than Being” (*William Edelglass, ‟Levinas's language,” in *The Enigma of Good and Evil: The Moral Sentiment in Literature,* ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005): 47-62, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 51-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. John Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 108-109. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Searle argued that there are actually only two types of speech acts, because even in the locutionary speech act some action is performed, for example the act of describing. See: John Searle*, Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. “What these are we may hope to discover by looking at and classifying types of case in which something goes wrong and the act —marrying, betting, bequeathing, christening, or what not—is therefore at least to some extent a failure: the utterance is then, we may say, not indeed false but in

general unhappy. And for this reason we call the doctrine of the things that can be and go wrong on the occasion of such utterances, the doctrine of the Infelicities” (Austin, *How to do*, 13-14). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. John L. Austin, “Other minds,” in *Philosophical papers* (London: Oxford University Press 1961): 44-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid., 61–62. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid., 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. “Levinas […] attached no great ethical importance to animals other than humans […]. For over four decades, Levinas developed a theory of ethics he called a “humanism of the other man” that viewed animals as little more than things or cases, the interests of which count for little in comparison with those of human beings” (Peter Atterton*,* ‟Facing animals”, in *Facing nature: Levinas and environmental thought*, eds. William Edelglass, James Hatley, and Christian Diehm [Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2012]: 25-40, 25). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Edelglass et al, *Facing nature; Face to face with animals: Levinas and the animal question,* eds. Peter Atterton and Tamra Wright (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. “Levinas’s phenomenological description of the face justifies extending moral considerability to animals that can suffer and are capable of expressing that suffering to me” (Atterton, “Facing animals”, 25). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Emmanuel Levinas*, Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990): 151-153. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. “You shall be men consecrated to me; therefore you shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs” (Exodus 22:31). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Levinas*, Difficult Freedom*, 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. “But not a dog shall growl against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.” (Exodus 11:7) [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Levinas*,* “The Name of a Dog,” 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Peter Atterton, Tamra Wright, “The animal interview,” in *Face to Face with Animals: Levinas and the Animal Question* (New-York: The State University of New-York, 2019), 3-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid., 3-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. “Clearly, one [approach to] ethics is the transference of the idea of suffering to an animal, certainly. The animal suffers. It is because we as men know what suffering is that we can also have this obligation” (Ibid., 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. “Man is an unreasonable animal. […] Most of the time my life is closer [than that of the other], most of the time one is preoccupied with oneself. But we cannot not admire saintliness. […] What is saintliness? It is someone who […] *is* attached more to the being of the other than to his own. He tries to do that. […] I am telling you that because to say that saintliness begins with animals implies that animals have already heard the word of God—which makes no difference to me. But, in any case, there is something other there than pure Being that persists in being” (Ibid., 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Peter Atterton, “Dog and Philosophy: Does Bobby Have What It Takes to Be Moral?” ՙ in *Face to Face with Animals,* 63-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid., 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. “Levinas’s description of Bobby as a “Kantian,” the last of its kind in Germany at that time, has been challenged by Derrida, who asks: “But how can one ignore that a Kantian who doesn’t have ‘the brain needed’ to universalize maxims would not be a Kantian, especially if the maxims in question are maxims of ‘drives’ that would have made Kant bark. Bobby is thus anything but Kantian” (Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills [New York: Fordham University Press, 2008], 114). Clark too sees here some kind of contradiction on Levinas’s part: “Bobby remains inwardly deficient. […] Because he lacks the knowhow and the liberty truly to stop himself from acting in a way that cannot be universalized, he is only a kind of simulation of goodness.” (David Clark, “On Being ‘The Last Kantian in Nazi Germany’: Dwelling with Animals after Levinas,” in *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History*, eds. Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior (New York: Routledge, 1997), 165–98); And Guenther similarly writes: “And yet, Levinas immediately limits the compliment to Bobby; for as an animal ‘without the brains [etc....]’ the dog is just a dog, deprived of language and reason, incapable of truly responding to others.” These criticisms are totally misguided” (Lisa Guenther, “Le flair animal: Levinas and the Possibility of Animal Friendship,” *PhaenEx: Journal of Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2007), in Atterton, *Dog and Philosophy,* 70). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. “We can understand the experience of animals, though even in “tendency” we cannot imitate their manner of expression; for instance, when *a dog expresses its joy by barking* and wagging its tail, or a bird by twittering. The relationships between expression and experience have a *fundamental* basis of connection. We have here, as it were, a universal grammar, valid for all languages of expression, and the ultimate basis of understanding for all form of mimes and pantomime among living creatures” (Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. P. Heath [Hamden, CT: Archon, 1973], 11). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Atterton, *Dog and Philosophy*, 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid., 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Emmanuel Levinas, ‘‘Reality and Its Shadow,’’ in The Levinas Reader, Sean Hand (ed.).

(Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 130–43 (first published in Le Temps Moderne in 1948) [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Michael Fagenblat and Arthur Cools, *Levinas and Literature: New Directions* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 46 (emphasis mine). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Grossman, *Someone to run with,* 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid., 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid., 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid., 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid., 327. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid., 327–328. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. “Balak found rest for his body, but consolation for his soul he didn’t find. He was sorry about what had slipped away from under his feet and was not happy about what had come into his hands. The entire world was not worthwhile for him as was the place he was exiled from. Between one thing and another, he settled down among the nations and was melted among the Gentiles and defiled himself with the cooking of the heathens and his heart was numbed and he couldn’t distinguish between Jewish holiday and Christian holiday. […] The evil men of Israel are like dogs. But the evil men of Israel sometimes repent and sometimes don’t repent. And even those who do repent don’t repent on their own, but repent because of the Shofar on the Day of Judgment, for when they hear the sound of the Shofar, they tremble in fear and dread, while Balak did repent on his own, and it was in the month of Tamuz when the Shofars are still sleeping that he decided to repent. […] From too much thinking, his soul grew weary and he dozed off. The Lord of Dreams came to him and showed him things in his dream that he had thought about when he was awake. And when he woke up from his sleep, he didn’t know what was real here and what was a dream” (Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *Only Yesterday*, trans. Barbara Harshav [Princeton University Press, 2000], 311-312). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. “The dog has been interpreted as an allegory of Jewish Exile, as Isaac’s erotic projection, as the embodiment of the irrational, demonic force that subverts all Enlightenment rationality, as a guide to Jerusalem, and as a satire of its outlandish Orthodox society, as a Kafkaesque parable and a Surrealist vision; and he is probably all of those combined. Persecuted without understanding why, Balak really does go mad, and eventually bites his patron Isaac, who dies of the venom” (Benjamin Harshav, Introduction in:, p. xiii). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 169-170. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)