

The New Criterion

Reconsiderations

March 2007

Stepson of the time

by [Michael Weiss](#)

On Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*.

This could be Arthur Koestler apostrophizing the condemned Rubashov in his novel *Darkness at Noon* (1940):

There is nothing more difficult than to be a stepson of the time; there is no heavier fate than to live in an age that is not your own. Stepsons of the time are easily recognized: in personnel departments, Party district committees, army political sections, editorial offices, and on the street. Time loves only those it has given birth to itself: its own children, its own heroes, its own labourers. Never can it come to love the children of a past age, any more than a woman can love the heroes of a past age, or a stepmother love the children of another woman.

In fact, it is from Vasily Grossman's masterpiece of World War II, *Life and Fate* (1959). If Fascism doesn't kill Krymov, the graying commissar of the novel, then his own obsolescence under Stalini ...

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This article originally appeared in *The New Criterion*, Volume 25 March 2007, on page 33

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