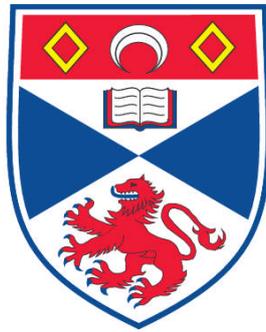


**THE WORK OF ALEKSANDR GRIN (1880-1932):
A STUDY OF GRIN'S PHILOSOPHICAL OUTLOOK**

Krzysztof Martowicz

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
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The work of Aleksandr Grin (1880-1932):

A Study of Grin's Philosophical Outlook

Krzysztof Martowicz

St Andrews University

2011

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*Mojej wspaniałej i kochanej żonie Ani
oraz naszej cudownej córeczce Zosi
pracę tę dedykuję...*

Abstract

There has been to date no attempt at a detailed examination of Aleksandr Grin's philosophical views interpreted on the basis of his literary work. Whilst some critics have noted interesting links between the writer's oeuvre and a few popular philosophers, this has usually been done in passing and on an ad hoc basis. This thesis aims to fill this gap by reconstructing Grin's views in relation to the European philosophical tradition.

The main body of the thesis consists of three parts built on and named after three essential themes in philosophy: External World, Happiness and Morality.

Part One delineates Grin's views on nature and civilisation: I argue first that his cult of nature makes it possible to conceive of Grin as a pantheistic thinker close to Rousseau and Bergson, and then I reconstruct the author's criticism of urbanisation and industrialisation.

In the second part I assess the place of happiness in Grin's world-view, indicating its similarities to the philosophy of various thinkers from the Ancients to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. After sketching a general picture of the concept of happiness in Grin's works, I discuss the place of material and immaterial factors in the writer's outlook. I also gather maxims expressed by the protagonists in his fiction that can be taken as recommendations concerning ways of achieving and defending happiness. Finally, I link happiness with the problem of morality in Grin's oeuvre.

In the final part I examine modes of moral behaviour as displayed by the author's protagonists. Firstly, I argue that in Grin's works we find numerous examples and themes that allow us to perceive him as an existentialist. Secondly, I indicate Grin's adherence to rules of conduct commonly associated with chivalric literature. Thirdly, I emphasise the importance of Promethean-like characters in the moral hierarchy of Grin's protagonists.

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I wish to express my cordial appreciation to my wife Anna for her invaluable encouragement and spiritual support at all stages of this work. My special thanks go also to my parents Ewa and Elio, and my brother Jan simply for being there.

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The novel is not the author's confession; it is an investigation of human life in the trap the world has become.

Milan Kundera

A fictional technique always relates back to the novelist's metaphysics. The critic's task is to define the latter before evaluating the former.

Jean-Paul Sartre

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Introduction

The pathways of philosophy and literature interweave in three main forms which may be summarised as ‘philosophy of literature’, ‘philosophy and literature’ and ‘philosophy in literature’. The first type refers to the philosophical reflection on literature as an art form and addresses questions concerning the nature of literature (What makes something literature?), its forms (What is literature and what is not?), meanings (How do literary works convey meanings?), values and purposes. ‘Philosophy and literature’, in turn, is the attempt to apply philosophy to a literary work to enhance one's understanding of this work an example of which is, for instance, interpreting literary works using concepts from aesthetics, ethics, religion studies or particular philosophical currents (e.g. existentialism) as interpretative tools. The last form of coexistence – ‘philosophy in literature’ – is focused on the issues of presence of philosophical thought in a literary work which surfaces either explicitly in characters’ dialogues or implicitly, in which case only attending to incidents in the lives of the characters allows for reconstruction of that thought. This places ‘philosophy in literature’ as a predominantly author-oriented phenomenon accepting that behind every literary work there is a human being who experiences the world in his own peculiar way. The world requires him to interpret facts, events, acts, behaviour – from the level of simple reactions to the most complex and mysterious questions concerning the essence of human existence (life, hate, faith, melancholy, love, honour, and death). A literary work is an image of this interpretation – a picture of the author’s beliefs, visions of the world and perception of reality (claiming the contrary would imply that the author is unfaithful to himself). The process of writing can be viewed in its philosophical dimension, as Diamond (1993:144-145) put it, as the ‘imaginative response to life’. The author-oriented approach contrasts directly with a reader-oriented philosophical analysis where literature is analysed in the light of its suggestive potential and influence on the reader most commonly in its epistemological aspect as yielding knowledge of the human condition (see Zamir 2007:4-5,21; Kolenda 1982:IX-X), including the creation of an experimental environment to understand behavioural conduct (morality).

This thesis aims to reconstruct the philosophical outlook of Aleksandr Stepanovich Grin (1880-1932) – an author who, for many decades, following several myths distributed by the Soviet authorities, was labelled as a children’s writer, a fantasy writer, or even a

science fiction writer, because of the presence of elements such as flying men, teleportation, magic and gnomes in his prose. I endeavour to pursue and develop here the remarks made in more recent critical works devoted to Grin's writing such as Mikhailova's comment about Grin's fiction revolving around the mystery of the human soul and its place in the world (1980:148-49), or Luker's claim that 'the problems Grin poses and the solutions he offers are of universal significance, pertaining to the human condition' (Luker 1980:56). In this, strictly author-oriented work, I use the term *Weltanschauung*, fundamental to the German philosophical tradition (used, inter alia, in the works of Fichte, Humboldt, Goethe, Schelling, Hegel, Schleiermacher and Schopenhauer) in its traditional understanding: a world-view characterised by its subjective basis, one's personal perception and interpretation of the world through a set of one's own ideas, values and beliefs.¹ Although some of the questions related to these issues have been recorded and scrutinised by critics (as will be discussed in the section 'Current State of Research'), there has been no attempt so far to present a coherent analysis of Grin's *Weltanschauung*.

It needs to be emphasised here that Grin's oeuvre is almost entirely free of philosophical arguments expressed in direct, non-imaginative form. The author had a limited knowledge of philosophy (cf. Oryshchuk 2006:16-19, Litwinow 1980:27) based on occasional reading of some works by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Marx. It is reasonable to assume that he was familiar with the two leading tendencies of contemporary Russian philosophy: the historically-positivist and the religious-irrational but throughout his life he remained completely disinterested in studying philosophy, preferring clearly to read literary works. In his own stories he does not present a variety of moral points of view ('richness of plural qualitative thinking' or complex contexts, as Nussbaum puts it, 1990:36), nor is his writing openly didactic, but it carries, without any doubts, moral implications. We find in Grin's writing what Kolenda (1982:XI) labelled as a writer's 'ability to think deeply about questions that always have been also in the province of philosophy'.

The choice of the topic of this thesis, which merges philosophy and literary criticism, predetermines the structure of the dissertation and application of a quite eclectic methodology, including the choice of interpretative tools which I shall discuss here briefly.

The thesis discusses in detail, as presented below, Grin's views on the external world, happiness and morality – three concepts central to philosophical investigations. Aiming to reconstruct the comprehensive picture of these views, I relate the elements of

¹ The term *Weltanschauung* was derived from the Kantian term *Anschauung* and was used by Romantics to differentiate from the objective *Weltbild* – 'world picture'.

Grin's Weltanschauung to the works of the thinkers of the European **philosophical tradition** (including, inter alia, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Rousseau, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, Camus, Sartre) and particular philosophical concepts (e.g. Stoicism, Franciscanism, Rousseauism, Existentialism, as well as the external world, eudaimonology, independent ethics and morality) and point out links between Grin's prose and acclaimed works by other writer-philosophers such as Dostoevsky, Gorky, Sartre or Camus. It can be said then that, although this work is first and foremost a quest for 'philosophy in literature' as defined above, it also applies philosophy to the analysis of Grin's works to enhance our understanding of his oeuvre.

Needless to say, from the perspective of literary criticism, the Weltanschauung-oriented discussion requires most importantly a significant amount of **structural analysis** of Grin's texts. This includes identification of repetitive motifs, formulaic elements and genres (such as adventure or chivalric stories). The evolution of plots is also scrutinised on many occasions with the special emphasis on the application of the Aristotelian concept of peripeteia and its ethical relevance. Additionally, on a more general note, I argue in line with many theorists of literature (cf. Hawthorn 1988:44) that the form of a literary work cannot be treated separately from content, and I assign interpretative significance to the fact that the majority of Grin's works are short stories with strikingly simple and clear plots. The same concerns several other large-scale structural issues such as laconic unemotional narration, under-specification of characters, geographic settings and general ahistoricism which add to the possibility of reading Grin as a Universalist. I argue that all these elements can be viewed as means of establishing the author's philosophical depiction of the world. On the whole then, I follow Diamond (1993:37) – a philosopher herself – in her opinion that the *only* way to see what kinds of thinking may be found in literary texts is by giving them sensitive attention.

Finally, extending Hawthorn's thought: 'To understand works of art we have to understand their conditions of birth, how and why they were created, responding to what personal and social pressures, in the teeth of which constraints and oppositional forces' (1988:64), I argue that the same elements should be taken into account in an attempt to understand also the authors of these works and their worldviews. Hence, the final tools helping in the reconstruction of Grin's Weltanschauung I apply in this thesis (especially in parts II and III) are **biographism and historicism** (in the understanding of the 'Old' rather

than ‘New Historicism’).² More specifically, I propose a somewhat unusual method of interpreting Grin’s output as a self-reflexive activity, a form of writer’s therapy – as a search for an ideal hero in a world full of the absurd. Since no other place fits the presentation of Grin’s times, life and literary context better than this introductory part, let me summarise briefly this background information here.

At the dawn of the twentieth century Russia was on the verge of severe social conflict, drastic poverty and almost overwhelming spiritual chaos. For the past decades, or as Mirsky claims, since the beginning of the previous century, Russian political and social life was marked by a succession of revolutionary waves and anti-revolutionary thoughts.³ Fierce conflicts like severe storms rolled over the country leaving an indelible impression on writers and their works, giving evidence of the epoch and its changes. Among the most powerful factors shaping the consciousness of the society were the failure in the war against Japan (1904-5) and two revolutions (1905 and 1917).⁴

The disastrous outcome of the Japanese campaign ruined the myth of the power of the Russian empire and strongly shook the very foundation of the tsarist regime. The society came from the conflict not only impoverished, but also with a strong conviction that the authorities were no longer able to control the state and fulfil their tasks. Constantly recurring anti-tsarist and anarchic feelings became at that time even more visible, gaining in power and leading to a strong oppositional current. The tsar was perceived as the opponent of society and people lost their faith in his wise leadership and in a better future. Poverty, social injustice and inequality, together with instability of the state, resulted in rapid growth of the popularity of revolutionary tendencies and anarchism, including terrorist elements striving for the overthrow of the existing rulers. The masses openly refused to defend autocracy, while on the other hand they supported the recently-developed class of industrial workers. The direct outcome of the rise of capitalism was mechanisation of labour and the rise of great factories based on mass production which resulted in the formation of a new social class – the working class. Low pay and dreadful work conditions aroused strong objections from the workers. Moreover, the dramatic famine following the 1917 revolution had its own devastating impact and the morbidity rate increased

² It is not to say that I find Grin’s writing autobiographical. Although it is obvious that in his oeuvre one can find numerous autobiographical motifs (cf. for instance, Luker 1980:14,17,32), and the author himself, as his second wife Nina recalled, used to say ‘My biography is in my books... one only has to know how to read them’ (quoted in Luker 1980:1).

³ Cf. Mirsky (1926:97).

⁴ For detailed and insightful accounts of the socio-political situation in Russia in the discussed period, see for instance: Pipes (1991) and Moss (2005).

alarmingly.

It should also be mentioned that there were huge discrepancies among peasantry, industrial workers, city-dwellers, clergy and aristocracy, and the army was regarded as the tool of repression rather than a protecting force. For many army service was worse than slavery, and hence Russian literature of the Silver Age abounds in horrible images of the soldier's dreadful lot.

These disturbing tendencies were accompanied by a rapid decrease in the authority of the Church which was often criticised for being too institutional and separated from the problems of the real people. Not without an impact on the general social turmoil was also a decline in morals caused to some extent by the influence of morally dubious literature (often of low quality) breaking with the traditional moral norms.

The dominant factors in the socio-philosophical thought of the period were decadent motifs of decay, pessimism and the feeling of coming collapse of the old system, even the crisis of the whole civilisation, although among the Russian élite there were also people who displayed patriotism full of optimism. Regardless of the views on the current political situation, at the turn of the century revolution seemed a real possibility rather than merely an abstract concept.

The literary works of the Silver Age bore considerable imprints of intense philosophical discussions and investigations. Thanks to the appearance of various literary journals and translation activities undertaken by writers (e.g. Bal'mont, Briusov and Merezhkovskii), Russian intellectuals embraced opportunities to become acquainted with the works of modern Western writers: Verlaine, D'Annunzio, Maeterlinck and Strindberg. Founded in 1898, the journal '*Mir Iskusstva*' had great impact on bringing new trends to Russia and educating new generations. Among its contributors were such luminaries as Diaghilev, Benois, Muratov and Grabar, who played an important role in building a bridge between Russia and Western European culture. So strong a connection between philosophy and literature (especially in the field of moral issues) was to a large extent the result of the powerful impact of the two literary giants of the 19th century – Dostoevsky and Tolstoi. Their timeless masterpieces were held in high esteem and in a sense were the Bible of the Russian *intelligentsia*. Dealing with *роковые вопросы* became in the Silver Age the trademark of Russian literature. Dostoevsky's influence both in respect of Christianity and individualism and his unequalled popularity were to some extent connected with the

interpretation of his work by Merezhkovskii, who linked the great writer with Nietzsche.⁵ The followers of Tolstoism were recruited from those who were disappointed with the current cultural and political situation. Tolstoi's philosophy can be summarised as extremely anti-modern and anti-clerical, pantheistic and anti-dogmatic. As Stites (1989:33-4) aptly noticed, apart from a 'rejection of passion and anger and even sexual drive', his views constituted a radical response to the puzzling menace of the advance of technology, capitalism, egoism, and productive anarchy. He preached pacifism and opposition to violence in any form. As a panacea to the moral degeneration of the modern world he recommended withdrawal to a simple rustic life.

Among widely-discussed Russian thinkers of the Silver Age, two deserve special mention in this context: Solov'ev and Shestov.⁶ Solov'ev was perhaps the most important professional philosopher of that period, a Neo-Platonist who combined Roman Catholicism with scientific discoveries.⁷ The central place in his philosophy was occupied by the concept of Sophia, the Divine Wisdom which was a common property among Solov'ev's followers.⁸ The other thinker – Shestov – is often called the most influential Russian existentialist who realised the malice of his age and degeneration of morality. 'Up to now' – as he diagnosed it – 'we have had to deal with people and the laws of humanity – now – with eternity and the absence of all laws' (quoted in Pyman 1994:5). In his influential writings he presented original interpretations of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky and Tolstoi. He opposed rationalism and dogmatic faith and systematised morality, opting instead in favour of individual choice.

In bohemian circles (and generally among intellectuals) the inspiration often came from the philosophy of Schopenhauer whose main doctrines and attempts at explaining the world carried forward the cult of Art alongside pessimistic visions of the human lot and the fate of mankind. Even more popular in this period was another German idealist, called by Bely 'a close brother' – Friedrich Nietzsche.⁹ Nietzscheanism was undoubtedly one of the most powerful influences on Russian culture and was, as Mirsky puts it (1926:153), represented by a huge variety of forms, 'from the zoological immoralism of Sanin to the mythopoetic theories of V. Ivanov'. According to another critic, Rosenthal (1986:3), its

⁵ For Merezhkovsky 'the Great Christian Dostoevsky' stood higher than 'the great Pagan Tolstoi' (cf. Mirsky 1926:153,159). Similarly, Pyman (1994:2-3) writes that 'at the dawn of Symbolism Europe belonged to Schopenhauer, Baudelaire and Dostoevsky's *Chelovek iz podpolia*'.

⁶ Other influential figures were Berdyaev, Florenskii, Plekhanov and Lenin.

⁷ According to Solov'ev, faith does not contradict reason but, instead, the two should complement each other.

⁸ For more on the concept of Sophia, see, for instance, Kornblatt and Gustafson (1996). On the life and philosophy of Solov'ev, see: Allen 2008.

⁹ See: Paperno and Grossman (1994:6).

impact was profound, widespread and enduring (even though after 1912, authors less eagerly admitted their acknowledgement). The researcher traces the roots of the rapid growth of Nietzsche's popularity in the gap created in the last decade of the 19th century by Hegelianism, anti-Hegelian positivism and materialism, and subjective populism which lost their intellectual glitter. Nietzsche ruthlessly criticised philistinism, vulgarity and the pseudo-values of mass culture. He became famous as a philosopher of rejection and many of his ground-breaking ideas became 'an important ingredient in the revolutionary mix, sweeping away the old and clearing a path for the new'. For Bely and many other Russian intellectuals, the rebellious German idealist who fiercely attacked Spinoza's rationalism was a true 'отражение смятения эпохи' (see Paperno and Grossman 1994:32).

Many leading writers found themselves under the spell of Nietzsche's teachings on Superman, nihilism, the cult of Dionysus and the death of God. However, they often varied in their fascination for Nietzsche's philosophical output: while Briusov and Bal'mont emphasised the aesthetic part of Nietzscheanism, Shestov drew on ethical and philosophical elements, and Lunacharsky became inspired by the cultural and socio-political concepts.¹⁰ Gorky, in turn, was attracted by the idea of *amor fati* and faith in the individual.¹¹ His *босячество* was a socio-cultural phenomenon often viewed as a radical form of Nietzscheanism. The tramps had contempt for society (akin to Nietzsche's anti-democratic views) and they also display unabashed amoralism, egoism and a belief that no truths exist (Rosenthal 1986:13-14).

Although largely in the shadow of Nietzsche's unprecedented popularity, such Western thinkers as Stirner, Darwin, Hegel and Marx also had their own followers in Russia. The increase of doubt in the power of reason and lack of hope in the progress of Science resulted in the rapid rise of the popularity of parapsychology and all kinds of Gnostic knowledge. A large number of writers (including, for instance, Blok, Bely and Briusov) were deeply influenced by Gnostic literature.¹² Even some futurists (e.g. Maiakovskii, Tufanov, Zabolotskii, as well as Khlebnikov) were interested in mysticism. They believed in physical resurrection, which often combined religious strivings with scientific concepts – Christian resurrection with Darwinian evolution, messianism with the ideas of Bergson and Einstein.

¹⁰ With the passage of time, a general shift of influence can be observed – from an emphasis on aesthetic, moral and psychological issues in 1890s to religious, philosophical and existential issues around 1900, and political and social issues around 1905. For details, see: Rosenthal (1986:8).

¹¹ 'Pesnia o sokole', for example, can be viewed as Gorky's paean to heroic individualism.

¹² See: Rosenthal (1997:89).

In the richness of trends in the Russian Silver Age it is the conflict between idealist and positivist (Marxist) currents that is often the border-line between two main groups with respect to the views on reason and the divine: all the idealistic formations including religions (Christianity and its transformations), aestheticism, Nietzscheanism and irrationalism on one hand, while on the other hand – the Marxist, materialist current of positivist provenance which put stress on the progress of science, industrialisation and building social order, and achieving a paradise-like state on earth.

For modernist idealists the main problems for investigations and artistic expression were transgression, breaking the limits of human understanding, enrichment of religious life and search for mystical revelations. Not surprisingly, the Silver Age was the period of unbridled spiritual searchers which brought various interesting re-interpretations of Christianity.

Russian Marxism, in turn, stemmed from the traditional positivism and agnosticism of the older Russian Liberals, and as early as 1894 it held an important position on the map of Russian political thought. In literature, Marxism's most renowned representatives were Lenin, Lunacharsky and Trotsky. An interesting phenomenon of that period was the Russian philosophy of God-building (*богостроительство*), constituting a kind of amalgam of the positivist and idealist concepts. The term God-building was coined by Anatolii Lunacharskii and Aleksandr Bogdanov who implied that a human collective, through the concentration of released human energy, can perform the same miracles that were assigned to supra-natural beings.¹³ The ideas became a form of secular rejuvenation with aspects of mystery cults, and for some time exerted a significant influence on some of the writers of that period.

Even this brief sketch proves that Grin lived and wrote his fiction in exceptionally complex and turbulent times. He was born in 1880 in Viatka and from a very early age he was a dreamer, recluse and seeker of ideal love. His childhood was bitter and far from idyllic – his mother died when he was only 12, and his alcoholic father and cold stepmother took over care of him. Because of his unhappy relationship with them, Grin escaped his family home at the age of 15 and became a wanderer whose everyday life was to be filled for many years to come with a sense of physical and spiritual loneliness. First, his early dreams of becoming a sailor were crushed. To make a living he had to beg, he collected

¹³ For more on the concept of God-building, see, for instance, Clowes, 1987.

scrap, worked as a coal-loader and often spent nights in the port without shelter, in the company of drunkards and thieves. He returned to Viatka several times but due to lack of prospects and a difficult relationship with his father he was constantly on the move. He also worked in the Ural gold mines and as a lumberjack. At the age of 22 he joined the army, but very soon deserted to join the Socialist Revolutionary Party. He was not successful this time either as he refused to carry out a terrorist attack. Soon he was arrested and accused of desertion. For many years using false names and documents, Grin learned to live the life of an outlaw, never sure about tomorrow, without any stable job or real home. After all those years of wandering and miserable fight for survival, however, Grin finally discovered that it was writing that would be the sole thing that would make him happy. He married in 1907, but his first wife, Vera Abramova, never really became his truly soul mate, and their marriage was constantly troubled by financial problems, alongside Grin's incurable alcoholism and growing depression. After 6 years of married life full of mutual misunderstandings and a struggle for normality, Vera left. The following years were filled with numerous harsh and violent images of war and revolutions.

In January 1919 Grin moved to a room in a house occupied by a group of artists known as 'Union of Belle-lettrists' (*Союз деятелей художественной литературы*) but he spent there only a couple of months as in the summer of 1919 he was called up for military service in the Red Army. During the service he was first detailed to work in a porcelain factory in the Belarusian town of Vitebsk, and then, as a member of a communication unit, he worked laying telephone lines in Ostrov. In March 1920 he was sent to Moscow with the suspicion of tuberculosis. Soon afterwards he was found to be suffering from typhus. Later on that year, Gorky found Grin a room in the Petersburg House of Arts (*Дом Искусств*) established in 1919. He stayed there until early 1921. In May that year Grin married Nina Nikolaevna. Although they lived in poverty and Grin still drank a lot, his wife displayed understanding and continuously encouraged him to write. To lower the costs of living and help Grin fight his drinking habit they moved to Feodosiia in the Crimea. Their situation did not improve, however, and they were forced to borrow money and faced hunger even though they sold their belongings. Grin's health problems grew worse – he suffered from severe physical and nervous exhaustion caused by anaemia and tuberculosis and he died in 1932 of stomach cancer.

In the face of all these tribulations it is easy to understand that for Grin literature was also a form of escapism into the world of dreams (see Luker 1980:4). For this very reason, as Litwinow (1986:109) and Luker (1973:40-41) have rightly claimed, to

understand Grin's oeuvre one has to bear in mind the difficult times he lived in. This factor was, however, sadly missing from the critical reception of Grin's work – more often than not he remained underestimated and misunderstood. His position in Russian literature became even more undermined on the foundation of RAPP, because the author of *Alye parusa* remained for ever faithful to his own beliefs and could not let his pen praise the new regime and the reality he clearly disliked. As a result, publication of Grin's works was strictly limited by the authorities at the end of his life. Adventurous plots and their often parabolic character, the magic and quasi-fairy-tale elements of Grin's prose were the elements that made his works unacceptable for censors and, as RAPP was growing in power, Grin, like other independent writers, became a persona non grata of Russian literature.

Having presented the socio-political and philosophical background of Grin's times we may also attempt to answer the question 'How does Grin actually fit in the complicated and rich literary context of his times?' The question of *the role of artist* and the discrepancy between the Romantic notion of a prophetic art and a utilitarian understanding of the author's goals are a good point of departure here.¹⁴

The first of them clearly dominated the first decade of the 20th century, revolving around the concept of *theurgy*.¹⁵ While V. Ivanov saw it above all as *bogodeistvie*, for his fellow-symbolist, Blok, as Pyman (1994:214) observes: 'the calling of the artist was not to abide in the sphere of the finite but to wrestle with infinity, to bring cosmos from chaos, harmony from discord, or as Nietzsche put in the *Birth of Tragedy*, the Apollonian vision from Dionysian Rausch (delirium)'.

Regardless of the incredible complexity and diversity of literary life in the Silver Age, it can be said that artists were generally preoccupied with striving for a fusion of life and art. The artistic mission of many a modernist involved transformation of reality by imaginative creation of different variations of this reality. Another significant concept was *life-creation* (*жизнетворчество*), in which the artist's aim is to create a myth of his own life,¹⁶ In this context Schelling's principle seems very suitable: 'Every great poet is called

¹⁴ The utilitarian concept of art involved serving the state, political and social issues and objective presentation of reality. At the turn of century, as Luker (1991:xii) observes, it was widely believed that Russian literature could only achieve regeneration through aestheticism and individualism which would free artists from all social obligations. See also: Mirsky (1926:151).

¹⁵ Theurgy (or God-creation) was, by definition, a cathartic activity rooted in Christian idea of brotherhood love and denial of self-content and aimed at achieving spiritual enlightenment. The myth of theurgy and spiritual knight-errantry were also, according to Pyman (1994:185), psychologically liberating.

¹⁶ With regard to this concept, Nefed'ev (2009) recalls two interesting terms used by Russian critics: Khoruzhii defines it as a personal 'mythologeme' while Golosovker prefers 'mythotheme'. Rather

to structure from this evolving mythological world, a world of which his own age can reveal to him only a part, (...) and to create from the content and substance of that world his mythology.’¹⁷ The modernist idea of fusion of life and art was naturally linked with antimimesis, anti-utilitarianism and radical individualism. Hutchings debates the division between art and life as particularly characteristic of Russian Modernism.¹⁸

In the writing of the author of *Alye parusa* we find, without any doubt, numerous affinities with modernists. In this literary current artistic creation was the main principle of art and all literary creation was predominantly focused on the author’s individual perception of reality. The transformations of the world depicted in modernist literature were not infrequently affected by anti-urbanism and demonisation of machines, technology and scientific progress. The modernists held reason in disregard and their approach to the questions of philosophy was intuitive and anti-dialectic. They shared a deep interest in and attempts at re-interpretations of the leading German idealist philosophers (especially Schopenhauer and Nietzsche) and the divine role of the artist seeking for the ideal alongside a complete lack of interest in social issues. In their searches for the perfect embodiment of artistic visions the modernist writers often made use of the principle of syncretism of various arts, especially music. All these constituent features of modernism appear also in Grin’s work. Nevertheless, Grin was essentially against the idea of *l’art pour l’art* and, instead of sacrificing his life on the altar of Art, he sought to teach and enlighten the reader through his work. Moreover, Grin did not share with the modernists their interest and sometimes scandalous exploration of erotic motifs. On the contrary, in this respect Grin should rather be seen as unique among the writers in the Silver Age for a complete lack of eroticism in his fiction, even in very veiled forms or allusions.

Grin resembles them in his search for the understanding of the human being in all his complexity – a feature so typical of Chekhov, master of the realist short story. Grin’s prose displays his belief in the need to keep life in harmony with nature and deep interest in the eternal themes: love, beauty and death, as well as his ahistoric convention which brings to mind the work of the great Russian impressionist – Ivan Bunin. The ability to observe

unsurprisingly Russian modernists took particular interest in myths and mythologies. In the Silver Age many dramas were based on mythological plots and such writers as Bryusov, Sologub and Annenskii willingly drew inspiration from mythology. Arguably the most important works in this vein came from the pens of V. Ivanov (*Tantal* in 1905 and *Prometei* in 1915) and Tsvetaeva (*Ariadna* in 1927 and *Fedra* in 1928). Their artistic values lie, however, not merely in depicting the myths or transforming the plots but serve as means of displaying the author’s own vision of the myth changing the originals’ semantics and bringing new meanings.

¹⁷ Quotation from J.F.W. Schelling *Philosophy of Art* (1989 edition:74).

¹⁸ As Kelly and Lovell (2000:15) claim, even such remote trends as V. Ivanov’s mystical anarchism and 1920s Constructivism have in common their desire to unite art and reality, to inscribe upon reality a meaning that can be derived only from artistic form.

and aptly depict various 'arenas' of life (such as a fishing village, army garrison, little provincial town) and the portrayal of the new type of *malen'kii chelovek* – make Grin similar to Aleksandr Kuprin. Grin's works share also some features with the early romantic-revolutionary stories by Gorky. Like his older friend, Grin also endowed some of his early characters with Nietzschean features and so they display an anti-bourgeois and anti-philistine attitude. Finally, it should be noted that an interest in the unknown, incredible, fantastic, and the problem of absurdity make it reasonable to compare Grin with Andreev. The author of 'Krasnyi smekh' was a very characteristic representative of the Silver Age – the epoch of intensive and often eclectic searches, as he combined the realism of Dostoevsky and Tolstoi with strong modernist tendencies. The existential dimension of Andreev's writing, the absence of God and conviction of the helplessness of the human mind as the basis of understanding can all also be found in Grin's work. These above-mentioned similarities were not, however, anything more than sharing certain typical fascinations and literary fashions of the epoch.

The frequent presence of romantic elements in plots (such as loneliness, uncanniness and heroic fight for love) enables one to see Grin as akin also to the Symbolists. He does not, however, share their general views on the meaning of symbol and the theurgic, religious role of the writer-creator. Although Grin admired and appreciated symbolists (and one of their leading representatives, Bal'mont, was Grin's favourite poet), he differed from them fundamentally in his treatment of symbols. As Litwinow (1986:69-70) has rightly put it, Grin's symbolism is 'non-intellectual', and should be decoded only within the literary work in which they are used, bearing only literary features. The Symbolists, on the other hand, used symbols always in relation to various religious, philosophical and cultural connections.

Typical motifs in Russian decadent literature appeared also in Grin's work – we find strong feelings of doubt, apathy and at the same time a longing for the ideal, fascination with death (especially premature and in mysterious circumstances) and interest in various pathologies of mind such as schizophrenia, paranoia and persecution mania. Grin's position was, however, unlike that of contemporary decadent writers and artists, far from prophesying disastrous social and moral cataclysms or a destruction of the 'old world' in an inevitable apocalypse. The leading representatives of this current – Briusov, Sologub, Gippius and Andreev – also paid special attention to the idea of suffering as an intrinsic element of life and, inspired by Nietzsche's treatises, they often regarded human life as an

arena of fight. What links Grin with decadence is also his admiration for music and common use of musical motifs in his works.

The decline of Symbolism around 1910 saw in the years to follow the appearance of a number of avant-garde groups and their countless (and often truly bizarre) manifestoes which can be seen as representative of general revolutionary tendencies.¹⁹ In comparison to the Russian left-wing avant-garde, it should be said that above all it was Grin's vision of the artist that made him so distant from its members. Not only was Grin against dialectic materialism but he could not agree to see himself merely as a master craftsman (LEF), or a collective creator (Proletkul't), or above all an illustrator and propagator of the utilitarian socio-political ideas of the government, so important in the programme of the leading association RAPP.²⁰ Interestingly, the relatively scarce but still noticeable presence of grotesque elements in Grin's oeuvre may be connected with such writers as Bulgakov, Olesha, Ilf and Petrov, Kaverin, Erenburg whose works in 1920s revealed a fantastic-grotesque and eccentric vision of reality.²¹ Apart from these differences, Grin was, unlike such avant-garde writers as Khlebnikov and Mayakovsky, not keen on experimenting with literary form.

Bearing in mind these similarities it is right to say that, although Grin was an outsider and maverick in Russian literature, he was clearly an eclectic writer too, implementing motifs and literary devices typical of various, sometimes even opposing schools and currents. If we add the enormous variety of problems presented in his works, this makes his oeuvre an even more interesting subject of research.

The main body of the thesis, which follows a short biographical note and an overview of editions of Grin's works and the current state of research, consists of three parts built on and named after three essential themes in philosophy: External World, Happiness and Morality.²² Part One, External World, aims to reveal Grin's views on nature and civilisation. Although many observations concerning this issue have already been noted by critics, none of them has attempted to relate these aspects of Grin's worldview to the history of philosophy. In section 1.1 it is argued that the cult of nature, so prominent in Grin's oeuvre, makes it convincing to perceive him as a pantheistic thinker close to

¹⁹ Apart from such well-known currents and groups as expressionism, the Serapion Brothers and Constructivism LEF, there were many short-lived literary phenomena including biocosmism, luminism, Nichevoki, fuism, Form-Librism, and various proletarian literary organisations.

²⁰ Cf. Litwinow (1980:53).

²¹ Cf. Litwinow (1980:64).

²² A comprehensive description of aesthetics in Grin's Weltanschauung would require a separate study and so the problems of art are only occasionally referred to in this dissertation.

Rousseau and Bergson. The proposal is reinforced in section 1.2, which reconstructs the author's unhesitating criticism of urbanisation and industrialisation in the modern age. It is argued that Grin viewed modern man as torn between two environments – the natural environment of flora and fauna, forest, river and ocean, and the artificial world of the city where issues of politics, mental illness and social problems often dominate man's life.

The second part, which focuses on the question of happiness in Grin's Weltanschauung, begins with a brief introduction for eudaimonology – the field of philosophy dealing with this issue. I argue that the concept of happiness, somewhat neglected in the analysis of his literary works, is very important for reconstructing and understanding Grin's world-view. In section 2.2 I sketch a general picture of the concept of happiness as emerging from Grin's works. The detailed discussion on the place of material and immaterial factors which have had an impact on happiness in Grin's Weltanschauung makes up sections 2.3 and 2.4 respectively. Section 2.5 gathers sets of rules expressed explicitly by Grin's protagonists that can be taken as recommendations concerning not only possible ways of achieving happiness but also the means of defending it. The following section extends the discussion to problems of morality (the topic of the last part) by dealing with altruism, issues of virtue and their relation to the concept of happiness in Grin's Weltanschauung. The second part of the thesis concludes with a section gathering together the most important findings, emphasising the numerous links and similarities between Grin and various philosophers from stoicism to his contemporaries, and also stresses the influence of Schopenhauer on the writer.

The final part focuses on the most important element of Grin's Weltanschauung – Morality. Divided into three sections, it examines the author's moral views from three different perspectives. The first of them, described in 3.1, reveals Grin's idea of the world as full of absurdity and his notion of human life as a constant struggle to make existence meaningful. I argue that Grin's treatment of some problems typically associated with existentialism (such as loneliness, freedom, responsibility, suicide) is evoked in a way that anticipates the existentialists of the early twentieth century – Camus, Sartre and Heidegger – and therefore allows us to regard him as an existentialist writer. This line of interpretation has not been proposed in previous critical studies. In the penultimate subsection I propose to apply the term *existential sketch* to describe a special type of literary work that is typical for Grin and that is short in form, with a mono-linear plot focused on presenting crucial problems of human existence. I argue, then, that Grin can be viewed allegorically as a painter who produces a series of sketches striving to create a portrait of an ideal moral hero.

The second perspective on Grin's moral views is described in 3.2, and focuses on his adherence to certain rules of conduct commonly associated with chivalric literature. Since some Grinian protagonists display knight-like values and character traits, I argue that we could talk about a revival of a chivalric ethos in the author's oeuvre. This should certainly be seen as extraordinary for the period of Russian literature to which Grin belongs. Finally, in the last section of the thesis I focus on the characters that embody altruism akin to that of the mythological Titan Prometheus. In this part I evoke once again the central place of the human being and human dignity in Grin's Weltanschauung in order to emphasise that the two elements – Promethean attitude and humanism – characterise those heroes who occupy the pinnacle in the moral hierarchy of Grin's protagonists.

Some of the hypotheses proposed in this thesis are likely to provoke controversy. If this study stimulates its readers to ponder the themes discussed here, it will have accomplished one of its main purposes. There are three main remarks I would like to make here with regard to the analysis and presentation of Grin's works. Firstly, the number of stories taken into consideration is relatively large – it would be impossible fully to reconstruct a writer's worldview if we were to limit the analysis just to a selection of his most widely-acclaimed works. Thus, I have tried to focus on all those which I consider most relevant for reconstructing Grin's Weltanschauung, even if they may not seem to be the most original and artistically-refined ones. Since I argue that poems do not contribute significantly to our understanding of the writer's philosophy, they are only mentioned occasionally. Secondly, in many cases I recall the most important parts of the plots to emphasise the elements of most significance for a problem being analysed and to draw the reader's attention to those chosen components. The number of descriptions depends on the subject of the analysis. Finally, it should be noted that although this thesis is not biographical in character, it will occasionally contain references to facts drawn from Grin's life which appear to have had a strong impact on the formation of his philosophical vision of the world.

I use two editions of Grin's works. The references indicate the edition in Arabic (1 for *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* 1980, and 2 for *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* 1991), followed by the volume number shown in Roman and the page in Arabic, thus for instance, 1.III:34. This thesis generally follows the guidelines of the *MHRA Style Guide*. Transliteration of all Russian names is based on the Library of Congress system. All quotations from literary works are given in the Russian original. Quotations from critical works in Polish have been translated into English.

Current state of research

The most comprehensive Russian edition of Grin's works, published in five volumes in Moscow in 1991, includes all seven of his novels, 213 stories and a selection of 28 poems. There are also, according to Scherr (2007a:72), over 150 stories published during Grin's lifetime that remain uncollected. The total number of Grin's works may then be estimated at over 400 items. It is not my ambition here to present a full description of all editions of his literary output or a full history of Grin criticism. Instead I offer a brief sketch that will present information about the most significant editions of Grin's works (both inside and outside Russia) and about the major critical studies. At the end I give a short overview of those publications that are most important from the point of view of Grin's Weltanschauung.²³

Grin's literary work spans the period from 1906 to 1932. He published mainly in periodicals such as *Birzhevye vedomosti*, *Tovarishch*, *Russkaia mysl'*, *Petrogradskii listok*, *Petrogradskoe ekho*, *Chestnoe slovo* and *Krasnyi militsioner*, but he also managed to publish several collections of stories (the first one being *Shapka-nevidimka* in 1908). Although he was well-recognised in the early and mid-1920s, it is a fact that owing to increasing repressions brought about by the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) after 1925, he became gradually marginalised and died a virtually forgotten writer. The Stalin period saw even stronger and more aggressive official criticism of Grin's fiction. It was only at the end of the 1950s that he reappeared on the rising tide of ideological myth-making. As Scherr aptly notices (2007a:72), the reasons for this rehabilitation are easy to comprehend – Grin's writing lacks a readily-identifiable ideology and therefore attracted far-fetched interpretations. He began to be used as a propaganda writer and several myths were built around his work, presenting him as a realist writer devoted to revolution, as loyal towards the regime and even as predominantly a children's writer (cf. Oryshchuk 2006: 57-69). This is how his fiction made its way into bookshops, libraries and schools. In 1965 a six-volume edition of his works was published in Moscow. An extended reissue appeared fifteen years later to satisfy the growing public demand. Together the two editions contain 202 items. The most recent multi-volume Russian edition of Grin's works was published in 1991, as mentioned above.

²³ Detailed information about these problems may be found in the study by Litwinow published in 1986, in the doctoral dissertation 'Official Representation of the Works by Alexander Grin in the USSR' by Oryshchuk written in 2006, as well as in the bibliography of biographical, website and critical sources on Grin's work ranging from 1970 to 2005 prepared by Scherr (2007b).

Outside Russia, as Litwinow notes (1986:5), Grin was already known in the 1920s in Germany. In Poland between 1959 and 1975 several editions of three selections of works were published, as well as some of Grin's novels. The first story translated into English was 'Krysolov', which appeared in *New Russian Stories* (1953), and 'Slovookhotlivyi domovoi', which was included in an anthology of Russian literature issued in 1960. Separate stories were also published between 1964 and 1980 in various journals. The most famous of Grin's works – the novel *Alye parusa* – appeared on the market in the United States in 1967. Eleven years later Moscow Progress Publishers prepared the collection of stories *The Seeker of Adventure* translated by Glagoleva, Luker and Scherr (which was then reissued in 1989). Finally, in 1987, Luker prepared a translation of a collection of shorter works published as *Selected Short Stories*, which is the last edition of Grin's work that has appeared in English.

The first comprehensive critical analysis of Grin's work – *Romanticheskii mir A. Grina* – came in 1969 from the pen of Kovskii. At that point very few studies of Grin avoided reinforcing an ideological mythology about him and none of them could be regarded as significant (Oryshchuk 2006:20). The next important publication, Mikhailova's *A. Grin. Zhizn', lichnost', tvorchestvo*, appeared in 1972.²⁴ This book was aimed at a general rather than academic audience and depicted Grin as a romantic and idealist. Its popularity led the publisher to reissue it in an extended and revised edition in 1980. Another significant monograph that appeared in the 1970s was Kharchev's *Poeziia i proza Grina* (1975), which focused on an analysis of Grin's style and literary achievements.

The next period of fruitful research began in 1980 when the 100th anniversary of Grin's birth was celebrated in the Soviet Union. Apart from many articles, the most important studies written at that time were those by Medvedeva ('Mifologicheskaiia obraznost' v romane A.S. Grina "Blistaiushchii mir"', 1984), Pervova ('Alye parusa v serom tumane', 1988) and Dunaevskaia (*Etiko-esteticheskaiia kontseptsiiia cheloveka i prirody v tvorchestve Grina*, 1988). Although studies that were rooted in the Soviet ideological currents of interpretation were still appearing in the 1990s,²⁵ they were overshadowed by more valuable ones such as the deeply insightful book by Ivanitskaia – *Mir i chelovek v tvorchestve A.S. Grina* (1993). A year later Grin's second wife managed to publish a full version of her *Vospominaniia ob Aleksandre Grine*. The most recent selection

²⁴ In the same year Sandler edited *Vospominaniia ob Aleksandre Grine* – an extensive collection of memoirs, letters and archival information which has served many critics as a basic source of information on Grin's life.

²⁵ Among authors of such papers we find still active Kobzev, who has attempted to impose his anti-capitalistic reading of Grin since 1971.

of critical papers on Grin and his oeuvre was published in 2005 as the volume *Vzgliad iz XXI veka: K 125-letiiu Aleksandra Grina: Sbornik statei po materialam Mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii 'Aktual'nye problemy sovremennoi filologii'*, edited by Zagvozdskina.

Outside Russia, the most distinguished and influential expert on Grin and his oeuvre is without doubt Nicholas Luker, his English-language translator. Luker has been publishing on the writer in various international journals devoted to Russian literature since 1973 and he is also the author of two biographical sketches – *Alexander Grin* (1973) and *Alexander Grin: The Forgotten Visionary* (1980). In 2007, together with Barry Scherr, Luker published a collection of essays devoted to Grin's fiction, *The Shining World. Exploring Aleksandr Grin's Grinlandia*. The Polish researcher Jerzy Litwinow has published fairly extensively on Grin since 1977. His most important study, *Proza Aleksandra Grina*, appeared in 1986. Finally, in France from the early 1970s Paul Castaing has contributed to the understanding of Grin in a series of articles. His major study *L'évolution littéraire d'Aleksandr Grin; de la décadence à l'idéalisme* (1997) was the first French monograph on the writer and followed his earlier translation of 'Krysolov' (published in 1989).

The problem of reconstructing Grin's Weltanschauung has not been addressed in detail by critics so far. Similarly, Grin's links with the European philosophical tradition have been virtually absent from critical studies. One researcher who explicitly mentions Grin's connection with philosophy is Litwinow (1986). He associates Grin's philosophical views with Rousseau and points out that the latter's criticism of civilisation and the cult of nature had a strong impact on Grin's convictions. In his explanations of Grin's pessimism and hyper-individualism he draws analogies with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. He also stresses how the Bergsonian notions of *élan vital* and biologism are present in Grin's Weltanschauung. Apart from Litwinow's work, other critical studies seem only to touch upon philosophy by analysing or mentioning some repetitive aspects of Grin's works that might be viewed as elements of the author's Weltanschauung, as will be discussed below.

The contrast of nature with the urban environment, which, as I will attempt to prove, is of vital significance for reconstructing Grin's philosophy, has been described in detail by Iraida Dunaevskaia (1988). Dunaevskaia draws on the topoi of city, forest and ocean as she tries to interpret the general meaning of Grinlandia²⁶ and the *nesbyvsheesia*²⁷

²⁶ *Grinlandia* is a term used in literary criticism to denote the imaginary land depicted in a number of Grin's works (the most detailed image of it can be found in *Doroga nikuda*). On the characteristics of Grinlandia, its development in Grin's oeuvre, see Luker 2007.

²⁷ *Nesbyvsheesia* (the Unrealised) is one of the key concepts used in Grin's fiction by the author himself. It refers to the irrational phenomenon that enables main characters to transform their life and reality thanks to

in Grin's oeuvre. She also identifies the spiritual crisis of modern man and stresses the importance of the presence of evil in Grin's oeuvre: 'Мысль о зле, которое является одной из причин раздвоения гриновского героя, развивается на протяжении всего творчества Грина' (Dunaevskaia 1988: 47). Similarly, Kovskii (1969), Mikhailova (1980) and Ivanitskaia (1993) describe Grin's typical hero as struggling to achieve happiness and seeking the meaning of life in a hostile world full of absurdity and moral dilemmas. At the same time Kovskii (1969:150) sees Grin as an author who believes that people are good by nature. He considers this to be the writer's *a priori* axiom, and identifies morality as the ultimate element of Grin's Weltanschauung: 'все гриновские бродяги, искатели приключений, моряки, контрабандисты, охотники, ученые, путешественники, литераторы действительно по натуре - игроки, но играют они в особую игру, своего рода этическое соревнование, где победа всегда присуждается мужеству, верности, чести, благородству' (Kovskii 1969:114). The same thing has been pointed out by Luker (1980:52).

Another interesting observation, made originally by Kovskii (1969) and then taken up by Mikhailova (1980), concerns the evolution of Grin's hero, who develops from being an egoist, an escapist and a hyper-individualist in the early works to an altruist who incarnates moral beauty – a dominant element in Grin's philosophy – in the later stories. The question of religious views in Grin's oeuvre has been explored by Litwinow, who argues in his article 'Religioznye motivy v tvorchestve Aleksandra Grina' (1993) that the writer avoided religion in his work almost completely, although he occasionally uses certain biblical symbols. Finally, in an attempt to put together all those elements noticed by these critics and that may be seen as building-blocks of Grin's Weltanschauung, it should be mentioned that, although almost all researchers have noticed the significance of happiness in his prose, none has made it the subject of detailed enquiry.

spiritual strength and ability to follow dreams. For an insightful analysis of this concept, see Dunaevskaia 1980: 130-137.

PART ONE

THE EXTERNAL WORLD

The two elements that will be the focus of this part – nature and civilisation – can be viewed as aspects of Grin’s Weltanschauung in their own right, as well as a background for the analysis of other building blocks of the writer’s philosophical views, i.e. the problems of happiness and morality that will be dealt with in the next parts of the thesis. In this first section I will briefly discuss the place of nature in philosophical enquiry and in some literary works, and then describe important components of the natural environment in Grin’s oeuvre. The second section will analyse the vision of civilisation and the urban environment in the author’s fiction and will be preceded by a short overview of the perception of these issues in philosophy and literature also.

1.1 Nature

From the earliest written sources which give evidence of human consciousness, man has attempted to fix his vision of nature and tried to display his individual understanding of the external world, the world beyond his own mind. The vision took shape most evidently in the ancients’ philosophy of nature which arose in Greece around the 6th century BC and developed dynamically for some two centuries. Greek pre-Socratic philosophers such as members of the Milesian School (Thales of Miletus, Anaximander and Anaximeneus of Miletus) in the 6th century BC, the Eleatics (Parmenides, Zeno of Elea, Melissus of Samos, Xenophanes) in the 5th century BC and others like Heraclitus (ca. 535–475), Empedocles (ca. 490–430), Anaxagoras (500–428) and Democritus (ca. 460–ca 370) were all deeply interested in studying nature in relation to the essential problems of human existence. They sought to find answers to the perennial question of the origin of the world and at the same time tried to reveal the real character of man and his destiny. Closely connected with religion and metaphysics were their searches for harmony and the meaning of existence, since they described not only the physical aspects of matter, but also the place which mankind occupies in the living world.

The philosophy of nature was subsequently supplanted by the elaborate systems built by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in the 5th century BC. Since then, although still present in the history of modern thought, this area of enquiry has remained quite dormant. Nowadays it is no longer of primary interest to scholars, as other sciences such as molecular biology and

astrophysics have appropriated many of its problems. Thus, the interest of academic philosophers has moved towards philosophy of mind, cognition and phenomena.

In modern philosophical enquiry, nature has been a special focus of interest for a number of philosophers who believed in the unity of the world and God; they became known as pantheists. From a historical perspective, Spinoza is the most important representative of the pantheistic current. It is from his *Ethics* that the identification of God and the world stems. His views, labelled as Spinozism, became an important strand in the development of Romanticism. Other prominent thinkers who preached pantheism were German idealists such as Schelling and Hegel in the nineteenth century, and Tillich in the twentieth. The idea of the unity of the entire creation is present also in contemporary philosophy where we often come across terms coined by pantheistic thinkers such as Wordsworth's *living nature*, Bergson's *intuitive penetration of objects* and Whitehead's *panpsychism*.¹

As far as literature is concerned, the perennial problems of the nature of the living world have been continuously and heavily explored since ancient times and were examined profoundly in the works of Romantic writers such as Goethe, Byron, Wordsworth, Lermontov and F. Cooper. After the Romantic wave, the topic continued to attract the attention of writers such as Jack London, H. James, Zola, Emerson, Whitman and Lawrence.

From the works of Grin's contemporaries also – like Reymont's *Peasants* (1904-09) and Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil* (1917) – it may be clearly seen that the search for an understanding of the links between man and nature on a biological level has not stopped. By showing their heroes in close relationship with animals and the soil, these two writers emphasised how a correct mental balance is essential for developing a sympathetic attitude to the living world. A similar worldview is to be found in the fiction of their contemporary – Aleksandr Grin.

Grin treats nature with special esteem, and his descriptions of it nearly always possess profound significance for the overall meaning of any given work. Both Kovskii (1969) and Litwinow (1986) point out explicitly on many occasions the role played by the pantheistic cult of nature in Grin's oeuvre. Other works that have also contributed to the discussion of the place of nature in Grin's work are those by Dunaevskaia (1988) and Ivanitskaia (1993). Arguably, it is Ivanitskaia's book *Mir i chelovek v tvorchestve A.S. Grina* (1993) that casts an

¹ Cf. Levine 2007.

entirely new light on the question of nature in Grin's philosophy, however. Her book gives an analysis of the elements of landscape and man-nature relationships in his work, which, as we will see, can be transferred to the general scheme of his *Weltanschauung*.

From the very beginning of his literary career Grin, an idealist and dreamer, depicted scenes where his characters 'immerse' themselves into the world of nature. The heroes, usually alone and estranged, are devoid of external support and are searching for any kind of orientation for their path through life. In 'Karantin', 'Ostrov Reno', 'Tragediia ploskogor'ia Suan', 'Lunnyi svet', 'Otshel'nik Vinogradnogo Pika' and 'Taina lesa' we find various descriptions which, though different in form and strength of expression, clearly illustrate Grin's fascination with the beauty of nature. His tendency to extol nature is displayed fully in 'Tragediia ploskogor'ia Suan'. Here the two main characters, Ting and Assunta, lead a peaceful life in an exotic landscape far away from cities and the bustle of civilisation. The happy couple enjoy to the utmost the teeming life and beauty of the mysterious jungle which surrounds them. The long descriptions of flora woven into the plot point to the power of nature and its superiority over men. Ting and Assunta find a paradise there because they have managed fully to adjust to the environment and treat the jungle with humble respect.

The story 'Ostrov Reno', which Luker (2007:208) quite rightly describes as 'Grinlandia in embryo', provides one of the most refined descriptions of the beauty of nature to be found in Grin's entire oeuvre. Tart, the main character, is a deserter from a navy ship and seeks refuge on an uninhabited island. The island provides him with a kind of asylum and separates him from the horror of the modern social world which alienates him. The breathtaking splendour of rare, colourful animals and plants surrounded by the ocean has an enormous effect on Tart. If read allegorically, this important story may be interpreted as a depiction of Mother Nature accepting the exhausted wanderer and providing him with the solitude for which he has longed.

A similar theme is to be found in the short work 'Lunnyi svet', in which the hero, Penkal', a solitary blacksmith, acquires the habit of going on night walks in the forest. This eccentric behaviour arouses the interest of his fellow-villagers who begin to gossip about him. They take him for a *чудаκ* and speculate on the purpose of his lonely strolls. Several of his neighbours decide to follow him and they find him sitting by a bonfire, contemplating the stars and the beauty of nature. Penkal's extraordinary habit seems to stem from his innate need to experience a deep link with nature. 'Taina lesa', in turn, is the story of a factory worker, a

husband and the father of two children, who has become a degenerate drunkard who wastes his pay every week on drink. Devastated by pangs of conscience, and seeing no way to escape his disgusting weakness, he thinks of committing suicide. Late one evening, he stops on his way home from the factory and lies down on the grass. At this point, Nature intervenes to save his life, in a way that is significant for Grin's philosophy. The inexplicable mystery of the forest makes the protagonist feel his connection with the living world so strongly that he gives up the idea of suicide and wakes the next morning to find himself still alive, and in fact spiritually reborn.

In all these works Grin reveals, as Litwinow (1986:146-55) has aptly noted, a tendency to present nature as *sacred*; it brings solitude and comfort on the one hand and fascinating richness of sensations and the amazing variety of living forms on the other. The critic recognises in Grin's work signs of monism and sensualism, features which are often associated with Tolstoism and Rousseauism (Litwinow 1986:155-65).

At this point it is worth mentioning that Litwinow's study on religion in Grin's oeuvre contains apt remarks on the lack of clearly-defined religious beliefs. However, there can also be no doubt that we can still trace deeply religious characters in Grin's works. One of them is Gran'ka, the hero of 'Gran'ka i ego syn', who believes in his own way in divine power. He is described in the story as 'настоящий язычник', and the elements of animism in his faith make him close to Shintoism: 'наряду с крестами, образами и колокольнями видел еще множество богов темных и светлых' (I.III:454). It is clearly nature that occupies the most important position in his beliefs, as 'Восход солнца занимал в его религиозном ощущении такое же место, как Иисус Христос, а лес, полный озер, был воплощением дьявольского и божественного начала.'

The ability to perceive the beauty of nature is for Grin the basis of the good life; and for some highly-sensitive characters endowed with artistic talent, nature provides the starting point for an artistic journey – a journey which embraces the gifts of the earth and their transformation in works of art (cf. Mikhailova 1980:136). As for the more specific components of the natural world, at least a few of them, such as jungle, forest, river, ocean and the kingdom of animals, require to be looked at closely since they play a special role in Grin's depiction of the natural world and the human/nature relationship and, therefore, also in his Weltanschauung.

As Mikhailova has noted (1980), exotic landscapes (such as exotic islands and jungles) in Grin's earlier works are gradually replaced in his later stories by more European-like forests. The forest becomes more important because it appeared to Grin as more friendly to human beings and certainly less exotic for the Russian (or European) reader. Possibly, he saw the forest as appropriate for explaining the importance of the man/nature relationship, since it allowed him to root his stories more firmly in his own contemporary socio-cultural context. Regardless of whether the action takes place in a jungle or in a forest, the characters depicted as positive are always shown as endowed with the ability to appreciate the beauty and harmony of nature. For Tart from the aforementioned 'Ostrov Reno', the jungle is a much more friendly environment than anything else he knows. He finds there what he has wished for – a quiet life away from hostile society, where he can enjoy the beauty of nature.

Other characters who come from the civilised world and happen to find themselves in exotic places are to be seen as especially close to nature, sometimes even closer than the aboriginal inhabitants.² This kind of scenario can be found in 'Ptitsa Kam-Bu' and 'Tabu'. In the first story we read about two sailors captured by an unknown tribe and appreciating the beauty of the flora and fauna in the virgin jungle. The savages, on the other hand, are depicted unsympathetically as unfriendly and superstitious with their cult of a wonderful bird, which is thought to be an evil ghost. Even though the aboriginal inhabitants of the jungle are evil, the wonderful creations of nature around them – flowers, trees and birds – remain unambiguously beautiful. Similarly, in the story 'Tabu' we come across a cruel tribe of cannibals and their prisoner – a traveller Agrippa who, despite his harsh situation, goes into rapture admiring the jungle:

я любовался царством первосказанной красоты, любимейшей матери людей - природы, исходящей лучезарными улыбками океана, серебристыми, лиловыми оттенками берегов, дивной прозрачностью воды, беспричинной, полной радости света, обмывающего в зеленоватой глубине воды плавники дельфинов, раковины, орхидеи и камни, отполированные столетиями столетий. (1. II: 11)

² Grin's fascination with the life of primitive tribes in the early period of his work is clear. Litwinow (1986) is right to see in this aspect of his fiction numerous traces of the writer's fascination with the ideas of Rousseau and other followers of the cult of nature.

Unsurprisingly, it is Agrippa who conquers the savages by sending them far out into the ocean in broken boats. All the inhumane tribesmen die, while the one who was spiritually linked with nature in a very specific way survives.

In the same thematic group we find ‘Otravlennyi ostrov’, which ranks arguably among Grin’s best works. This story details a series of extraordinary events on a remote exotic island where once a tribe enjoyed an idyllic life far from civilisation. One day, however, terrible collective dreams began to torment its inhabitants and, oppressed by fear and anxiety, they went mad and committed mass suicide. At the root of their nightmares was modern civilisation itself, which managed in some mysterious way to inflict upon the earthly paradise terrible visions of violence, death and war. Their dreams, which seemed almost real in the palpability of their horror, came as a complete shock to the tribesmen. Grin directly points to the fact that the image of war alone can have a fatal impact on the human psyche. On a larger scale, it is possible to detect the story’s more symbolic meaning: that the world in its entirety has been transformed unrecognisably; there is no safe place under the sun and evil spreads even where the bombers do not fly, yet nature, somehow remains intact.

Moving from the jungle to the forest, Grin does not change his mode of presenting positive characters as closely linked with nature. We can refer to two representative works here – ‘Slovookhotlivyi domovoi’ and *Alye parusa*. The main character in the first story is Anni, who belongs firmly to Grin’s gallery of seraphic women characters. She is able to hear and see things connected with the mysterious life of the forest which would normally be beyond human perception: ‘Она пыталась ловить руками рыбу в ручье, стучала по большому камню, что на перекрестке, слушая, как он, долго затихая, звенит, и смеялась, если видела на стене желтого зайчика’ (1.IV:159). She represents ideal possibilities of establishing contact with nature, and fittingly she is compared to a little wild flower. In *Alye parusa*, also, the two unambiguously positive protagonists, Grey and Assol, display the ability to live in contact with nature in a way that differentiates them from the rest of the characters. Assol is related to the elements of forest and river, and Grey to the element of ocean. Following this line of argument, the forest may be associated with a peaceful and delicate feminine spirit, while the ocean reflects masculine features.

Dunaievskaja (1988:103) believes that for Grin the topos of ocean is even more significant than the topos of forest, since the former is often depicted as the space

where a spiritual challenge to the protagonist is to take place. This is the case, for example, in ‘Proliv bur’, ‘Zolotaia tsep’ and ‘Nozh i karandash’.³ Not only does the ocean, however, represent the element of water in Grin’s works; the river also plays an important role in his fiction. We find it in several stories, always with important symbolic implications for the protagonist. Such is the case in ‘Sto verst po reke’ or ‘Prodavets shchast’ia’. Both works depict a similar series of events where the hero changes inwardly as he builds a relationship with a girl he chances to meet. The river serves as a backdrop to the action, but it also symbolises the natural progress of the human spirit, which attempts to find a way out of melancholy and misanthropy through identification with nature. Grin also employs the topos of the river in his short fairy-tale ‘Struia’. The plot concerns a blind fish which is freed from a dark cave and miraculously cured. As it regains its sight, it quickly realises the miracle of life precisely through the beauty and harmony of the other living creatures and plants that surround it.

The final element of the natural world to play a significant role in Grin’s perception of nature is the kingdom of animals. His work provides many examples of the terrible cruelty which man can show towards animals. The protagonist of the naturalistic story ‘Okno v lesu’ is a hunter, a man of nature who, wandering alone in the forest at night, happens upon a tiny house. As he gazes quietly in through the window, he sees two men torturing a little bird with a pin. Half-dead, the bird tries to hop away, but to no avail. These men behave in a worse manner than any predators as they inflict pain on the victim merely for their own satisfaction. The hunter cannot bear to view this sadistic spectacle any longer and fires at the oppressors. The window of the title separates two worlds: one, the truly inhumane and sadistic world of the household owner, and the second – that of the man of nature.

In the little story ‘Lebed’ the eponymous bird, often regarded as the most beautiful of all creatures, becomes the object of the main character’s mercenary thoughts. The petty shopkeeper Sidor plans to kill the bird and sell it for its meat and feathers. He reveals this cruel idea to a couple of strangers enjoying a relaxing time at the lake where the swan is swimming peacefully. In Sidor’s opinion the bird is nothing more than an attractive object with no intrinsic rights or value of its own. The shopkeeper cannot understand the couple’s delight at the sight of the swan: ‘Что они там особенного увидели?’, ‘Тьфу!’ (1.III:389), he exclaims.

³ All these works, dealing with the moral testing of Grin’s characters, will be discussed in Part Three.

Yet another of the evil characters in Grin's oeuvre is thus unable to understand and appreciate nature.

Grin reveals his negative opinion of hunting once again in the story 'Medvezh'ia okhota'. Kenin, the main character, decides to take part in a bear hunt in order to win the competition and give the trophy to Brattseva, the woman he loves. As soon as she receives the gift, she unhesitatingly sells it on to another hunter. At this point Kenin realises that his beloved is not what he thought – she cares only for material benefit and feels no pity for the bear. The hunter, by contrast, now clearly sympathises with the dead king of the forest and bitterly regrets his deed. The idle pursuit by men of defenceless animals acts in Grin's work as a symbol of modern society's attitude towards nature. The hunters go to hunt and carouse rather than simply enjoy being in the forest. They slaughter innocent animals in order to alleviate their boredom. The hunting itself is not at stake here, but man's brutal conquest of the natural environment.

In Grin's work it is not only adults, however, who hurt animals and display an emotionless attitude to nature. In the story 'Igrushka', which takes place at a time of revolution, two schoolboys decide to execute a cat by hanging it. It is only the accidental appearance of the narrator on the scene that stops their plan and saves the animal. As the former suggests, the boys have been infected by the spirit of the times in which they live – by seeing real executions and bloody clashes between adults who openly fight and kill one another. This misdeed cannot, then, be seen as an argument against the innate purity of human nature, for the boys are merely copying what has come to seem normal to them.

It can be noted that for Grin knowledge and intelligence do not prevent people from inflicting suffering on innocent animals. Even a thoroughly-educated man can kill an animal without mercy, as is shown in 'L'vinyi udar'. The story opens with a discussion between two philosophers in which the materialist turns out to be superior to his opponent, who is an idealist. The latter decides to carry out an experiment to prove the existence of an immaterial soul. He buys a lion from a zoo and transfers it to an old building in which he kills the animal to prove his convictions. The idealistic philosopher turns out to be a merciless killer, though the story does not end there. Unexpectedly, the 'soul' of the lion rises from the battered body and hits out at the killer with 'real' claws, killing him in seconds. The message conveyed by the story is clear: it is not important what philosophy one preaches or how well-educated one becomes; what really matters is one's true, proven attitude towards others, including animals.

A part from these pessimistic views on man's attitude to animals, there are a few examples in Grin's work of people treating animals with solicitude or regarding them as living creatures which deserve sympathy and care. One such optimistic story is the autobiographical tale 'Iastreb', where Grin depicts in detail his own deep affection for a hawk called Gul'. The writer not only cares very kindly for the creature, but also demonstrates how rewarding such a relationship can be for both man and bird. In another story, 'Okhota na khuligana', we encounter a brave old hunter who pursues a dangerous killer with the help of his hunting dog. Here Grin presents us again with a convincing account of a friendship between human and animal. It is thanks to the dog's excellent skills and courage that they manage to find the villain's hideout and prevent him from committing further crimes.⁴

An instructive example of how Grin sees the relationship between man and animals can be found in the story 'Grif'. In the city centre a lion has escaped from a zoo, causing general panic. It enters a tenement building and randomly chooses a flat in which to shelter from the noise of the city. In one of the rooms a small baby boy is sitting by himself. The defenceless child and the powerful predator have no fear of or enmity for each other. They gaze at one another in amazement and only the intervention of the boy's mother prevents the two from developing a closer relationship. In 'Ptitsa Kam-Bu', already mentioned, two sailors praise the eponymous bird for its help in saving their lives. This fantastically beautiful creature, believed by the superstitious tribe to be an evil but powerful ghost, distracts the tribesmen's attention long enough for the sailors to escape unnoticed. In the final sentence of the story, one of the protagonists utters words of gratitude to his bird-saviour: 'Милая спасительница Кам-Бу, сверкай бесполезно!' (1.III:379). The bird may be seen as a symbol for the whole of nature, which in Grin's fiction is always on the side of the righteous and saves the lives of the innocent from the cruelty of evil men.

An example of a supernatural force which interacts with people in order to defend the morally right can also be found in the story 'Belyi shar', which depicts the scene of an argument. On a stormy night interrupted by peals of thunder the merciless creditor, Santus, is insisting that his poverty-stricken debtor repay the money. Suddenly a shining white ball enters

⁴ The figure of the true hunter in Grin's oeuvre almost always belongs to the special sort of people who can be seen as men of nature. They hunt, but they also care for animals and display deep respect for all living creatures. For Grinian hunters the forest remains a form of asylum (as in 'Lesnaia drama') or a way of living a life full of adventure and self-imposed challenges (as in 'Zurbaganskii strelok').

the room through an open window. It flies low for a few seconds and then stops very close to the creditor, which frightens him tremendously. Now everything changes: Santus becomes absolutely submissive and immediately postpones the date of repayment. As soon as he signs off a document, the spherical lightning withdraws from the room.⁵

Mother Nature is also shown as taking justice into her own hands in the story ‘Gatt, Vitt and Redott’, which concerns the adventures of three gold-prospectors. All of them receive an extraordinary gift from a mysterious Hindu, namely a seed that gives them titanic strength. One of the men, Vitt, uses his supernatural power to hunt and kill animals. He does this not out of any need to survive or help other people, but simply because power turns him mad, as he imagines himself superior to the living world he inhabits. But his self-satisfaction and impunity do not last forever. One day, while he is sitting at a bonfire, a snake falls from a tree and gives him a fatal bite. The one who has inflicted so much unnecessary violence and death dies, killed by a mere reptile. Nature punishes the cruel son of the earth for the sin of violating the natural law of life: a man is allowed to kill creatures only in order not to starve and for no other reason. Similarly, in the last episode of ‘Na oblachnom beregu’, a bear kills a man called Gog, who is about to steal a necklace from a poor couple. Earlier the same day Gog had been out hunting the bear. The animal kills the man not only to mete out justice, but also to prevent the theft. In all three stories described above Nature’s unexpected intervention is used as a *deus ex machina*.

There can be no doubt, therefore, that in Grin’s fiction nature occupies a very important place. In all the works described here we notice the author’s humble respect for the beauty as well as the power of nature. Be it a tropical jungle or a European forest, a little creek or a boundless ocean, a domesticated hawk or a mighty bear – Grin depicts them all with equal reverence. Moreover, he sees man as an element of creation which is neither superior nor inferior to any other part of it. I argue, therefore, that the writer’s views can be seen as a form of pantheism.

Although overt religious references are rare, this pantheistic reverence has almost sacred characteristics. The semi-religious quality of nature and the fact that the most important positive characters in Grin’s oeuvre enjoy contact with nature and discover its beauty reveals

⁵ It is noteworthy that spherical lightning appears also in Olesha’s novel ‘Zavist’ and Mikhalkov’s movie ‘Utomlennye solntsem’.

similarities between the author's views and those expressed by St Francis of Assisi in the 13th century.⁶ Furthermore, through its presentation of the man-nature relationship and the conviction that everything is logical and takes place according to unknown principles that lie beyond our comprehension, Grin's Weltanschauung also resembles that of the ancient natural philosophers and Stoics.

In many cases we can also discover striking similarities with Rousseauism.⁷ Like the French philosopher, Grin preaches the exploration and re-discovery of nature. Rousseau's words: 'I feel an indescribable ecstasy and delirium in melting, as it were, into the system of beings, in identifying myself with the whole of nature' (cited in Leigh Selig 2004:134), could also have been uttered by most Grinian men of nature who also seem to immerse themselves into the vast richness of the fauna and flora of nature.

It would be a mistake, however, to say that nature plays only a passive role in the world of Grin's fiction, or only the object of admiration a good mother always ready to open her arms to the lost children of civilisation. In Grin's prose, nature often seems to be depicted as a kind of spirit which governs the earth and punishes villains who violate her laws. In some ways this complex man-nature relationship resembles the powerful image of Nature presented in Russian folklore, where she is seen to mete out justice to the bad characters and reward the good (cf. Propp 1927).

⁶ Apart from its key religious elements (i.e. brotherhood love, living in poverty, imitation of Christ, rejection of the ascetic way of life, necessity to help those in need) Franciscanism rested upon the belief that the world of nature is essentially the emanation of God's love to men and as such it should be affirmed and admired. People should thus love one another as well as animals and display reverence for all living beings, thereby praising the whole divine creation. In terms of eudaimonology, Franciscanism preached that mere communing with nature makes one happy either directly, or indirectly, as it brings man closer to God.

⁷ Completely in the spirit of Rousseau is Grin's interest in the life of savage tribes. Works such as 'Otravlennyi ostrov' and 'Plemia Siurg' represent the author's search for the lost virtues which may be found in exotic societies unspoiled by the Western world, innocent in their primitive pagan cults –although, as has been shown, not all Grin's tribes are depicted as morally impeccable.

1.2 Civilisation

Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

In Grin's oeuvre modern civilisation and the urban environment are almost always depicted in a negative manner, a certain trap into which modern man falls, and as such are contrasted with nature. Dunaevskaia (1988:55) rightly argues that Grin presents the city as an artificial world, a confined space in which man becomes separated from beauty and, consequently, loses his own nature. Ivanitskaia (1993) and Iablokov (2005) also emphasise that living in the city, with consequential separation from nature, tears man apart inwardly. I will focus here on those elements that are directly linked with the phenomena of the city and civilisation: technology, industry, society, politics, war, mental conditions and addictions. I will begin with a general overview of Grin's criticism of the urban environment and finish by drawing attention to Grin's remedy for the maladies of modern man – that is to say, a return to nature.

Before moving to specific discussion of Grin's oeuvre, I shall devote some space to the problem of anti-urbanism in philosophy and literature before and during the author's lifetime. Even prior to the modern industrial age many claimed that the development of cities had a negative impact on the culture and spiritual life of mankind. In *Candide*, for example, Voltaire urged his readers to abandon despicable city life and to withdraw to the countryside (to 'cultivate one's garden'), celebrating privacy in a self-imposed, anti-urban haven. The anti-urban attitude became fully developed in the works of Rousseau (*Émile*, *The Social Contract*, *Confessions* and *Considerations on the Government of Poland*), who argued that social inequality was the result of the human race's primeval decline from a natural state of equality in harmony with nature (cf. Dahrendorf 1968:151-178). The philosopher also extolled rebuilding relations with the world of nature and we may say that the Romantic movement in philosophy began with his powerful rejection of civilisation.⁸

⁸ Cf. Dent (1992:46-9).

In the eighteenth century the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder expressed discontent with the negative impact of civilisation on human beings. He admired the Middle Ages as a time of imagination and feeling, of rural simplicity and peace, and viewed it in contrast to post-Reformation Europe with its worship of the state, wealth, artificiality and vice.⁹

In literature, the anti-civilisation view appeared relatively early. R. W. Emerson, the great prophet of the romantic generation, argued in *The Course of Empire and Nature* (1836) that it is in Nature that man finds all he knows and all he needs to know. Anti-civilisation ideas blossomed in the work of Thoreau (cf. popular extolling of country life in his *Walden*), Wordsworth ('The Prospectus', 'The world is too much with us'), Keats ('Ode to a Nightingale') and Thomas Jefferson (in his numerous political speeches and letters). The motif of anti-urbanism would return later also in the works of such thinkers as Comte, Le Play and Durkheim. Significant criticism of modern society as focused on consumption and production has also been prominent in the 20th century, namely in the influential works of Brentano, Weber, Tawney and Fromm.

The urban theme has played a significant role from the beginning of 19th century in Russian literature too, when it was introduced in the works of Pushkin: 'Pikovaia dama' (1833) and 'Mednyi vsadnik' (1833).¹⁰ Gogol' and Dostoevsky's powerful depictions of gloomy Petersburg presented the city as false, corrupting, and, as in the works of their great predecessor, capable of destroying people's minds. A similar aversion to urban life is visible in the discomfort felt by Levin during his visit to Moscow in Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina*, or in the provincial towns in Chekhov's stories and plays, which embody entrapment and boredom.

The darker aspects of life in the city occupied an important position also in Russian modernist literature just before the Revolution of 1917, as well as during the Soviet period. The urban environments in Belyi's *Petersburg* (1916) and Pil'niak's *Mashiny i volki* (1925) were unambiguously depicted as chaotic, confusing and even hostile. Right at the beginning of the century Briusov turned his attention to the capitalistic city in his famous collection *Urbi et orbi* (1903). The poet expressed his scepticism and anxiety about the condition of modern society most convincingly in such poems as 'Kamenshchik' and 'Kon' bled'. Not surprisingly,

⁹ Cf. Durant (1967b:786).

¹⁰ It was in Pushkin's 'Pikovaia dama' that the gloomy and baleful image of Petersburg was created for the first time in Russian literature. Pushkin's work depicted the capital as having an essentially negative influence on people – ruining their dreams as well as their lives.

during Grin's lifetime the Bolsheviks' ideological commitment to industrialisation and urbanisation left a major imprint on literature and gave rise to works praising urban life such as Alexander Bogdanov's utopian novel *Krasnaia zvezda* (1908).

A representative example of Grin's criticism of the modern city and civilisation can be found in the longer story 'Seryi avtomobil'. Its protagonist, Ebenezer Sidney, although clearly mentally unstable (displaying some symptoms of schizophrenia), criticises harshly the city and urban society. As Dunaevskaia (1988:56-57) has noticed, Sidney targets the atmosphere of decadence, unspirituality (embodied to the utmost in his beloved girl) and vulgarity of the interpersonal relations of everyday city life. He discovers that so far his life has been full of deception and falsehood. In his opinion modern man is so dominated by technical innovation and industrialisation that he has become an object, a mechanism suppressed ultimately by his own product – the car. Sidney hates society for creating the illusion of normal life, whereas in actual fact the urban environment resembles an ants' nest. Grin seems to foresee the development of industrial society with its contempt for nature and fascination with lifeless but mechanical products.

Grin's views on the harmful effects of city life can be also found in works such as 'Krysolov', 'Rasskaz Birka', 'Zurbaganskii strelok', 'Ona', 'Novyi tsirk', 'Veselaia babochka', *Blistaiushchii mir* and 'Iva'. All these works emphasise the artificial character of the city. The urban environment is for Grin a sphere where man has succeeded in removing nature from his life, where there are neither plants nor animals. Man exists surrounded by nothing but walls, streets and cars, which represent the opposite of the wonderful vividness of the forest.¹¹ In his description of cities Grin even utilises the weather by usually erasing from them any rays of sunlight and by making them cold and misty places. Also the colours and shapes differ strongly from the images of the natural landscape described in the previous section.

Moreover, those who dwell in the city are depicted as very different from those who live close to nature. In the city, people seem to be a mass of anonymous individuals, who are very often hostile, alienated passers-by or competitors. The interpersonal relations of the citizens are then characterised by aggression and selfishness. In this environment a typical

¹¹ It would be a mistake, however, to say that Grin's cities are industrial metropolises; they are rather average-size cities or ports.

Grinian sensitive loner must experience separation from the rest of mankind even more strongly. The disastrous impact of the urban area on the individual is described very explicitly in 'Rasskaz Birka', where the eponymous hero suffers severe mental disorder caused by intoxication with the chaos of the city. Birk appears to be trapped as he wanders the streets at night, half-asleep, half-awake. He is barely in control of his rational faculties, and in his touching account of this dramatic state he underlines the striking discrepancy between city and country. While the city makes him feel depressed and lethargic, his long walks in the country have the opposite effect of curing him and giving him a zest for life. He firmly identifies the city as the source of his mental disorder and expresses the conviction that nature is, in all respects, superior to the artificial urban landscapes.

Grin's typical city is like an anthill: people run around in a constant frenzy, having lost all sense of value with no deeper understanding of life. The creative human energy which once built the city, has become corrupted and turned into something destructive.¹² The City in Grin's fiction can be compared to the depiction of London and Birmingham in Dickens and Petersburg in Dostoevsky's works.¹³ For those two great writers, too, the city is very often a trap that has a demoralising and enslaving effect on a human being. These literary visions, elements of the writers' Weltanschauung, would be developed later in the twentieth century in the philosophical treatises of José Ortega y Gasset or literary works by Zamiatin and Huxley.

One of the most significant phenomena that is inherently linked with civilisation in Grin's fiction is technology. According to Litwinow (1986:99-101), Grin's increasingly sceptical attitude towards civilisation was due to man's growing dependence on machines. The writer does, indeed, criticise technology heavily since he regards it as one of the crucial reasons for the collapse of the human spirit in a consumer society.

¹² Nonetheless, positive cities (such as Zurbagan and Liss) are also to be found on the map of 'Grinlandia'. What makes them different from the dehumanising anthills described above is that they offer a gateway to adventure, which, in turn, is one of the vital elements in Grin's perception of happiness, as will be discussed in Part Two. These very special cities offer a hint of mystery and at the same time possess a special 'quietness' which attracts the positive characters.

¹³ As Mikhailova notices (1980:53-55) in 'Chetvertyi za vsekh', Grin depicts the depression of a Petersburg student, and the story 'Put'' can be compared to Dostoevsky's 'Slaboe serdtse' in its harsh criticism of the gloomy city environment.

One revealing example of Grin's views on the problem of industrial technology is to be found in the already mentioned story 'Seryi avtomobil'. In Grin's symbolism, grey (the colour of the city) has unambiguously negative connotations.¹⁴ It can be contrasted with green – the colour of the world of nature. The car, then, as early as the beginning of the work, is endowed with a telling symbolic feature and, although the automobile itself does not play a significant role in the plot, it still points to the general symbolic subtext of the whole story. It symbolises the way in which tools gain control of human life, posing a danger to people, and in which they are able to destroy the natural environment. The car comes to act as an obstacle between the two main characters of the story, Sidney and Corrida. The girl is fascinated by technology and tends to regard the car as a source of pleasure, whereas Sidney expresses his negative views on mechanical objects which 'invade' our lives. He criticises the girl, saying 'Ее день был великолепным образцом пущенной в ход машины' (1.IV:325). The car is not Corrida's only addiction; her entire character is a personification of hedonistic consumerism (or what later would be labelled by Fromm as *homo consumens*). She is deeply addicted to acquiring new luxurious objects and all she needs for self-fulfilment is the feeling of excitement caused by novelty and admiration of others. In this story Grin aims his criticism not only at the eponymous car, but also at the whole world of objects and machines which violate the lives of men and take control over them. This conviction is reflected in Sidney's feeling of being persecuted: 'я должен был резко останавливать свою тайную, внутреннюю жизнь каждый раз, как иступленный, нечеловеческий окрик или визг автомобиля хлестал по моим нервам' (1.IV:318).

It is interesting how Grin makes a link in this story between the modern city and modern art. In the long monologue which opens the second part of the story, the protagonist undermines Futuristic art which, with its geometrical visual technique, also suffers from excessive technical development and urbanisation. Those who enjoy modern art appear to be for him 'благодушные простаки' (1.IV:318). The culture they praise, in turn, is described as 'вырождение культуры, ее ужасный гротеск' (1.IV:318). We can see how Grin draws a parallel between the fact that geometric, sharp and hostile forms assault and overwhelm traditional artistic trends, and the protagonist's observation that machines and cities eliminate handicrafts and villages. Although the car was designed initially to be a tool for man, it gradually has become a threat to human freedom. It does not appear to make modern society

¹⁴ Cf. Dunaevskaia 1988:73.

happier any more, but causes increasing estrangement and enslavement: ‘Я иногда не мог сказать сам себе: “Они едут”; я говорил: “Их увозят”’ (1.IV:318).

In the short story ‘Nakazanie’ Grin depicts in a convincing way how working with machines destroys man’s inner harmony. The main character, Vertliuga, feels that he should give up his mechanical and monotonous work at a wood-processing machine, leave the factory and move to the bosom of nature. However, he does not listen to his inner voice and keeps on working. The punishment for insincerity, for not being true to one’s own nature, comes quickly. Suddenly the machine breaks down and injures Vertliuga seriously. He dies soon after he has realised where he went wrong. In *Blistaiushchii mir* Grin reveals further important effects of the ‘technologising’ of everyday life. In the imagined world of the future, which relies strongly on science and technology, there is no place for religious faith. Although society seems to be safe and well-ordered, people are no longer able to perceive the world through the innocent eyes of a child.¹⁵ They can no longer see miracles and have lost the power of imagination. They perceive the protagonist’s ability to fly as an example of a scientific invention and not as the emanation of some wonderful transcendent spirit which it really is. ‘Blistaiushchii mir’, in a way quite similar to that depicted in Kubrick’s *Space Odyssey*, conveys the author’s warning that technology decreases the spiritual powers of mankind.¹⁶

Urban society, which is another component of the phenomenon of civilisation in Grin’s work, is depicted as lost, spiritually crippled and devoid of ideals in numerous other stories. It can become a primitive mass and inflicts serious harm on the Grinian protagonist. The writer displays what might be regarded as strong anti-social views, especially in his early romantic works (‘Ostrov Reno’, ‘Koloniia Lanfier’ and ‘Sinii kaskad Telluri’). Such views stem from his conviction concerning the uniqueness of human beings. It was Kovskii (1969) who noticed that Grin’s typical Nietzschean independent character, under constant threat of harm from the insensitive and egoistic crowd, goes on to seek refuge from modern people. The mass keeps such an individual under pressure, forcing him to observe certain rules of conduct and keeping him in perpetual fear of having his aspirations and dreams restricted.

¹⁵ A detailed analysis of this novel with reference to Nietzsche will be presented in section 3.3.

¹⁶ As Iablokov (2005) rightly points out, the same criticism is to be found in ‘Sostiazanie v Lisse’, where a pilot has no respect for the laws of nature and sees himself as a near-godlike creature. However, in the dramatic scene of confrontation with a flying man he is the one who is doomed to failure and he dies in an aeroplane accident. His death in the titanic air battle is caused by the false belief that machines can make man superior to nature.

A similarly harsh criticism of vacuous society is found in ‘Pozornyi stolb’, ‘Zurbaganskii strelok’, ‘Sto verst po reke’, *Alye parusa* and ‘Rai’,¹⁷ where the contrast between the individual and society is built upon the juxtaposition of the mass, devoid of any positive ideals, and the protagonist who always seeks fulfilment of his noble dreams. From a writer who was as much engaged in describing the human condition as Grin, it might be expected that he would address social questions, too. Grin, however, avoids presenting his own solutions to social problems and limits himself to drawing the reader’s attention to the individual’s ability to change surrounding conditions on a personal basis. Grin’s heroes do not make plans to change the whole country. It does not come as a surprise, then, that the archetypal Grinian positive hero hardly ever engages in any social interaction and almost never tries to change the social *status quo*, even though he often professes altruism. Moreover, in a great number of works, Grin’s protagonists face difficult obstacles with complete indifference to other people. Society cannot understand the hypersensitive romantic’s dream and, in fact, ignores him. Therefore the hero rebels against society and tries to escape from it.

Inherently connected with the topic of civilisation and society is the question of politics. It is beyond doubt that Grin remained completely apolitical in his works. Although some Soviet critics (cf. Kobzev’s ideologically tendentious critical studies issued in 1983 and 1996) suggested that several works hint at Grin’s interest in socialism, such suggestions have been rejected in more recent critical works. The author of *Alye parusa* uses historical references only rarely in his plots and even where he does, he focuses attention on individuals and their existential problems. Hence, these references cannot be seen as veiled criticism on any political issues or contemporary questions of governance. Grin also avoided political utterances in his literary works, especially concerning his attitude towards revolution. Moreover, he scarcely ever uses any references to the national origins of characters and he never describes any specific forms of government. Since his plots may be seen as universally applicable, we may regard him as a cosmopolitan writer who is not focused exclusively on his own homeland.¹⁸ The writer’s early (so-called ‘revolutionary’) stories do not express any thoughts on the reorganisation of Russia; he is merely deeply interested in the social problems of his homeland. Kovskii (1969:47) has even noticed “anti-patriotic” overtones in his early

¹⁷ The latter story will be scrutinised carefully in the second part of this thesis.

¹⁸ I agree with Litwinow (1986:140) who has claimed that the notion of country is not cultivated by Grin, who seems to retain cosmopolitan convictions throughout his oeuvre.

work 'Ostrov Reno', where it is said that a homeland should be regarded as 'место, где родился человек, и более ничего' (1.I:268).¹⁹ Finally, politics as a sphere of human interest and activity is significantly criticised in the story 'Sluchai', where the protagonist frowns upon his brother for reading a newspaper.²⁰

From the stories in the *Shapka-nevidimka* collection it is also clear that Grin became disillusioned with the ideas of revolutionary activity, as Kovskii (1988:8) has argued.²¹ This disappointment was due largely to his conviction that this kind of activity, although carried on by individuals possessed of good intentions, is ultimately based on violence. Thus, many of Grin's early works concern not the political facet of the Russian revolutionary movement in the 1900s, but the moral element of revolution in general. We will find examples of this in 'Tretii etazh', 'Karnaval', 'Malen'kii komitet', 'Malen'kii zagovor' and 'Marat'. In all these stories Grin presents revolution as a chaotic and inhumane machine which enslaves people by enforcing artificial roles upon them: they have to destroy, harass, hurt and kill other people, often innocent officials, just to support some illusory political project.

'Ogon' i voda' is arguably the only story in which Grin directly depicts political repression. The protagonist, Leon Shtrikh, has been banished from his native region for political reasons a year before the plot commences, since he previously opposed the harsh dictator. Having settled down in a rented house close to the border, he then suffers loneliness, brought on by his separation from his wife and children. Their tragic death in a fire that ravaged their home, combined with the fact that Shtrikh is unable to prevent the disaster because of his banishment, make clear Grin's criticism of the cruel violation of the essential law of existence: every man regardless of his political convictions has the right to live freely and express his opinions. The will to remain free and independent is in some of Grin's works the direct reason behind his heroes' lack of interest in politics. This kind of attitude is well exemplified by Ting, the hero of 'Tragediia ploskogor'ia Suan', who personifies what will be labelled as Grin's *escapist inclination* in the next parts of the thesis. Ting openly admits that he desires above all to live away from the chaos of the modern world and remain uninvolved in politics, and, indeed, we find him enjoying freedom in the seclusion of an exotic land where he lives an undisturbed life with his beloved wife.

¹⁹ In the story 'Povest', *okonchennaia blagodaria pule*, however, one of the characters is eager to fight for his homeland – though we do not know his specific nationality.

²⁰ The newspaper may be seen as a symbol of how the protagonist's brother focuses on artificial issues remote from the problems of the people in their poor village.

²¹ Grin's rejection of revolution will be discussed in detail in section 3.1.

Grin's hero, however, cannot always remain uninterested in politics or completely escape from it as Ting and his wife did. Rulers, governments and politicians have the power to penetrate the life of the individual forcing him to participate in the most violent realisation of political conflict – war. Indeed, shocking impressions of war acquire an important philosophical dimension in Grin's fiction. The narrator typically takes the position of spectator and analyses the phenomenon of armed conflict from the point of view of the single individual. Described usually without any reference to nationality or political views, the protagonist is often not even a soldier, but a person who is remote from the theatre of military conflict, like the eponymous heroine of the story 'Proisshestvie v dome g-zhi Seriz'. For Seriz, war means a painful and long separation from her husband, a soldier who has gone off to the distant front line. Every passing day seems like an eternity, since she cannot be sure if her beloved is still alive. Even if Grin places his hero on a battlefield, he is more interested in the moral condition of the character than in the fight itself. In his oeuvre we do not find any realistic impressions of war like those present in Babel's famous stories. Nonetheless, war represents a plain horror for the writer, for no matter who the main characters are, all experience the devastating effects of conflict.

'Uzhasnoe zrenie' and 'Zheltyi gorod' both deal with the latter theme. In the first of these stories the blind protagonist wanders alone in the fields in a time of war. Suddenly, as he falls into a great hole created by a huge explosion, he regains his sight. However, this wonderful recovery is only to last a few moments. When he gazes at the nightmarish ruins of the village around him, the horror of the scene results in a deep nervous breakdown and he loses his sight again. Written in a similar tone, the story 'Zheltyi gorod' describes a traveller, Kil', who chances upon the deserted town of Saint-Jean in Belgium in March 1915.²² Utterly ruined, its streets littered with dead bodies, the town makes a truly depressing impression. The only inhabitants who have managed to survive the German slaughter have gathered together in one place, overwhelmed by fear and madness. Their faces express the traumatic impact of the brutal violence they have witnessed and survived. The scene has the same devastating effect on the protagonist as in 'Uzhasnoe zrenie'. Here, however, it is not the physical destruction of the village, but the horror in the madmen's faces that makes Kil' lose his own mind and, in fact, commit suicide. The narrator reveals his thoughts at that crucial moment: 'Какое потрясение

²² This is one of the few stories which Grin locates precisely in time and place.

должен был перенести их мозг, когда их близких и родственников убивали, мучили, насиловали на их глазах! И он здесь, один здоровый человек в городе сумасшедших!’(2.П:303).

Grin’s pacifist views find somewhat veiled embodiment in the little story ‘Igrushki’. The Prussian garrison commander, tellingly called Puppensohn,²³ is on his way to the execution of some French prisoners of war sentenced to die by firing squad. His attention is suddenly attracted by a little window still lit late at night when houses should already be in darkness. He enters the suspicious house and finds there, to his surprise, an old man playing toy soldiers on a mock-up of a battlefield. Instantly engrossed by this innocent phenomenon, Puppensohn forgets about the execution and as a result the condemned men are saved.

In Grin’s fiction, war is presented with no traces of exultation or of admiration for the victors. Although the emphasis is always put on the suffering of individual soldiers whose lot is to fight, suffer and die, in the work of Grin war may also be seen as an opportunity to prove one’s moral stance.²⁴ Nevertheless, in the end, no matter how heroic the protagonist, there is no victory; in war the world seems to sink into chaos and catastrophe. In Grin’s opinion any military conflict should be seen as the ultimate crisis of civilisation, an abyss of moral degeneration. Unlike Tolstoi, however, the author of *Alye parusa* never preaches pacifism in the form of ‘non-resistance to evil through evil means’. As Part Three of the thesis (Morality) will show, for Grin evil must be faced and, wherever possible, eliminated.

As was seen in the stories ‘Uzhasnoe zrenie’ and ‘Zheltyi gorod’, war not only affects the physical condition of human beings, but also has devastating effects on their psyche. In Grin’s works mental problems can, however, be triggered even by simple contact with the urban environment. The inhospitable atmosphere of the city can lead to the collapse of the natural stability of the human mind. Interestingly, none of the mentally-ill characters in Grin’s oeuvre is a man of nature; they all live in the city or seem to be intoxicated by its negative atmosphere.

Agreeing with Kovskii’s (1988) analysis of psychological themes in Grin’s fiction, critics like Litwinow (1986) and Ivanitskaia (1993) have expressed their conviction that the large number of Grin’s works devoted to mental disease demonstrates the author’s fascination

²³ In German *Puppe* means ‘doll’ and *Sohn* – ‘son’.

²⁴ This is the case, for instance, in the story ‘Zabytoe’ where the protagonist, a cameraman filming on a battlefield, risks his life for an unknown soldier.

both with the unknown in the work of Poe and the latter's desire to explore the human psyche. This is certainly true when we look at stories such as 'Vozvrashchennyi ad', 'Kanat', 'Noch'iu i dnem', 'Ubiistvo v rybnoi lavke' and 'Mrak'.²⁵ My interpretation of mental disease in Grin's work does not contradict such views, but lays greater stress on the role of civilisation as trigger.

Grin's work reveals two main ways in which a hostile environment can have a negative effect on man: it can either turn an apparently normal individual insane (or at least bring on mental instability), or it can ignite evil mechanisms and forces within human nature. Although Grin tries to reveal the secrets of a mind in chaos, he never describes them from a purely medical point of view. The author does not look for a diagnosis; rather he is preoccupied with observing psychological anomalies. He carefully portrays drastic changes in behaviour and focuses attention on their terrible consequences, yet he never tries to find any cure. 'Tramvainaia bolezn'', for example, a short story written in the form of a scientific dissertation, depicts an experiment to determine the effect which living in a tram for a few hours every day can have on the individual.²⁶ A growing sense of estrangement, confusion and possibly a persecution complex led the author of the dissertation to commit suicide in a place which, in his delusion, he takes to be Rome.

An even more complex vision of the pitiful results of mental disorder caused by the modern city is presented in the story 'Rasskaz Birka', where the eponymous hero recreates in detail his experience of mental breakdown. There can be no doubt that it is the conditions within the city that made him mad and wrecked a once sound mind.

In Grin's works, living in a city under psychological stress can trigger mental disease, but it can also make the individual vulnerable to vices such as alcoholism and gambling.²⁷ These are addictions which are often regarded by psychologists as a means of escaping the

²⁵ In these and other stories Grin explores a wide variety of mental disorders: severely imbalanced sensitivity, persecution mania, various forms of anxiety neurosis and finally schizophrenia. Such a deep insight would not be possible, as Kovskii (1988:3-16) rightly stresses, without careful study of the most important works in the field of psychology, psychopathology and psychoanalysis.

²⁶ Nowadays such a story could seem rather naive in its message and it is little wonder that it has been almost completely neglected by critics. However, this story may be read as an insight into the psyche of modern man intoxicated by a world increasingly populated by machines and may therefore provides interesting material for analysis in the context of civilisation.

²⁷ In his own life the author himself fought a long battle against alcoholism and also for some time against a gambling addiction.

unbearable pressure of everyday life.²⁸ Alcoholism and gambling are presented explicitly enough in Grin's fiction to be analysed as a kind of 'disease of the modern age'.

Enslavement to the drink habit can have a devastating impact on marriage, as in the four works: 'Vetka omely', 'P'er i Surine', 'Taina doma no. 41' and 'Dacha bol'shogo ozera'. These are all variations on the same problem: the husband, although in love with his wife, is not strong enough to free himself from alcoholism, and this has dramatic consequences for the couple's relationship. Burunchei Ossovskii, the hero of 'Dacha Bol'shogo Ozera', manages altruistically to prevent a marital crisis for his friend Mikhail. The latter has forgotten about his first wedding anniversary and, instead of returning home to his young wife, remains in the capital drinking and gambling. Although Mikhail has evidently changed a great deal, Ossovskii has hopes that he can be rehabilitated. But even Ossovskii's successful intrigue (writing a bogus letter to Mikhail's wife) does not result in the drunkard's recovery from his pitiful addiction. The long-term negative effects of the drink habit not only cause physical damage but also moral degradation.

Grin, nonetheless, believes that it may still be within a man's power to break the vicious circle of addiction, as we see in 'Vetka omely', 'P'er i Surine' and 'Akvarel'. The main characters of the first two stories, helped by their spouses, are reborn, free of their addictions. While Tergens of 'Vetka omely' shows himself as strong enough to give up the habit as a result of the promise he makes to his wife, the eponymous P'er of the second story is literally resurrected from the grave after his funeral by the power of Surine's love and he starts a completely new life free of alcohol. Another example of a drunkard rescued from an alcoholic crisis is to be found in the story 'Akvarel'. Although in this work it is the power of art that makes recovery possible, Grin still places stress on the character's inner ability to acknowledge his weakness and find a better life.

The devastating problem of gambling is depicted in two of Grin's works: 'Klubnyi arap' and 'Genial'nyi igrok'. There are also relevant episodes in 'Zurbaganskii strelok' and 'Seryi avtomobil'. In each of these stories the addiction is seen to have a detrimental effect on the protagonists, as their obsession deprives them not only of their freedom, but also of their lives. Gambling is insidious: once a man becomes addicted it saps his energy and he becomes totally absorbed. The message of 'Klubnyi arap' and 'Genial'nyi igrok' is just as clear – only those who can stay utterly detached from winning and money can be saved from this addiction.

²⁸ Cf. Etzioni-Halevy (1981:35).

As we can see in these two stories, both protagonists sink into gambling, and their obsession with achieving the great win must finally make them lose not only all their property, but also their lives. A good counter-example is the hero of 'Seryi avtomobil' who by chance visits a casino and starts to play against an experienced gambler. Surprisingly for everyone (himself included), he wins a huge sum of money but does not lose his freedom – he remains immune to the poison of gambling, since winning and material benefits are not his goal.

As has already been discussed, civilisation and the phenomena derived from it have in Grin's opinion a negative impact on a human being. Sooner or later they prove toxic to the city dweller. The best remedy offered by the author to such tormented characters is escape to the bosom of nature. The longing to reconnect with nature is a key element in many of Grin's works. In 'Glukhaia tropa', for example, Grin tells of an unsuccessful trip by three people to the remote wilderness of the Siberian forests. This story may be seen as revealing Grin's deep scepticism concerning the possibility of man's return to his earlier natural environment. When the travellers suddenly discover that they have lost their way and are likely to miss the ship that is supposed to take them back to their homes, their minds are immediately paralysed by fear at the prospect of endless wandering in the trackless forest. The great forest is to be seen as a powerful and impenetrable environment from which modern urban man feels alienated and for whom it may quickly become a deadly trap. For the archetypal Grinian man of nature, on the contrary, the forest has always been a source of food and a peaceful place to live.²⁹ For the three heroes of 'Glukhaia tropa', however, such an organic relationship with nature will be impossible to establish.

The successful return of the individual to his birthplace is portrayed as a symbolic return journey (village-city-village) in two explicitly anti-urban works: 'Gran'ka i ego syn' and 'Sladkii iad goroda'. In the first of these Grin depicts a father and son reunited after many years of separation. Gran'ka cannot hide his happiness when he meets Mikhail, his only son who has decided to return to live in his native forest after many years of absence. Although already rich and successful (he mentions Venetian furniture, servants, an excellent job), he has discovered there is something missing in his life: 'Думаешь - вышел в люди - рай небесный. Вопросы появляются. (...) тоскливо мне, проку из меня настоящего мало' (I.III:458). The

²⁹ Astarot, a character in 'Zurbaganskii strelok', can be seen as such an archetypal hero. He has spent all his life living and hunting in that environment. Ever self-reliant, this arch-individualist symbolises the reclusive type who is completely self-sufficient and embodies perfect disengagement from society and the city.

urban mode of existence has not suited Mikhail. He has discovered that splendour, wealth and even scientific knowledge can lead a spiritual man astray.³⁰ Grin draws a picture of inner roots summoning the hero to change his life completely and rid himself of all vestiges of his consumerist and bourgeois lifestyle. Mikhail no longer sees any reason to acquire material goods, to climb the career ladder or to enjoy an active social life: ‘А какой смысл? Далее для чего мне работать?’ (1.III: 458). What he really needs – and this is to be seen as Grin’s philosophical utterance about the essential choice between nature and city – is the world of rivers, forests and animals, and discussions around the bonfire at night with fellow-souls. Luckily for Mikhail, the return to his home and meeting his father retrieve his sense of orientation and belonging: ‘Приехал - вижу, место нашел себе’ (1.III:459).

The other story, ‘Sladkii iad goroda’, is built almost entirely on dialogue and resembles the biblical parable of the Prodigal Son. In the wilderness of the forest we witness a long conversation involving three men: Enokh, his son Tart and a friend Dribb. At the core of their meeting lies the story of the visit to the city many years ago told by the father who describes how he became utterly disillusioned with all that he saw there. He discovered that urban life was totally hostile to him, and that he was not suited to the chaotic reality of the city-dwellers with their strange habits, cars and social conventions. The flirtatious but unscrupulous girl he loved could not make up her mind and kept him in constant uncertainty. Her behaviour was the opposite of the simple openness and frankness to which Enokh had always been accustomed. He finally grew tired of it: ‘Надоело мне вечное двоедушие’, he says to her. ‘Ни ‘да’, ни ‘нет’ - ни так, ни этак, ни так, ни сяк’ (1.III: 275). These words may be seen as reflecting Enokh’s general disillusionment with the city: ‘ничего верного’ (1.III:275). He then felt the irrepressible call to return to his old life which ‘не обманывает и где живут люди, которые знают, что они сделают и чего хотят’ (1.III:275). With great relief the hero did return to his birthplace, never to think about the city again. At the end of Enokh’s account, however, his son suddenly announces his decision to go off and see the city for himself. He wishes to find out if the bustling life really is detrimental to people from a rural background. Although a dangerous place, then, the city still exerts a powerful magnetic influence and, as the title suggests, the sweet poison of the city has lured another potential victim, like a fly entering a deadly spider’s web. Enokh’s words ‘Наш дикий простор и суровая наша жизнь - куда лучше духовного

³⁰ Mikhail’s brief remark about a telescope is telling evidence that he knows something about scientific inventions but attaches no value to them.

городского разврата' (1.III:275) sum up the underlying meaning of the story. 'Sladkii iad goroda' belongs without doubt to the group of stories where Grin's anti-urban convictions are most explicitly stated.

A similar contrast of views on the city is to be found in 'Telegrafist iz Medianskogo Bora'. Petunnikov, the revolutionary protagonist, seeks refuge in the forest from the police who are pursuing him. Unexpectedly, he recognises in himself an affection for the peaceful life of the village where he finds temporary asylum. A seemingly uneventful life close to nature appears to him, as it did for Enokh, an earthly paradise, free from all the problems and sufferings that torment his heart in the city.³¹ Petunnikov is contrasted with Elena, the village dweller who provides him with shelter. In her drive to become accustomed with urban life she, in turn, is similar to Enokh's son. But she is depicted as a much more negative character than Tart. She is reminiscent of Flaubert's Madame Bovary. Her soliloquies reveal her boredom with village life, her need for adventure and her interest in city life with all its perceived splendour and fascination.

Strong innate inclination to renew the relationship with nature is contrasted once again with lack of interest in life close to nature in 'Plemia Siurg'. The main hero of this story, Elli Star, explores some exotic land untouched by civilisation with a couple of friends. One day he encounters and secretly watches a pagan ritual being performed by members of a savage tribe and suddenly discovers that their music, dance and primitive religious beliefs somehow attract him. Shortly afterwards he encounters a girl who belongs to the tribe and tries to communicate with her despite the language barrier. They are immediately attracted to each other and Star is absolutely fascinated with the beauty of what he experiences. However, this idyllic episode is not to last, since a few moments later the beautiful savage girl is killed before Star's eyes by his fellow-traveller Rod. Overcome by grief, the protagonist sinks into melancholy and apathy. In this story, too, Grin juxtaposes two completely diverse philosophies. Whereas Star represents the lonely romantic seeking refuge from the chaos of the modern world in the dark mysterious jungle, Rod can be seen as representative of aggressive and spiritually-broken modern society. The killer shouts loudly to his friend: 'Стар, держись! Бей черных каналов! Стреляй!' (1.II:31), and fires at random, frightened by the obscure tribal dancing which he

³¹ A revolutionary activist delighted with nature and village life is depicted once again in the story 'Karantin' in the person of Sergei. Amid the rustic scenery, the protagonist's memories of his urban origin gradually fade. In the end he decides to give up revolutionary involvement and remain in the village.

witnesses. For Star, on the other hand, the jungle appears as an everlasting mystery, a sort of asylum from the abyss of the modern world. He represents Grin's insight into man's efforts to re-establish links with nature, although he is aware that there may be no way in which the two opposite worlds can be reunited. Star has no desire to return to the ship and go back to his native land. He would have left everything behind and lost himself in the exotic wilderness, forgetting all about the misery of the modern world. But none of this is to be. Indeed, the story ends with the veiled and somewhat melancholy thoughts of Star: 'прекрасные земля и небо казались ему суровым храмом, где обижают детей' (1. II:34).

In another story – 'Iva' – the protagonist Frangeit wants to persuade Karion, the girl he loves, to return with him to their native village where they had once shared and enjoyed a peaceful life. Having ventured to the city to fight for her love and what he perceives to be her lost soul (a concealed reference, perhaps, to Orpheus rescuing Eurydice), he discovers that the girl has been irreversibly changed by her new mode of life: her desire to become a famous ballet dancer has made her unable to experience the purity of love any longer. Although Karion recognises the boy, she refuses to leave with him. The girl is lost in the frantic world of the modern city; intoxicated by selfish desires, she can no longer identify the real treasures of life, and Frangeit's idyllic vision of village life seems to her utterly pointless.

It is clear from the stories discussed here that, except for the cities on the map of Grin's imaginary Grinlandia, the author's views on civilisation are strongly negative in tone. The writer criticises industrialisation and consumerism, pointing out that the rising importance of machines and luxury goods enslaves man and makes him ever more remote from the world of nature.

Grin sees no future for a society in which science replaces faith and where art comes down to geometry. There is no place there for higher feelings and virtues; the human being is alienated in a crowd in which people grow more and more hostile to each other. Without any tools of modern sociology, Grin realistically catches some of the most prominent elements of the decay of society, portraying a kind of alienated character who may be linked with Marxian individuals separated not only from their work but more importantly from each other and from nature.³² In the gloomy world of Grin's cities there is no hope for friendship, let alone for true

³² For more discussion on human alienation as the result of development of civilisation, see: Fromm 2008.

love. It does not come as a surprise, then, that under such conditions the human spirit should degenerate and become mentally unstable and susceptible to various addictions.

Other elements associated with modern civilisation like political programmes, revolutions and armed conflicts are likewise viewed by the writer in an unambiguously negative way. Like Dostoevsky in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, Grin would claim that sacrificing even one life is no way to solve any social or economic problem, let alone engaging in armed conflict. In fact, war is depicted in Grin's fiction as the most disastrous emanation of the spiritual crisis of civilisation.³³

All these pessimistic views on civilisation make Grin's Weltanschauung similar to those of Schweitzer (*The Philosophy of Civilisation*), Spängler (*The Decline of the West*) or Ortega y Gasset (*The Revolt of the Masses*). For all these contemporaries of Grin, the modern world of cities and machines appears unnatural for human beings.

Grin is also close in his views to the father of anti-urbanistic thought – Rousseau. Like the French thinker, Grin perceived that the only possibility for modern man to improve his spiritual condition is to escape to the natural environment of forests, fields, rivers and ocean. Thus, the Grinian hero is torn between two conflicting feelings: his understanding that by living in the city his ties with Nature are becoming ever more remote, and the growing sense of alienation brought about by city life. In these conditions, as will be discussed in the next part, he seeks happiness.

³³ Although Grin does not devote much space to descriptions of war, it seems that he would naturally have sided with Heinrich Mann and Romain Rolland as opponents on the value of war, arguing against such prominent proponents as Thomas Mann who believed that the artist should seek the purifying element of war and not flinch from extolling suffering and hardship. Similarly, Grin would not agree with Briusov, Gumilev and Gorodetskii who considered armed conflict a form of purification of civilisation (cf. Gorkin, 2006).

PART TWO

HAPPINESS

(...) for different men seek after happiness in different ways and by different means, and so make for themselves different modes of life and forms of government.

Aristotle

*- Хорошо счастье! Я хочу видеть ее лицо!
- Так лучше, дорогая моя, - вздохнул Кут, - пусть каждый представляет это лицо по-своему.*

Aleksandr Grin, 'Iskatel' prikluchenii'

Rossel's argues that Grin himself came to the conclusion that 'нет счастья тем, кто ищет его для себя' (Rossel's 1967: 385), and, moreover, he can win happiness only by his own efforts. The concept of happiness occupies, without any doubt, a special position in Grin's work. Mikhailova notes that Grin 'заговорил о жажде счастья у человека' (Mikhailova 1980:52), while Ivanitskaia (1993:12-13) claims that the whole of Grin's oeuvre centres on the search for happiness. Litwinow summarises Grin's notion of this concept aptly: 'His vision of happiness is above all pragmatic, simple and obvious, almost banal – since it depends entirely on the characters' activity and their application of an altruistic stance' (Litwinow [transl. CM] (1986:164)). Nonetheless, this complex and important element in Grin's oeuvre has been much neglected in critical thought.

For the purposes of this thesis it is necessary to answer a number of questions that arise with respect to this area of philosophy. The present part will deal with Grin's views on happiness and offer a description of the different ways in which it is perceived and can be achieved. I shall also touch upon other related issues (e.g. the absurdity of human existence,¹ pessimism, free will) which present a fuller elaboration of this rich philosophical idea and which will allow us to find answers to a number of questions concerning Grin's work such as: can it be stated that happiness is really the aim of human life?; what model of life is perceived by Grin as happy?; what elements are likely to bring about such happiness?

By addressing these questions I hope to provide a coherent image of the presentation of happiness in the work of Grin. I consider that in this we may risk reversing Tatkiewicz's emphasis expressed in the introduction to his *O szczęściu* (*On Happiness*).

¹ I prefer to use the term 'absurdity' (rather than 'absurd') which is the title Camus gave to one of the chapters of his 'Myth of Sisyphus'.

The philosopher wrote: ‘My book was written with a theoretical intention, not a practical one’ (Tatarkiewicz 1985:9). Grin’s aspirations were entirely opposite – the writer created his stories and novels with the clear intention of asking the most essential questions about the place and sense of happiness in human life. To use Blackburn’s terms regarding happiness (2001: 70), Grin presents us with ‘prescriptions’ rather than ‘descriptions’.

In terms of the material for analysis to be used in this part, the most important element are Grin’s indirect utterances.² The writer’s concept of happiness is usually to be found hidden in the dense structure of his plots and in the words of his fictional characters. I shall begin by examining the concept of happiness in its philosophical context, followed by two contrasting definitions of the concept and a description of the various ways in which Grin considered that happiness could be achieved, defended and shared with other people.

2.1 Eudaimonology

Happiness is the end of every sentient being. It is the first desire impressed on us by nature and the only one that never leaves us. But where is happiness to be found? Nobody knows. Everybody seeks it: nobody finds it. All through life we pursue it, but die without attaining it.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

The concept of happiness is one of the most essential ideas underlying human life. Although used very often in everyday language with a colloquial meaning and simplified connotations, happiness is, in fact, a far more complex and subjective concept than is usually appreciated. For centuries, the attempt to describe it has caused serious problems for philosophers and writers who have tried to present their views on this matter. In the history of human thought the analysis of this concept has taken innumerable forms: colloquial debates,

² I understand by this that Grin does not express his views explicitly, *ipse dixit*, as often occurs in philosophical tracts.

poetic visions, philosophical tracts and scientific research. The domain which is of special importance here, and which I shall discuss in detail, is that of philosophy.

Philosophical investigations on happiness have not attracted such rich analysis as some other fields of philosophy, though the question of happiness is pondered by most people at some point in their lives. As Anne Frank said, ‘we all live with the objective of being happy; our lives are all different and yet the same’.³ Nonetheless, there is a special field in philosophy dealing with the concept of happiness – *eudaimonology* – beginning with Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* where the term appeared for the first time. Other important works in this field of human thought are the writing of Epicurus, numerous Stoic tracts (Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius), the theological works of St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas, Spinoza’s *Ethics*, Kant’s *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, nineteenth-century idealist works by Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Mill’s *Utilitarianism* and Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus* (cf. McMahon 2005). They all tend to express the same idea as Helen Keller did when she wrote: ‘No matter how dull, or how mean, or how wise a man is, he feels that happiness is his indisputable right’.⁴ The same idea is stated in the famous axiom of Diderot: ‘There is only one passion, the passion for happiness’.⁵ Another philosopher, Russell, saw the problem of happiness as presenting two main aspects: the *conquest of happiness* and the *conquest of un-happiness*.⁶

Throughout the centuries the methods and terminology have evolved and nowadays debates on eudaimonology involve many other disciplines, such as sociology, psychology and physiology, to name but a few.⁷ It has become customary for treatises on happiness to refer to works of literature as also providing valuable insights.⁸

Among the many problems which have been tackled in the history of philosophical thought on happiness, two are especially important for the present analysis: *eudaimonia* and *summum bonum*. I shall refer to both throughout my argument. By the term eudaimonia I understand a life which ‘turns out well’ or ‘good for itself’, as suggested by Telfer (1980:37-43).

³ Quoted in Swainson (2000:348).

⁴ Quoted in Thomas Tripp (1970:271).

⁵ Quoted in McCandless Wilson (1972:700).

⁶ His book *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930) is divided into two almost equal halves which seek to find reasons for unhappiness and the sources of happiness.

⁷ McMahon (2005) quotes a wide gamut of various sources, including even genetics.

⁸ See Tatariewicz’s (1985:13) remarks in the introduction to his *O szczęściu* where he recalls his thorough examination of a large number of literary works before writing the compendium on happiness. He admits that the examination of happiness in philosophy must include links with numerous other disciplines.

It is noteworthy that Schopenhauer begins his *magnum opus* on happiness (*Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life* in the first volume of *Parerga and Paralipomena*) with the idea of eudaimonia. His definition is well worth considering in relation to Grin's oeuvre: happiness is life worth having for its own sake, i.e. the one we would prefer to non-existence. The second concept, *summum bonum*, appears in many philosophical systems and means, broadly speaking, 'the highest good' or 'reason for living'. It may be connected with various qualities, aims and feelings depending on the hierarchy of values to which one is committed. But instead of using the famous Aristotelian assumption that 'all men aim at happiness, though they vary considerably in their methods of pursuing it' (cf. Hospers 1963:80, Kenny 1992:4-5), I prefer Telfer's (1980:23) safer suggestion that 'no one ever pursues a policy which he thinks will be contrary to his happiness' (Telfer 1980:23).

Happiness is an extremely subjective idea that may be perceived in different ways according to personal character, desire, need and one's state of mind. Fichte observed that 'what appears to someone as a desirable goal depends on what kind of person one is' (quoted in Speamann 2000:IX).⁹ Thus, happiness, one of the essential elements of human existence, is so subjective that thinkers and writers present their own notion of it and give directions for achieving and defending it in their own way. Therefore the notion of the happy life in philosophy and literature could hardly be more inconsistent and, although many writers may agree that happiness is the ultimate goal of the individual life, there is no clear agreement as to what happiness entails.

Despite such lack of agreement, however, we may point to two broad philosophical approaches to the idea of happiness. The first is based on the assumption that our natural state is that of unhappiness (or, as some philosophers have argued, a feeling of *lack*) and that every human being seeks to escape from that state.¹⁰ The second approach states that man is born to be happy, but that over the course of time many factors adversely affect this innate natural state of eudaimonia, causing suffering and disturbance and thus leading to unhappiness. From this point of view the main way of preserving one's happiness is carefully to avoid or remove any such negative factors and live a peaceful, undisturbed life. This notion of happiness is much more common and seems to be typical of most non-philosophical views of everyday life. In the field of

⁹ A similar view of the subjectivity of the notion of happiness is to be found in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas.

¹⁰ This approach is common to both Buddhism and Hinduism and was introduced into European philosophical tradition by Schopenhauer in his *Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life*, where the German thinker defended it convincingly.

philosophy it has been represented by many prominent figures, among them Leibnitz and Rousseau. Both believed that it may be ultimately through our own fault that we may need to fight for our happiness, instead of enjoying a peaceful and harmonious existence in a perfect world close to nature.

2.2 The concept of happiness in Grin's work

Горн не слышал его, он спал глубоким, похожим на смерть, сном - истинное счастье земли, царства пыток.

Aleksandr Grin, 'Koloniia Lanfier'

As Litwinow (1986:34) and Luker (1973:40-41) have stressed, to understand the writer's oeuvre fully one has to bear in mind the reality in which he lived, and, as has already been noted in the introduction, the beginning of the 20th century in Russia was a turbulent period.

Numerous stories by Grin display a pessimistic, catastrophic, and even tragic view of human life, especially in the fiction which he wrote before the revolution of 1917. Be it through the writer's way of creating negative characters, or of describing inimical external reality – Grin's stories are filled at every level with cruelty, unhappiness and the injustice of fate. While praising Grin's artistry, Mikhailova (1980:169) writes that Grin made for his characters an even gloomier world than the real one.

A convincing example of such overwhelming sadness and cruelty is the story 'Sluchai', which was already mentioned in section 1.2. The main character, a poverty-stricken peasant, is about to leave his village cottage to get medicine for his dying wife. We encounter him preparing to leave one autumn night while his baby is crying. In the background his brother, who is absorbed in political issues, is reading a newspaper. A short conversation between the two brothers reveals the tragic situation of the family and indeed of the entire village in which they

live. The peasant's senseless death at the hands of a group of Cossack soldiers, blinded by hatred, embodies Grin's protest against what he perceives to be the cruelty of the world in general (cf. Luker 1973:38). In this world darkness prevails; it is not night that provides the real background for the tragic events, but the descent into the darkness of the human world.

Such a depiction of reality is in striking contrast with the popular image of Grin as 'a dreamer and visionary'. However, closer analysis of his oeuvre will reveal that the world, as perceived by the author, is exactly as it is depicted in 'Sluchai'; far from being friendly and bright, it resembles the vision of earthly horror presented by Hume in a famous passage from his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*.¹¹

Horrific events can engulf people without any reason, as in 'Zemlia i voda' where fire suddenly destroys a house and kills a mother with her two children, driving the husband insane within a few hours. We can easily see how lost in inner chaos are some characters ('Malinnik Iakobsona', 'Rasskaz Birka', 'Imenie Khonsa'), how desolate are others ('Kirpich i muzyka'), the devastating effect of broken dreams ('Apel'siny') and the negative impact of life's monotony ('Vozdushnyi korabl'). Moreover, there are no clear rules for adapting to life in this gloomy world.¹² As we shall see, however, characters in Grin's prose do make attempts to escape from their environment (e.g. 'Kirpich i muzyka' and 'Zimniaia skazka').

Such a predicament results in characters feeling that they are lost on the edge of two worlds: the real world which offers only suffering, and the imagined world which holds the possibility of happiness. Escaping the real world, however, leads in several cases to schizophrenia (as was seen in the discussion of 'Rasskaz Birka' in section 1.2 of the thesis) or to dwelling in the realm of fantasy and daydreams (*Alye parusa*, 'Golos sireny', 'Krysolov').

Most conflicts between characters in Grin's fiction are based on rivalry and the hard clash of opposed personalities and ideologies (like the barbaric nihilist and peaceful escapist who fight for their lives in 'Tragediia ploskogor'ia Suan'). Scarcely ever do his characters engage in deep discussion or peaceful cooperation with each other. The world created by Grin is like a battlefield, or at least a scene from a drama where life can be seen as a natural state of war and

¹¹ 'The whole earth, believe me, Philo, is cursed and polluted. A perpetual war is kindled amongst all living creatures. Necessity, hunger, want, stimulate the strong and courageous: fear, anxiety, terror agitate the weak and infirm. The first entrance into life gives anguish to the new-born infant and to its wretched parent: Weakness, impotence, distress, attend each stage of that life: and it is at last finished in agony and horror. Observe too, says Philo, the curious artifices of Nature, in order to embitter the life of every living being. The stronger prey upon the weaker, and keep them in perpetual terror and anxiety. The weaker too, in their turn, often prey upon the stronger, and vex and molest them without relaxation.' (Hume 2007:69-70).

¹² For interesting remarks on the inner chaos of the characters, see Dunaevskaia (1988:42-43).

competition, as Nietzsche claimed (cf. Hospers 1963:99). Grin's characters are portrayed as chasing after happiness, but for most of them it is unclear how they may best achieve it. They want their lives to turn out well, but often it is unclear what "eudaimonia" would consist in for them. The characters in Grin's prose are condemned to constant uncertainty, danger and loneliness in the face of the adversities of this cruel world. A severe blow may hit them at any time and change their lives for ever. There is no way of predicting and preventing such misfortunes.

In 'Zhizn' Gnora', for example, Grin evokes the image of the eponymous hero whose life changes suddenly when through jealousy a false friend abandons him on a deserted island. The long years of loneliness which follow are like a prison sentence, but a sentence imposed without any reason or any prospect of release. Gnor's life, the reader realises, is not in his own hands, but in those of his enemy. This kind of situation, when a person is but a pawn in the hands of Fate acting through malevolent individuals, occurs frequently throughout Grin's oeuvre.

As a general rule, the characters in the writer's fiction are not wealthy and they exercise no power. This means that they must confront everyday problems through relying on their own resources and little else. Grin focuses repeatedly on real-life difficulties and obstacles, and he tends to choose for examination the most dramatic and turbulent moments in life. Consequently, his characters need great determination and inner strength in order to overcome the challenges which they face. 'Nochleg' is perhaps the most dramatic of Grin's stories to express the vain absurdity of human existence along with an overwhelming feeling of desperation and lack of hope. The main character, another individual from Grin's extensive gallery of tramps and beggars, is compelled to spend a night in the open air. After wandering around the local park, utterly dejected about his destiny, he decides to go to sleep on the grass. His feeling of despair is so intense, however, and the loneliness and pain of existence so unbearable, that he hangs himself from a tree and dies entirely unnoticed by passers-by and mourned by no-one.¹³

Even very short narrative forms are often full of drastic events that bring about sudden change in the lives of his characters. In 'Ogon' i voda' the protagonist, Shtrikh, has been banished for unjust political reasons and forced to leave the country. Separated from his family, he is forced to spend years living abroad waiting for circumstances to change. The culmination

¹³ There are important resemblances between this story and Knut Hamsun's novel *Hunger* (which have apparently been missed by the critics). The main characters in both works are very alike. Where the stories differ is in the fact that Grin's poor wretch is much weaker, gives in to despair and finally leaves the hostile world for ever, whereas Hamsun's hero is finally strong enough to survive and leave the country.

of the story is yet another example of the excruciating injustice of fate: one night his family dies in a fire. Shtrikh is unable to save them and finds only dead bodies in the charred ruins. A similar story is 'Beznogii' where a successful young man loses his legs in an accident and as a result loses everything that is most precious to him: his beloved, his job, his status and possessions. He ends up as a beggar tormented by schizophrenia, dreaming of nothing but his former happiness now irretrievably lost.

'Vor v lesu', by contrast, concerns the dramatic struggle of the protagonist to achieve a better life and his courageous attempts to escape the vicious circle of poverty, hunger and indignity. He deceives his friend and his companion about a hidden treasure in the forest. He continues to live off both of them and, as soon as they become suspicious, he disappears. Filled with good intentions to earn money through selling wood on the river, he returns to the nearby city to pay back his debt. But the story does not end happily because Grin chooses to emphasise cruelty and lack of solidarity even between friends. Ultimately, instead of the expected forgiveness and reconciliation, the main character comes to a fatal end because the hearts of his companions are so filled with hatred that they kill him.

In a world where the human being appears to be nothing but a vulnerable speck in the vastness of life, negative factors seem to overshadow the positive ones in Grin's oeuvre. In this respect, it is evident that Grin's inclination towards unhappiness has much in common with Schopenhauer's pessimistic viewpoint.

Yet the striking cruelty of other people does not necessarily destroy Grin's characters' desire to achieve happiness, as we can see illustrated in 'Zolotoi prud', a story which can be interpreted as an allegory of the human dream of happiness. In this short work two prisoners, who have escaped from prison, find temporary shelter by a pond. When one of them goes off hunting, the other thinks he glimpses a gold plate and cutlery at the bottom of the pond. A rapid chain of thought immediately ensues, raising hopes of a life of luxury. However, when his companion comes back and dives into the pond to get the gold, their fantasies collapse, because all that the pond was hiding were the chains which they themselves had abandoned some time before. Ultimately, the poor dreamer ends up devastated; not because of his illness but rather, his broken dreams. Thus the story concentrates on feelings of disappointment, lost hopes and squandered opportunities.

More promising (and therefore even more overwhelming when it fails) is the hope of a sudden change of fate, a gift of fortune that will lead to a visible change of life. However, after his dreams have been ruthlessly broken, the character feels the misery of his existence even more deeply and strongly.

Russell's 'conquest of happiness' takes a number of different forms in Grin's oeuvre, dependent on an individual's character, his view of life and the conditions in which he lives. Grin was far from giving definitive answers or advancing only one correct way of achieving happiness. There are thousands of possibilities, and Grin offers many variations so as to give his readers the opportunity to choose the most convincing one.

In the history of eudaimonology there have generally been two main ways of regarding the notion of happiness: the *positive* view, according to which man needs to acquire certain things in order to be happy, and the *negative* view based on the belief that the individual needs to eliminate negative factors in his life, since the natural state of existence is that of happiness. This division is not contradictory, since the two notions complement each other in human life.

Grin's work shows happiness as influenced by both negative and positive factors, therefore I will first elaborate upon the negative notion of happiness, quoting the views of Arthur Schopenhauer, the thinker most commonly associated with the pessimistic attitude to eudaimonia. The German philosopher claims in his *Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life* that 'the two foes of human happiness are pain and boredom' (chapter 2). He believes also, as expressed in *The World as Will and Representation*, that 'in the degree in which we are fortunate enough to get away from the one, we approach the other' (cf: vol.1, §58, Schopenhauer 1969:319-323) and that 'life presents, in fact, a more or less violent oscillation between the two' (Schopenhauer 1851, chapter 2). Therefore, once these negative factors have been removed, the individual will no longer be bound by such obstacles and can be free, therefore, to feel happy. In other words, it is rather that unhappiness must be eliminated from one's existence, than that happiness must be achieved positively.¹⁴ Precisely this negative notion of happiness, shared also by Voltaire,¹⁵ is illustrated in the majority of Grin's works.

¹⁴ Happiness in this context must not be confused with satisfaction. The latter is carefully separated from happiness by Tatariewicz (1985:70-71). Satisfaction is generally not as total, much more ephemeral, usually less deep, and it does not concern life as a whole.

¹⁵ Voltaire claimed that, since unhappiness is the natural state of all human beings, our main concern in life is usually to attempt to ease the innumerable pains, worries and problems that constantly arise.

Although Schopenhauer's distinction may be problematic, I shall use it to categorise the problems faced by the characters in Grin's work, with the following proviso. Pain, or suffering more generally, comprises both physical and mental dimensions.¹⁶ Boredom, on the other hand, includes momentary discomfort at the lack of things to do, as we often experience in our childhood years. Schopenhauer argues that, because it is in the very nature of human Will to seek endlessly for satisfaction, boredom invariably appears as soon as there are no objects to be pursued and, as such, leads to suffering.¹⁷

Suffering of all kinds (be it physical or mental) appears in virtually every work of Grin and seriously affects the individual's ability to achieve eudaimonia. Instead of describing these sufferings, I shall rather discuss the positive factors which can bring happiness, since each of these, if suddenly removed, may in itself be a source of suffering, and thus of unhappiness.

The phenomenon of boredom is relatively rare in Grin's fiction but it is noteworthy that some of the wealthy characters in his prose do become bored with life and act immorally to satisfy their need for pleasure (e.g. the characters of 'Gladiatory', 'Propavshee solntse' and 'Zelenaia lampa'). In general, Grin's predominantly negative heroes are prone to boredom resulting from their inner defects.¹⁸

A representative example of the idea of 'being bored with life' is to be found in the story 'Na sklone kholmov'. Here the main character is so inwardly drained of enthusiasm for existence that he decides to give himself up to the police and end the pointless life he has been living as an elusive highwayman. A slightly less overwhelming feeling of boredom is the reason why the soldier in 'Prishel i ushel' leaves a remote fort shortly after his arrival – he cannot bear the monotony of the uneventful life he has found himself experiencing.

Schopenhauer's negative definition of happiness which we have briefly sketched is, however, not the only approach relevant to Grin's works. For some people, as Blackburn writes, 'the absence of pain and miseries is, by itself, too grey and neutral to excite our ambition and admiration' (Blackburn 2001:83). Thus, we need also to take into account the second, positive definition of happiness.

¹⁶ Thus, the category of pain includes such elements as: disappointment with the beloved, disenchantment with dreams as they become concretely embodied, fear of boredom and of life's lack of meaning, pricks of conscience, forms of addiction (gambling and alcoholism), mental disorders (schizophrenia, persecution complex), and severe fatigue – both physical and mental. For possible ways of dividing these negative factors, see Telfer (1980:5-6).

¹⁷ Like Schopenhauer, Russell also stresses the negative impact of boredom and explains it in a similar vein.

¹⁸ For more discussion on this theme, see Luker (1973:57), Dunaevskaia (1988:26) and Mikhailova's remarks on 'Prishel i ushel' (1980:38).

The positive definition is based on the assumption that a person needs something to fill a gap that has appeared in his life. This gap is perceived as an unfulfilled yearning. There are plenty of things that may have caused such a gap to appear, and consequently there are many different ways of filling it. Among the desires that create such gaps, Tatarkiewicz (1985:500) names three elements: the desire to experience something, the desire to possess something and the desire to become someone. Though attempting to acquire such goods is natural and logical, it is commonly agreed that all sources of happiness are more or less unreliable. Man is generally devoid of these desirable things, and his life is, therefore, focused on the search for them. If the gap remains unfilled, then, sooner or later, unhappiness is inevitable.¹⁹ In the work of Grin the gallery of characters who represent this way of perceiving happiness is fairly wide, though the selection of goods which they try to obtain is rather limited.

Yet another distinction that is made in eudaimonology, and that will be important in subsequent discussion, involves distinguishing between those positive factors which may bring about happiness directly (wealth, power, good family ties, professional success) and those that are necessary but do not guarantee it in any way.²⁰ St Thomas Aquinas used the following phrases for goods which bring happiness directly and indirectly: ‘in quo est beatitudo’ and ‘quid requiritur ad beatitudinem’.²¹ Since the source of happiness can be found either within a person or outside him, the analysis of factors bringing about happiness should also distinguish between intrapersonal and interpersonal values respectively.

Finally, we may refer to Telfer who believes that ‘mere possession of an object raises the question “What does he want it for?”, and so leads on to the notion of *enjoyment* of the object. One might say, therefore, that activities, rather than objects, are likely to be good in themselves’ (Telfer 1980:45). It is the same for Grin: things are only there to be used and perceived as a means of achieving an immaterial good, and in themselves possess only marginal significance. A good example of this would be money.

¹⁹ Schopenhauer in *The World as Will and Representation* (vol.1) sees the human being as principally moving between two states: that of *suffering* (caused by an obstacle in achieving one’s goal) and *satisfaction* (i.e. the attainment of the goal).

²⁰ There are immaterial properties which, once impaired by some disaster (e.g. serious disease), may cast light on the vital part they play in completing our happiness. Health is commonly regarded as the most important of these and is mentioned by the poisoned Dzhessi (*Dzhessi i Morgiana*) when she becomes seriously worried about her health. ‘Она вздохнула и села; однако ей сразу стало труднее дышать, и чувство изнеможения усилилось. Опустив голову, девушка тихо пожаловалась себе: “Нехорошее происходит со мной. Я забыла, что значит быть здоровой. Как вспомнить здоровье?! О, здоровье, ты лучше всего! Вернись ко мне! Господи, выздорови меня!”’ (1.V:274).

²¹ Respectively: ‘in which there is happiness’ and ‘one which is required for happiness’ [transl. CM].

2.3 Wealth

Grin's anti-materialistic views are especially clear in respect of wealth.²² The process of earning money is nearly always presented in his fiction either to prove his characters' moral convictions, or to achieve an important goal, predominantly an altruistic one. Only infrequently does Grin depict positive characters trying to gain money in order to earn a living. Work is portrayed with an important moralising connotation, as in 'Molchanie'. The main character in this story takes on the humiliating job of secretary to a high-ranking, despotic and repulsive old official. In the end, the old man is cured of his bitterness when he learns that his young assistant has worked for him with one simple purpose in mind: to earn money to live as the husband of the old man's daughter. Money is acquired only in order to obtain something else of much higher value.

Somewhat similar is the situation depicted in 'Vokrug sveta'. Sedir, an ambitious and idealistic scientist, bravely accepts a strange wager from the wealthy eccentric Frion, challenging him to make a round-the-world journey on his own without any belongings at all.²³ The prize he might win is intended to be spent on original scientific research and not on any kind of pleasure or entertainment *per se*. In this story, too, money is shown as needless in itself, but as vital for achieving a benefit of a higher and more genuine kind.

The clearest example of the fact that for Grin money and material goods cannot provide true happiness is to be found in the story 'Seryi avtomobil'. As already mentioned in Part One, the main hero, Sidney, wins a gigantic sum of money through gambling, but appears to remain entirely unmoved by it. He is a thoroughly Grinian individual for whom wealth occupies such a low level in his hierarchy of values that it scarcely influences him at all. For him happiness is to be achieved quite independently of this chance financial enrichment.

²² Mikhailova has observed that for Grin 'золото не выдерживает этической нагрузки' (Mikhailova 1980:171). Luker seems to share this opinion when he recognises that 'the golden chain is the cause of all the unhappiness which surrounds Ganuver and Molly' in 'Zolotaia tsep'' (Luker 1973:100).

²³ His decision stems from reasons which are very different from those of Phileas Fogg in Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*. The latter is a wealthy, solitary, unmarried gentleman with regular habits, whereas Zhil' Sedir has no personal ambitions and does not belong to the gentry. On the contrary, he is very modest and kind. Married and poor as Sedir is, he aims only to acquire money to support his wife and for his own scientific research.

The Grinian character always decides the actual value of money for himself – if his intention is good and his purpose noble and moral, then money may be an effective way for him to achieve his desired aim. Otherwise, it will be wasted or may even lead to disaster. As the hero of ‘Koloniia Lanfier’ Gorn admits sorrowfully: ‘Можно откупиться золотом, можно купить успех, но не счастье’. Although many characters in Grin's prose think constantly about money,²⁴ his positive heroes stick tightly to the stoic notion that wealth is a dangerous obstacle on the way to happiness rather than being its guarantee. The negative impact that money often has on characters is portrayed in several stories which will be examined subsequently.

2.4 Immaterial Goods

Even a brief review of Grin's most popular stories demonstrates that the issue of immaterial goods is the crucial element influencing characters' self-esteem and happiness. The entire core of his eudaimonology is concentrated on the feelings and self-perception of his heroes.²⁵ It seems that emotions and desires dominate their life. The element of intellect plays only a minor role, whereas the heart appears to be the major source of happiness. As far as the significance of these factors is concerned, such emphasis on the primacy of emotions clearly proves Grin's romantic inclinations. The immaterial factors capable of bringing happiness into an individual's life may be subdivided as follows: interpersonal values (such as love, family life, friendship) and intrapersonal values (respect of others, self-satisfaction, contact with nature, freedom, altruism). We shall go on to examine these values through concrete examples drawn from Grin's oeuvre.

²⁴E.g. in ‘Akvarel’ the main character, an idle layabout, spends a long time watching the leaves of a tree, trying to envisage them as gold coins.

²⁵ Philosophers as early as Aristotle and Boethius argued that happiness is only to be found within the inner world of a person. Tatariewicz (1985:64) quotes the latter: ‘Quid extra petitis intra vos positam felicitatem?’ (‘Why do you look outside yourselves for happiness that has been placed within you?’ (trans. C.M.)).

2.4.1 Interpersonal values

2.4.1.1 Love

Я ищу и хочу тебя, хочу ласки твоей, хочу счастья.

Aleksandr Grin, 'Она'

In the history of mankind love has always been considered the strongest of all human feelings and regarded as the supreme factor in bringing about an individual's happiness. This feeling is depicted in Grin's works mainly through the portrayal of man-woman relationships with only a few insignificant references to paternal love.²⁶ Although love is the main theme of many stories and occupies a high place in Grin's system of values, contrary to common belief it is not the leading element in human life when seen from the writer's point of view.

The generalised image of love that may be derived from the works of Grin is by and large a simple one. It often lacks elements of deep psychological analysis, and there is no attempt to describe in detail the richness and complexity of this feeling. Grin focuses mainly on idealistic love as it is usually depicted in romantic novels containing elements of chivalry and quixotism. A survey of his male characters leads to the generalisation that the majority of them are variations on the same theme: the Knight with many masks. Grin appears to be an uncompromising maximalist in the field of happiness. There is no place for 'counterbalancing pros and cons', but rather only heroism and attempts to get the highest reward. There are no intermediate or compromise solutions; at stake is either glorious victory and happiness with the beloved, or disastrous defeat and even death and oblivion. Grin seems to agree with Hospers's (1963:66) opinion that 'love is a calculated risk, but the experience is worth the risk'. Romantic heroism, for Grin, should not include any mediocre solution, any 'middle way' between extremes.²⁷

Despite Grin's early fascination with decadence, and the strong inclination in many early stories towards Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, he describes love in warm colours, without any trace of the Schopenhauerian blind Will and gloomy ideas of love as curse or fatal infatuation.

²⁶ Ivanitskaia (1993:34) notes that, surprisingly, there is no image of mother and child to be found anywhere in Grin's oeuvre.

²⁷ It must be stated, however, that the same romantic heroism is hardly ever typical for Grin's female characters, with few exceptions (e.g. 'Kseniia Turpanova').

On the contrary, it is clear that the feeling of love is a kind of salvation. It is pure and always matches people who are perfectly created for each other, transporting them into another reality, one which rewards them with happiness in spite of the obstacles which they have had to overcome ('Prodavets schast'ia', 'Na oblachnom beregu', 'Sto verst po reke' and many others).

One of the stories which best typify Grin's aim of depicting the human desire to achieve happiness through love is 'Pozornyi stolb'. This early work illustrates the theme of love in a simplistic and almost fairy-tale way. The plot is revealed quickly and laconically by the narrator, with its essence expressed in the last two paragraphs of the story. The bravery of Goan, the main character, who risks his life for the sake of his beloved, is rewarded when the narrator announces that 'они жили долго и умерли в один день'(1.II:7). Goan's fight for happiness may seem irrational or even insane; exposing oneself to deadly danger in order simply to achieve a private meeting with a girl who does not return one's feelings is strange behaviour, but typical of Grin's characters. Extraordinary faith in the victory of a pure heart finds its culmination when the two main characters meet again in the forest. Goan, who has been banned from the city, as well as beaten and deprived of his belongings, is depressed by his defeat. We see him making plans for the future when he is suddenly joined by his beloved. Her heart has been conquered, after all, by his brave deed. The similarities with the genre of heroic epic are striking. For Grin, Goan is a Knight who is determined to sacrifice everything in the name of his ideals, and who does not hesitate to risk his life for even the smallest chance of achieving his goal. Grin's seemingly simple miniature deserves longer commentary in the context of our philosophical analysis. Although interpretation does not seem to give rise to any difficulties at first, the story's strong simplicity in fact conceals greater depth of meaning. Close scrutiny leads to the following conclusion: the power of love transports these two people to another plane of existence, removing them entirely from the deplorable world of common experience and placing them in an utterly different reality.

Happiness as such is not described in this story. There are no idyllic family scenes, or any view from a longer temporal perspective. Grin ends this turbulent story with a few very simple, quiet sentences. After the dramatic events comes a wonderful 'happy end', yet expressed laconically, in almost perfunctory manner, as though cutting the reader off from the subsequent course of two happy lives. The narrator's words resemble one of the topoi of the Russian fairy-tale. The elliptical final paragraph is meaningful, because it enables the reader to assume that on the subject of 'happiness achieved' Grin prefers to remain silent. Words are unnecessary,

because as Gide said in *The Immoralist*, 'How would one tell a story about happiness? One can only tell of the origins of happiness and its destruction' (Gide 2001:51).

The euphoria of love which overcomes Goan results in his moral purification. As a result he gives up any possible plans for making petty revenge on his oppressors. The state of mind which he achieves when his beloved rejoins him makes impossible any desire he may still harbour for doing harm to those who had been so merciless towards him. It is as though love has the divine power to change the heart of man so that he is unable to cause pain and inflict unhappiness on others. The price that the positive character himself is ready to pay is that of great physical suffering and perhaps of permanent disability or even of death. In such cases, suffering in the name of love is a necessary condition for happiness. And this risk is taken without hesitation. The abduction of the girl is indeed an insane act born out of desperation. It cannot end happily. The girl remains unapproachable, in both the literal and the figurative sense. But in Grin's world miracles are possible and they would happen every day if only people were brave enough to fight for them. In 'Pozornyi stolb' the miracle occurs despite ostensible defeat and is contrary to logic. It seems, then, that in this case logic cannot be applied in the world of pure feelings. The opposition between the main character and his depraved environment is readily apparent.²⁸ There is no dichotomy in the portrait of Goan – his intentions and aspirations are clear and obvious from beginning to end – as is the case with all Grin's positive personalities.

Even though 'Pozornyi stolb' may seem somewhat naïve and simplistic with its message eulogising the virtue of quixotism, it generates enormous emotional power. Facing rejection, loneliness, physical pain and humiliation, the character may appear to lose everything, but in fact he wins the only thing that can bring him real happiness. His reckless striving for love is so convincing that it finally makes his overwhelming dream come true. And he does not stand in need of anything but this, which is the ultimate good, the strongest source of happiness in the hierarchy of value.

Similar dramatic resolutions involving the final reunion of two lovers can be found in the following works: 'Sto verst po reke', *Begushchaia po volnam*, 'Golos i glaz', 'Vpered i nazad' and 'Prodolzhenie sleduet'. In each of these works love is depicted as affection and is devoid of

²⁸ The same kind of literary device is used in *Alye parusa* and in many other stories dealing with the process whereby a highly sensitive and delicate nature becomes alienated from those around him who are mired in human cruelty and misery.

any traces of physical desire. This romantic image of powerful and uplifting love is strongly connected with the dominant male personality who is to accomplish some deed, and thereby gain that love. Happiness comes to the young pair as just reward and as the inevitable consequence of requited love. None of these works contains, however, any description of happiness following the final reunion of the couple. Grin never goes beyond establishing the vision of his heroes' unification through love.

Love in Grin's work is depicted as the power which gives an individual strength to overcome all difficulties (such as loss of savings and homelessness in 'Prodavets schast'ia' and 'Na oblachnom beregu', and the destruction of a happy couple's idyllic life in 'Tragediia ploskogor'ia Suan'). Arguably the most striking image of the power of this feeling is to be found in 'P'er i Surine', where the heroine restores her husband to life through the power of her love, although he has been a drunkard and has rarely shown any great attachment to her. After his resurrection, the prodigal husband returns to the path of decent and honourable spouse.

Although able to effect miracles, love in Grin is also strongly linked to the theme of suffering and sorrow. For him, falling in love means to risk opening one's heart to the danger of being seriously wounded.²⁹ Love can either save a hero from madness and collapse ('Vozvrashchennyi ad', 'Veselaia babochka', 'Sto verst po reke'), or directly cause despair and even lead him to suicide ('Slova', 'Proisshestvie v ulitse Psa').

2.4.1.2 *Family life*

It may come as a surprise to discover that Grin, an apologist for true love as a beneficial factor in human life, never tried to depict family life in detail. There are a few stories where the theme is presented, but only as a subsidiary plot, and arguably only two examples showing family life as a source of happiness: 'Kapitan' and 'Chetyre ginei'.³⁰

The first story concerns a brave and noble captain who longs to see his beloved wife and little baby, and is filled with joy at the fact of living such a wonderful life. He recollects some of

²⁹ The many unhappy stories in Grin's work relating to love will be examined in Part Three.

³⁰ Interestingly, Grin's own words of 1910 provide us with a telling insight into the writer's personal dreams: 'my sole desire is to live a quiet, family life' (quoted in Luker 1980:20).

his favourite memories and, even though it is only a fortnight that he has to spend away from them, he would eagerly leave the ship as soon as possible in order to rejoin his cherished family. Though strong, the captain's passion for the sea and sailing cannot counterbalance this new dimension of his life – that of the family. The second work, 'Chetyre ginei', also depicts a sailor who curtails his adventurous life at sea in order to take care of a widow and then become a husband and father in his turn.

In 'Nian'ka Glenau', by contrast, the theme of family life is presented in rather negative terms as something that the main character dreams of and wishes might have developed in an entirely different way. Again, the sailor would eagerly abandon his life as sea-wolf and swap roles with his friend as head of a family. In this story Grin shows how deeply caring the sailor is towards the child whom he encounters, and how strongly the longing for a family is rooted in his heart. But alas, his dreams are not fulfilled.

The change of life depicted in each of these three stories is clearly one for the better. Grin appears to suggest indirectly that any bachelor sailor can be turned into a loving partner if he is given the chance, and that even the wilderness of the vast ocean with all its mysteries and adventures will not keep him at sea for ever.

2.4.1.3 *Friendship*

It is possible that the conditions of Grin's own difficult life left their mark on the way in which he perceived friendship. Certainly in his work the phenomenon of friendship is depicted in approving tones very rarely, and there are few examples of selfless relationships.³¹

By definition, friendship is supposed to be a deep and long-lasting phenomenon, one which links people who are close to each other and who are endowed with similar passions and interests. Although this may not be surprising, bearing in mind Grin's early emphasis on the strong individual hero, the fact is that in Grin's stories practically every relationship that can be

³¹ The most significant examples of such relationships are to be found in *Blistaiushchii mir*, *Zolotaia tsep'* and *Doroga nikuda*. Although in all these works the main characters are supported by those who are close and devoted to them, none experiences deep friendship. The travellers in 'Glukhaia tropa' also seem to be acquaintances who only share interests, and whose friendship will be seriously undermined in the moment of crisis. At that point they become almost aggressive towards each other.

regarded as embodying the notion of friendship is closer to the idea of peaceful coexistence than to anything else. Grin's heroes are prone to keep others at a safe distance and not share their inner thoughts and plans (sailors seem especially likely to remain self-contained like Grey in *Alye parusa*). Moreover, many stories describe the phenomenon of friendship damaged (by money, envy, wicked desires) and of false friends (who betray and kill others mercilessly, as in 'Vor v lesu').

Friends in Grin's works nearly always belong to the same social class and share the same interests at any given point in the story. It is usually fate which makes acquaintances of people and enables them to become close to each other. Consequently, they resemble rather passengers on a ship who are there as a result of their own free will and happen to be travelling in the same direction. Such a notion of friendship reminds one of Schopenhauer's sceptical understanding of the phenomenon.³² A clear illustration of the idea can be found in the story 'Chelovek s chelovekom' where Grin's sceptical attitude to the possibility of friendship is implicit in the ironic and bitter words of his spokesman: 'Человеку нужно знать, господин самоубийца, всегда, что он никому на свете не нужен, кроме любимой женщины и верного друга. Возьмите то и другое. Лучше собаки друга вы не найдете' (1.III:476). The direct message of this statement (especially the direct phrase 'господин самоубийца') sounds like an obvious borrowing from Schopenhauer.

The same distrustful attitude to friendship can be found in 'Vor v lesu' and 'Tainstvennaia plastinka', stories in which Grin depicts false friends, corrupted morally by the desire to kill their companions in order to satisfy a lust for gold, or envy of their fame. Another example is that of Dzhessi and Eva Stratton in *Dzhessi and Morgiana*. The girls are quite close to each other, but their friendship does not seem to be strong.

As the exception which proves the rule, one of the very few stories to depict a true friendship, albeit one created by chance, is 'Veselyi poputchik'. The character suggested in the title is a poor man sparkling with good humour who is more optimistic and joyful than almost

³² See his essay 'The Art of Controversy': 'Every happiness that a man enjoys, and almost every friendship that he cherishes, rests upon illusion; for, as a rule, with increase of knowledge they are bound to vanish.' (Schopenhauer 2009:315); and a remark in *Parerga and Paralipomena*: 'True and genuine friendship presupposes a strong sympathy with the weal and woe of another - purely objective in its character and quite disinterested; and this in its turn means an absolute identification of self with the object of friendship. The egoism of human nature is so strongly antagonistic to any such sympathy that true friendship belongs to that class of things - the sea-serpent, for instance - with regard to which no one knows whether they are fabulous or really exist somewhere or other.' (Schopenhauer 1974:458-9)

any other of Grin's heroes. He lends a helping hand to a stranger and they become firm friends for the rest of their lives.

'Slabost' Danielia Khortona' also serves as an example of how Grin can occasionally present the brighter aspects of friendship without any trace of scepticism. The story, which concerns a brave trapper, shows real and convincing friendship being born out of help given selflessly. A tramp manages to save the life of a trapper who attempts to commit suicide in a moment of weakness, depressed by the difficulties and loneliness of his life. The tramp, a gifted storyteller and born optimist, is in many ways the perfect complement to his gloomy and taciturn companion. They meet by chance, but their friendship will be long-lasting. This relationship brings happiness, as well as advancing work on a new settlement in the forbidden wilds, and should be regarded as a necessary condition for the final success of this demanding undertaking. The lonely Daniel Khorton, though gifted, physically strong and determined, still needs not only help, but also the presence and support of a compassionate and friendly soul in order to live a happy life. The story seems to demonstrate that Grin regarded self-sufficiency and solitude as unfavourable to eudaimonia.

Finally, it would be incorrect to count relationships between men and women as examples of true friendship in Grin's work. With some insignificant exceptions, they should all be seen as carrying the mark of love, although expressed sometimes in a less direct way. We can see this in the two stories 'Malen'kii zagovor' and 'Marat'.

2.4.2 Intrapersonal values

2.4.2.1 Fame and the respect of others

For Grin's heroes, the judgement of other people does not seem to influence their happiness in the slightest way, whether they are the superman-like egotistic characters of his early stories, or the selfless altruists of his later works. Public recognition, popularity and fame are not shown as of any significance in the matter of achieving happiness. The hierarchy of values possessed by the typical positive characters in his fiction scarcely includes such elements

at all. In fact, only three stories depict the main hero gaining satisfaction from the respect paid to him by others: ‘Slepoi Day Kanet’, ‘Korabli v Lisse’ and ‘Strashnyi zlodei’.

In the first story, the eponymous character can still remember the precious moment in the theatre many years earlier when the audience, which included members of the government, cried with delight and gave him a standing ovation for his remarkable dramatic skills. This moment of artistic glory is kept by Kanet as proof of the inner power and talent which were once able to move people to tears and even enabled him once to save his country.

The character Bitt-Boy, from the second story, ‘Korabli v Lisse’, had long been praised and admired for his legendary luck. On every ship on which he had sailed he was believed by the crew to be a defence against danger. Any captain was proud to have Bitt-Boy on deck, and any sailor felt secure sailing with this dauntless spirit accompanying him on board. However, Grin conveys the message that it was not popularity and admiration that drove Bitt-Boy and urged him to risk his life in countless dangerous situations, but rather his unselfish heart that led him to such a way of life and would reward him with happiness.

Finally, in contrast to ‘Korabli v Lisse’, Grin depicts another facet of people’s respect in ‘Strashnyi zlodei’. Humiliated and ridiculed by everyone around him, the penniless thief Piskun owns up deliberately to someone else’s murder in order to receive just a modicum of praise and respect from other members of the criminal underworld. Although this act is tantamount to condemning himself to death, the misery of the hero’s life is so unbearable that it can only be relieved by some form of positive acknowledgement from other people, albeit from members of the underworld. Piskun’s choice of action — committing suicide in order to gain acceptance by a set of companions, however morally wretched and unworthy — provides one of the most poignant depictions of the *бедный человек* figure in the whole of Grin’s oeuvre.³³

2.4.2.2 *Self-satisfaction and self-realisation*

Many of Grin’s characters derive great pleasure from their own pastimes or passions and from the difficult tasks which they undertake. In the stories ‘Komendant porta’, ‘Okhota na

³³ The portrait of Piskun has certain traits in common with his most important predecessors from the works of Gogol (‘Shinel’), Pushkin (‘Stantsionnyi smotritel’) and Dostoevsky (*Unizhennye i oskorblennye*). Grin’s hero is not only lonely and poor, but also humiliated, and his low position in society seems to minimise his life-perspectives.

khuligana' and 'Igrushki', happiness takes the form of the heroes' penchant for ships and sea stories, for hunting, and for fighting imaginary battles with toy soldiers, respectively. The hero of 'Otkryvatel' zamkov', a mechanic, feels proud of the precision and mastery of his trade, regardless of the fact that at that difficult time his talent does not bring him wealth or admiration. In 'Okhota na khuligana' we see, in turn, what a great passion hunting can be: 'Богом Фингара был точный выстрел по редкой дичи' (1.III:296). A successful hunt for a criminal is a source of great satisfaction for the old man as he returns to his favourite pastime. In the aforementioned 'Korabli v Lisse', Bitt-Boy also seems able to remain relatively happy to the very end of his tragic life. Although he is suffering from an incurable disease, the hero is able to save his companions who are endangered by an enemy fleet. In order to do so he must say farewell to his beloved girl Regie, yet the good that results from his altruistic decision softens the blow of irremediable loss and death.

Achieving a higher state of awareness – activity advocated by Hinduism and Buddhism and then firmly promulgated by Schopenhauer – can also be seen as a way of gaining happiness. In 'Prestuplenie Otpavshogo Lista' a Hindu ascetic is depicted as completely devoted to contemplation and inner self-improvement. His enormously advanced spiritual development has led him to the point when he is about to break *samsara*, the continuous wheel of change.³⁴ The process of striving towards inner perfection in order to gain relief from earthly miseries is the activity which brings him happiness.

Examples of Grin's heroes gaining happiness simply by living adventurous lives without achieving any concrete aims or benefits would be the characters Cherniak and Asper in 'Vozvrashchenie "Chaiki"' and 'Sozдание Aspera', respectively. Neither character would describe happiness as being the realisation of a single task, because happiness for them is essentially bound up with living, with creating the conditions of one's own life with one's own hands. One might conclude on the basis of such stories that the writer was inclined to connect happiness with action and life focused on activity, and not necessarily with the achievement of concrete pre-determined results (cf. Mikhailova 1980:37). This is a point of view which Grin shared with the German poet K. T. Körner, who once stated that 'He must have never found real happiness, who wishes to experience it in peace'.³⁵ As Luker points out: 'Grin believed that there exists in everyone a thirst for the unexpected and even the miraculous' (Luker 1973:40). Lack of

³⁴ *Samsara* refers to reincarnation or rebirth in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and other related religions.

³⁵ Quoted in Tatkiewicz (1985:281), transl. CM.

events can infect the human soul with frustration, and a character requires great strength of will to overcome boredom and routine.

In a similar vein Litwinow (1986:117) indicates how well-endowed with life energy are many of Grin's characters. There is a clear link between them and the Bergsonian idea of *élan vital*.³⁶ Stories like 'Smert' Romelinka', 'Tsiklon v ravnine dozhdei', 'Proliv bur"', 'Sinii kaskad Telluri' and 'Zurbaganskii strelok' show people who are bold, resolute and courageous and always ready to fight. Mikhailova notes that for many of Grin's characters, the motto could be: 'жить – значит не щадить себя' (1980:83). This thought seems also to coincide with one of the main concepts present in Bergson's philosophy.³⁷

2.4.2.3 *Contact with nature*

In Part One we analysed the importance of human links with nature and concluded that Grin's philosophy contains a strong impulse towards pantheism. The perception of happiness experienced by the characters of 'Otshel'nik Vinogradnogo Pika', 'Tragediia ploskogor'ia Suan' and 'Uchenik charodeia', where Grin depicts the idea of life being conducted in harmony with nature, is relatively uncomplicated and straightforward. The theme is present in many other pieces, for example *Blistaiushchii mir* and *Alye parusa*. In such late works as these, Grin's heroes blend spiritually with nature, seeking for nothing beyond living close to the forest or to the mountains.

This aspect of Grin's work clearly reveals his closeness to the idyllic visions of Rousseau. As Litwinow (1986) points out on many occasions, the traces of Rousseau's philosophical aspirations are apparent throughout Grin's work. Take this passage from 'Prodavets schast'ia', for example:

³⁶ In Bergson's philosophy *élan vital* ('vital force', or 'Vital Impetus' as the philosopher wanted the term to be translated) is a source of efficient causation and evolution in nature (cf. Miller 1916:66,95).

³⁷ For Bergson's understanding of life, see Durant (1967a:345-46).

В тишине леса таилась покоряющая сила спокойствия, мысль человека, попавшего сюда, текла стройно и беспечно, отдаваясь власти видимого, и глаз не уставал подмечать богатое разнообразие берегов, слитных, как толпа, и разных, как лица. (1.III:363)

In this short passage Grin reveals the blissful repose of human thoughts in the contemplation of nature. At this point of the story there is a significant shift in narration: from the description of events, to drawing a landscape which slows the pace of action somewhat and makes us ponder the beauty of nature. The adventurous protagonist is thus placed in the background and for a moment acts as part of it, fully absorbed by the harmony of what he encounters.

'Koloniia Lanfier' provides a further example of the importance of nature in human life:

Горн стоял, налитый до макушки, подобно пустой бутылке, зеленым вином земли, потягивающейся от сна. Молоко, брызжущее из нежной, переполненной груди невидимой женщины, невидимо падало на его губы, и он представлял ее, ловил ее посланную небу улыбку и щурился от золотой паутины, заткавшей мир. Душа его раздвоилась, он мог бы засмеяться, но не хотел, готов был поверить зеленым рыцарям, но делал усилие и перебивал их тихие голоса настойчивыми воспоминаниями. (1.I:303-4)

The importance and soothing power of nature is contrasted in a very dramatic way with the influence of civilisation in the story 'Otravlennyi ostrov', where Grin presents the collapse of an uncivilised tribe. Their former happy existence has been severely violated by the influence of civilisation, illustrated in an allegorical immaterial way by mere daydream nightmares.

2.4.2.4 *Life in itself*

The famous statement by Cendrars that 'the single fact of existing is already a true happiness',³⁸ or Epicurus' words about life as being 'the highest of all goods: the beginning and end of all happiness',³⁹ find expression in several of Grin's works.

³⁸ Quoted in: Tatarkiewicz (1985:503).

³⁹ Quoted in: Tatarkiewicz (1985:306).

The experience of perceiving life itself as a state of happiness, when every moment brings awareness of the joy of existence, is amply depicted in ‘Veselyi poputchik’ and ‘Zurbaganskii strelok’, for example. The main characters, Bill Zheleznyi Kruchok in the former and the unnamed narrator in the latter, are lonely individuals whose happiness is divorced absolutely from any concrete purpose or aspiration. Yet they are filled with the feeling of happiness. Such an understanding of happiness is obviously connected with biologism and the strong, even animal attachment of man to the living world.⁴⁰

The story ‘Veselyi poputchik’ is also a perfect illustration of Schopenhauer’s contention that ‘cheerfulness is a direct and immediate gain — the very coin, as it were, of happiness, and not, like all else, merely a cheque upon the bank; for it alone makes us immediately happy in the present moment, and that is the highest blessing for beings like us, whose existence is but an infinitesimal moment between two eternities’. The German philosopher concludes: ‘To secure and promote this feeling of cheerfulness should be the supreme aim of all our endeavours after happiness’ (Schopenhauer, 1851).

The hero of ‘Veselyi poputchik’, a model *бояк* akin to many lonely wanderers of Gorky’s early stories, is far from being desolate. Although hungry and completely devoid of any propriety, he remains happy, and ‘его сумрачное лицо с мягким очертанием рта и спокойными голубыми глазами не отражало удрученности, озлобления или приниженности’ (1.IV:355). He combines accuracy of observation with good humour and lively wit: ‘в вульгарном смысле я сожрал бы быка, а в высшем удовлетворюсь виноградинкой и глотком воды Сирано де-Бержерака’ (1.IV:358).

2.4.2.5 Freedom

Limitless freedom, a factor which has often been recognised as one of the principal and necessary conditions of happiness – characterises many of the heroes of Grin’s early fiction, who

⁴⁰ Biologism may be understood as the use of biological principles to explain human behaviour especially in its social manifestation. In the history of literature the term is connected with tendencies to apply the theories of Nietzsche and Freud and show human life in its biological aspect.

are usually strongly individualistic people endowed with some of the features of the Nietzschean Superman. Such a way of achieving happiness is embodied, for example, in Reg ('Sinii kaskad Telluri'), Tart ('Ostrov Reno') and Gorn ('Koloniiia Lanfier'). We find confirmation of this attitude in 'Karantin', where the main character's inner struggle to choose between an act of violence in the name of revolution and his own life ends with a dramatic betrayal of the revolutionary ideology. His decision is emphasised by a simple and childish sentence which he utters: 'Жить – хорошо!'. Interestingly, 'Karantin' may be compared with the fiction of Walter Scott and 20th century writers: Władysław Reymont, Frans Sillanpää, Selma Lagerlöf, who express a similar fascination with a biological, sometimes even primitive attachment to life. A clear similarity can also be drawn between the heroes of Grin and Gorky in his early works 'Chelkash' and 'Dva bosiaka' (1895). Gorky portrayed the image of the new man in contrast to the dull, cowardly peasant, a prisoner of his own greed. The famous Gorkian hero was, as Gourfinkel (1960:10) has put it, 'often an outlaw, a bandit full of life, who knew how to enjoy freedom'.

Grin's early stories are especially focused on hyper-independence and rebellion against the social order, often imbued with elements of escapism. These qualities have been quickly recognised by critics (cf. Walicki 1973, Litwinow 1986, Rosenthal 1986) as an attempt to convey some of the ideas of Nietzsche and Stirner.⁴¹ Deeper insight into freedom, as one of the most important and essential needs of man, is to be found in several stories which present Grin's mature interpretation of the phenomenon and its significance for happiness.

Fitzroy in 'Chernyi almaz' and the nameless protagonist of 'Dva obeshchaniia' are both determined to risk their lives in order to escape from bondage. Fitzroy is a prisoner who is filled with an enormous desire for revenge on the man who seduced his wife. His life has been darkened by melancholy and fury, but he becomes metaphorically transformed by the power of the music that he hears at a concert. The beauty of the music inspires him to give up his plans for revenge, releasing his mind from the vicious circle of evil thought; it enables him to overcome both physical and psychological imprisonment as he escapes his captivity. In the short story 'Dva obeshchaniia', in turn, one of the prisoners bravely saves the governor's daughter and is then rewarded for his noble deed by being given an illicit pass out of the prison. However, this involves only a short break, and he must promise to return the very next day. The prisoner,

⁴¹ On the influence of these philosophers on Russian writers in the 19th and 20th centuries, see also Litwinow (1986:118-119).

surprisingly, keeps his word and returns to his cell as promised, but then he manages to escape from prison the next night. According to the note left in his empty cell, the escapee also had to keep his pledge to his friend; however, in fact, he chose both to be fair to the governor and also to remain faithful to his own nature, which urged him to make use of this unique opportunity to win back freedom.

For the hermit in ‘Otshel’nik Vinogradnogo Pika’, as will be discussed in detail in section 2.5, freedom seems to be the immanent, absolutely necessary factor for happiness and to constitute one of the pillars of his teaching. A similar attitude towards happiness is also expressed in the homily on the subject given by the character Anosov in ‘Chelovek s chelovekom’. Although the hero does not mention freedom directly, it is undoubtedly deeply connected with his concept of eudaimonia. This may be seen as reminiscent of Stoicism which (despite its diversity as a philosophical school) stems from Zeno’s vision of happiness based firmly upon freedom and independence from the outer world. Stoic philosophers claimed that while man may not be able to avoid misery and be in complete control of his life, nonetheless he may at least in his mind remain completely free. This was one of the main ideas unfolded in the teachings of Epictetus, notably in *Encheiridion* and *The Discourses*. Epictetus, a slave himself, taught that a person can be enslaved on the outside, ‘externally’ (have one’s body in chains), and yet be free ‘internally’ (be at peace with oneself and aloof from all pleasure and pain)’. We can safely assume that both the hermit and Anosov would join the ranks of the disciples of Epictetus.

2.4.2.6 *Imagination*

Grin has been commonly referred to as the ‘рыцарь мечты’,⁴² since he endows many of his heroes with extraordinary imagination which gives them the power to dream and then change reality.⁴³ It is not the case then that Grin’s characters dwell in the realm of illusion and deliberately escape the real world as a result of their own weakness and inability to adapt. Most frequently these worlds of imagination help the character to cope with cruelty and the injustice of

⁴² This term was introduced by Vikhrov (1980:3).

⁴³ Cf. Mikhailova (1980:186).

fate, serving as an impulse to action, a driving force that enables them to escape the monotony and misery of everyday life.

In 'Golos sireny', for example, the power of imagination brings relief to the young boy whose legs are paralysed, who dreams of distant lands and a life at sea. Grin gives this character an exceptional ability to separate himself from his difficult everyday life, and his beautiful dreams finally bring about a wonderful change: that is, his own imagination apparently produces a miracle and cures him, as he can stand on his feet again.

Another example of a character taking pleasure in the free exercise of his imagination may be found in 'Lael' u sebia doma'. Here, the main character, Zheton, escapes from reality into the world of his inner thoughts: 'он любил, выбрав какой-либо предмет, чуждый печальному настоящему, мысленно уходить от "Астры" [a restaurant where he spends long hours – С.М.] и самого себя'. (2.II:395). Although seemingly pointless, this form of intellectual activity brings considerable relief from the painful pressure of everyday troubles. The passage once again reminds us of Schopenhauer's conviction that, no matter whether in the confines of a prison cell or the expanse of a palace, in the moment of inner contemplation a man can feel happy in spite of tribulations.

Since the majority of Grin's characters are lonely, it is very common to find them lost in daydreams. The power of dreaming can be seen in many of his stories which concern miracles and supernatural abilities. Those who can easily find refuge in the fictitious worlds of their imagination are less prone to suffer at the hands of reality. Here, too, Grin seems to be in agreement with Schopenhauer, who professes that the only true wealth is the wealth of the soul.

Grin also takes very seriously the idea of contemplation, which can at least give temporary relief from the torments and miseries of life. The eponymous hero of 'Zhizn' Gnora' utters a lofty sentence that will find a frequent echo in many of Grin's later stories: 'Над прошлым, настоящим и будущим имеет власть человек' (1.I:454). 'Put', 'Vokrug sveta', 'Pari', 'Serdse pustyni' and 'Slabost' Danielia Khortona' are further stories which depict a main character who acts in accordance with a certain vision of happiness. The vision, once achieved, brings the hero, if not happiness in the full sense of the word, then at least some satisfaction from the awareness that he is following the right path.

A potent example of imagination being sufficient in itself to make a person happy can be found in the story 'Komendant porta'. Here Grin depicts an old man enchanted by life at sea and the stories of sailors. Although he has never been able to sail himself, his extraordinary

imagination has served perfectly to create an inner world of legends, stories and rumours. His endless conversations with captains and their crews lead to the illusion that he shares all their experiences and adventures, even though he lives the life of an ordinary landlubber. Mikhailova suggests (1980:168-69) that this kind of fascination with the boundless possibilities of the human imagination may have been inspired in Grin by the works of Edgar Allan Poe, particularly ‘The Gold Bug’ with its mysterious and eventful plot.⁴⁴ Mikhailova draws a parallel between Poe’s character Legrand and the heroes of two of Grin’s stories, ‘Sokrovishche afrikanskikh gor’ and *Zolotaia tsep’*. It is, in fact, typical of many characters created by Grin after 1917 that they draw energy from their imagination, which enables them to influence the future. Mikhailova catches this phenomenon very accurately: ‘Развитое воображение дает почву мечте, а в ней, как в фокусе, собраны все представления о будущем’ (Mikhailova 1980:170).

2.4.2.7 Art

From Grin’s point of view, the creation of a piece of art and so called *life-creation* (or modelling one’s life as if it were a piece of art) are practically two representations of the same idea. Such acts of creation always result from the individual’s marvellously sensitive imagination and faith in the ability to change one’s life. Mikhailova (1980:117) concludes that the joy in living in Grin’s works is equal to the freedom of creation of ‘настоящее, невыдуманное счастье доброго дела’.

The role which art and life-creation may play in the achievement of happiness can be seen in certain stories where the moral sphere of life is also emphasised.⁴⁵ A blind actor is proud of his magnificent dramatic skill which saved his country (‘Slepoi Day Kannet’), while a sculptor destroys with satisfaction a work of his own in order to open the door to victory for another artist whom he knows is better (‘Pobeditel’). Art that serves a higher purpose in a time of war brings fulfilment and satisfaction to a painter of battle scenes (‘Batalist Shuan’) and a film-maker (‘Zabytoe’). A painting with an artistic rendering of a poor couple’s shabby house in

⁴⁴ For Grin’s fascination with Poe, see also Vikhrov (1980:19) and Litwinow (1986:27).

⁴⁵ However, the concept of life-creation should not be linked directly with the Russian Silver-Age artistic concept of *жизнетворчество* as represented by Dobroliubov, Briusov, Bely, Ivanov and Blok.

‘Akvarel’ evokes warm thoughts in them, reconciles them to their poverty and brings happiness into their life.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, it is significant that, while in accordance with his romantic view of the artist Grin shows characters creating works of art which result from their inner strength, he scarcely ever depicts them as deriving happiness from the creative act itself. Although artistic creation may bring fulfilment, relief, or even escape of a kind, it should not be mistaken for pure happiness. Such artist-figures are usually tormented inwardly, and the sensitivity with which they deal with everyday life is a difficult burden for them to carry, rather than a blessing, as can be seen in ‘Iskatel’ prikliuchenii’, ‘Sila nepostizhimogo’. In this respect Grin’s point of view seems to be diametrically opposed to Schopenhauer’s assumption that art is one of the most laudable ways of detaching oneself from the chaos of the chain of desires which make up our everyday existence.⁴⁷

2.4.2.8 Adventure

Believe me! The secret of reaping the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment from life is to live dangerously!

Friedrich Nietzsche

One more category of phenomena that may be regarded as good in themselves, as Mikhailova (1980: 58) has put it, and hence seen as a type of immaterial good – is adventurousness.⁴⁸ While in certain works the main characters have no precise plans about the future, they hold to a dream which makes them act to change their present situation; they develop from stagnation to movement, from passivity to activity. This impulse may be described as the need for adventure. It is not surprising that Grin, so fascinated in his youth by the adventure

⁴⁶ In a similar vein, judge Gakker of ‘Sozdanie Aspera’ (which will be described in section 3.3) creates fictitious personalities who become real thanks to the elaborate efforts of his imagination.

⁴⁷ For Schopenhauer the *summum bonum*, ‘the final satisfaction of the will’, is a contradiction since it is only possible when the individual embodiment of will abates. However, he suggests that ascetic renunciation may be regarded as the nearest form of the highest good. On this problem, see: Young 2005:188.

⁴⁸ Although in some heroes this manifests itself more as unwise bravado, nevertheless the sense of adventure should be seen as the source of their extraordinary ability to fight for happiness.

novels of Jules Verne, Captain Marryat, James Fenimore Cooper and Mayne Reid⁴⁹, should have transferred this particular facet of life to his own fiction and embodied it in so many of his fictional characters. This inclination becomes clearer in light of Grin's dramatic biography, especially the fact that he lived for many years seemingly awaiting change and adventure.⁵⁰

A large number of characters in Grin's oeuvre are, therefore, driven by the aspiration to bring about definite changes in their lives. His heroes may decide to embark on a long journey, or risk their lives in pursuit of some extraordinary goal, sometimes because of the routine nature of the job they do, sometimes through their refusal to accommodate to repressive social conditions or otherwise adapt to their environment. In this exploration of the element of sudden change I argue that we may employ the term *peripeteia* which originates from Aristotle's *Poetics* where it refers to an unexpected reverse of circumstances and constitutes the first of two stages of tragedy. The term stands for 'reversal of fortune' and since ancient times has gained wide currency, not only in the enquiry on tragedy, but also in the discussions on literary prose.⁵¹ I believe that we may effectively use it with reference to Grin's oeuvre too. Among many of Grin's stories exemplifying this structural device, we may name 'Golos sireny', 'Prodavets shchast'ia' and 'Gatt, Vitt i Redott'.

The best example of such sudden change is, arguably, the novel *Zolotaia tsep'*, since the whole plot not only begins with a *peripeteia* (when the main hero is suddenly thrown into the great adventure he has just dreamt about), but is thereafter largely based on sudden twists and turns of events which have a huge impact on the hero's search for happiness.

Many of Grin's characters, especially those who are sailors and travellers, resemble the archetypal Russian fairy-tale character Ivan (Ivanushka-Durachok) who embodies the adventurous type of hero.⁵² While such characters are in search of their own kind of happiness, they hardly ever describe their motivation in words. The narration provides the reader with little explanation of or justification for their daring acts, beyond a description of the behaviour itself. Sailing is one means of uncovering the mysterious world of distant lands, with their concomitant

⁴⁹ See Luker (1980:6).

⁵⁰ One of the most important works read by Grin in childhood was A. Chekhov's *Moia zhizn'* with its gloomy portrayal of provincial life, in which mediocrity, stagnation and disillusionment with failed ideals prevail. The story bore many similarities to Chekhov's own life. In the same way Grin would base many of his works on autobiographical events and experiences (cf. Mikhailova 1980:158).

⁵¹ Interestingly, although in Greek drama *peripeteia* was essentially unfortunate in character, it could also be positive in nature (e.g. in comedies). For more on this topic, see Silk (1998:377-80).

⁵² See, for example: 'Kolonii Lanfier', *Zolotaia tsep'*, *Alye parusa*, 'Prodavets schast'ia', 'Krysolov', 'Kak by tam ni bylo', 'Sto verst po reke', 'Proliv bur', 'Vokrug sveta'.

surprises and unexpected events. Grin's travellers hardly ever act in order to gain any concrete benefit, financial or otherwise; they appear not to care for such things. On the contrary, as we have seen, they display an almost limitless indifference towards material goods, exhibiting a freedom reminiscent of that of the birds described by Jesus in Matthew 6:25 and praised by St Francis of Assisi.⁵³

Such journeying may involve what can be referred to as *the unknown*, a concept denoting a sphere of the world which may be figuratively rather than literally remote. The stories 'Serdtsye pustyni' and *Zolotaia tsep'* embody this concept in the context of a character's need for change.⁵⁴ Once a character has made up his mind to take up the challenge, the distances to be covered do not matter, because determination and courage guarantee that the aim will be achieved.

There is a significant group of Grinian characters who are seeking something that is not only vague and unspecified, but on occasion even indefinable. In 'Put' and 'Arventur' (a chapter in the longer story entitled 'Nasledstvo Pik-Mika'), Grin depicts two characters, Eli Star and Pik-Mik, who dream of something that they cannot properly describe. The first hero imagines in a daydream vision a group of pilgrims travelling on a road who tempt him to follow them into the unknown. Pik-Mik becomes fascinated with an enchantingly beautiful word 'arventur' which symbolises a fascinating irrational *зоб оммыда*. Both heroes accept these calls and abandon their existing lives and set off in search of something extraordinary.

Grinian adventurousness is closely connected with the chivalric tradition and has a great deal to do with quixotism.⁵⁵ 'Dacha bol'shogo ozera', 'Korabli v Lisse' and *Blistaiushchii mir* provide us with idealistic characters who share many of the traits of Cervantes' legendary knight-errant. Nevertheless, as readers we scarcely dare to criticise these characters, because we are impressed by their courage and the strength of their determination to make their dreams come true.

The examples mentioned above show that it is immaterial goods (i.e. spiritual and psychological values) that head the group of positive factors which bring happiness.

⁵³ 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?'

⁵⁴ This particular kind of change has been mentioned also by Luker (1980:52). It will be described in Part Three in relation to the Aristotelian term *peripeteia*.

⁵⁵ Again, both these qualities will be analysed in the last part of the thesis in the context of moral philosophy.

Among these, love is the most beneficial in terms of achieving eudaimonia, followed by freedom and the life of adventure. Love is, in fact, the only factor that has the power to raise a man from deepest suffering to the highest form of happiness. It should be noted here that in this entire variety of factors it is the constantly interwoven (and to some extent omnipresent) problem of morality which is of greatest importance in the work of Grin.

2.5 Sets of rules

Once we know what in Grin's opinion may bring happiness, the question arises what the author thinks one can do in order not to lose it. Three key works - 'Chelovek s chelovekom', 'Otshel'nik Vinogradnogo Pika' and 'Seryi avtomobil' - reveal a holistic vision of Grin's eudaimonology, providing a set of recommendations for remaining happy, or at least for fighting adversity and overcoming it. Although this group of works is rather small, it will serve as a representative set of examples for understanding Grin's view of eudaimonia.

The first story, 'Chelovek s chelovekom', contains a sophisticated dialogue between two men about the search for true happiness in life. The character Anosov begins by claiming that in order to live undisturbed among other people, 'нужно иметь колоссальную силу сопротивления' (1.III:471). The world is perceived by him as a battlefield where it is possible to lose one's peace of mind very easily.⁵⁶ In his view, society is comprised of a large number of hostile individuals who aim to 'покорить, унижить и поработить человека'. As a remedy he advises against making unnecessary contact with people in general: 'Оставьте других в покое, ни они вам, ни вы им, по совести, не нужны' (1.III:476). He thinks it is better to remain silent and create a special armour which is 'более несокрушимый, чем плиты броненосца'. Exactly the same negative view of social groups, as Luker (1973:99) notices, is given in other works, such as *Blistaiushchii mir*, *Alye parusa* and *Zolotaia tsep'*.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ 'Очень легко затеряться в необъятном зле мира, и тогда ничто не спасет вас' (1.III:476).

⁵⁷ It is instructive to note how much Grin differs from Gorky on this point. Although Grin was equally appreciative of the Nietzschean individualistic hero, and often used personalities akin to Gorkian *босяки*, he was far from advocating any eager forms of social engagement described in the later works of his more famous literary contemporary. For a detailed analysis of the early stories see, for example, Luker 1987.

While it may be impossible to avoid all life's difficulties, 'Chelovek s chelovekom' indicates that there are ways of placing oneself beyond their negative influence. 'Где ужас жизни?', asks one of Grin's heroes, and he answers his own question with words which might have been uttered by Marcus Aurelius: 'Он есть, но он не задевает меня.' (1.III:476). What is the rationale for such a calm response? According to the Stoics it lies in the idea of the control we are able to exercise over our impressions and judgments. Grin seems to agree with Aurelius' conviction that 'if you suffer distress because of some external cause, it is not the thing itself that troubles you but your judgment on it, and it is within your power to cancel that judgment at any moment'.⁵⁸ Grin is of the opinion that, although the world offers us more than enough variety of choices, we must ultimately accept the fact that there are many things which we cannot have or alter. A minimalistic approach reminiscent of Stoicism is clear in the confession of Anosov:

Во всем мире у меня есть один любимый поэт, один художник и один музыкант, а у этих людей есть у каждого по одному самому лучшему для меня произведению: второй вальс Гадаара; 'К Анне' - Эдгара По и портрет жены Рембрандта. (1.III:476)

The idea of self-limitation may be linked with Schopenhauer's famous advice that he gave in his 'Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life': 'Alle Beschränkung beglückt'.⁵⁹ That is to say, every voluntary limitation we conduct in life is conducive to happiness. Grin suggests that in the pursuit of happiness we should limit our desires and choose carefully so as to concentrate on what really makes us inwardly happy. He writes that 'никто не променяет лучшего на худшее' (1.III:476). Finally, although critics tend to see Grin's pre-revolutionary work as very pessimistic, we find in this early story an optimistic statement of the fact that happiness may be available to anybody, with one important reservation: the person who wishes to be happy must himself possess spiritual riches.

As an objection to Anosov's words his interlocutor raises the problem of egoism, however. The answer that follows is unambiguous: the only way to remain inwardly strong and unmoved is to bother oneself as little as possible with other people. Grin persuades us that this is not mere egocentrism but 'чувство собственного достоинства'. This interesting concept occupies a significant place in Grin's Weltanschauung and arguably stems from Nietzsche's convictions as expressed in chapter XVII of the first book of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: 'Too

⁵⁸ See: Marcus Aurelius (*Meditations*, VIII. 47, and, on the same question, VII.29, 33 and IX.35).

⁵⁹ 'All limitation makes us happy'.

readily doth the recluse reach his hand to any one who meeteth him. To many a one mayest thou not give thy hand, but only thy paw; and I wish thy paw also to have claws.’ (Nietzsche 1972:89-90).

The concept of pride, mentioned in the quotation above, appears also in the second story to be discussed here, ‘Otshel’nik Vinogradnogo Pika’. The plot is founded on the philosophical motif of the ‘road to enlightenment’. The main character begins from a position of total disorientation and depression and ends up being taught a lesson in life by a wise man who lives alone on top of a mountain. The hermit scarcely seems to be an ascetic – he does not hesitate to offer his guest good food and wine. His teaching is brief and laconic, lacking any sophisticated terms or analogies. The main threads of the hermit's set of rules may be summed up in Horace's famous phrase *carpe diem*. Grin claims here that the world is an unfathomed mystery, and we must not try to delve into metaphysical problems, because such questioning brings no benefit. On the contrary, a person who is too concerned with the problems of the universe – like the story's protagonist, who has read hundreds of philosophical works – may end as miserably as he does: half-insane and practically helpless. We should not waste our limited time on the earth, the story implies, because real life is with us here and now. It is reasonable instead to engage with the only existence we know, and to live it as we wish. Consequently, we are advised to sleep soundly, to enjoy good food and drink, to cherish friendship and love, and always to praise freedom.⁶⁰ Here Grin articulates, for perhaps the only time in his entire oeuvre, a generalisation about the meaning of life:

Только в том и есть смысл жизни, что окружает тебя. Бесчисленное множество комбинаций представлено тебе: явлений, красок, предметов, людей, работ: найди свою комбинацию.
(2.П:489)

This recommendation to find one's own combination arguably presents the core of the hermit's entire teaching. He advocates enjoying the world's diversity in accordance with one's own nature, but, as will be emphasised in the next part of this thesis, he advocates a crucially important refinement of this apparently simplistic eudaimonology: do not cause any harm to other people.⁶¹

⁶⁰ The same great significance of freedom is expressed in *Doroga nikuda* when the imprisoned Tirrey is tormented by his dark thoughts: ‘Даже его мысль не могла быть свободна, так как, о чем ни думал он, стены камеры и порядок дня были неразлучно при нем, от них он не мог уйти, не мог забыть о них’ (1.VI: 189).

⁶¹ One is allowed to exercise full freedom on one's earthly path and do ‘все что не оскорбляет и не обижает других’ (2.П: 489).

The hermit in 'Otshel'nik Vinogradnogo Pika' suggested that 'следует жить густо и смело, как свойственно человеческой природе' (2.II: 489), which sounds brave and may well be generally applicable. His view of life recalls, again in Grin's oeuvre, the Gorkian *босяки*, those independent tramps abundant in energy who display a special kind of *озорство* and present an image of immense vitalism and lust for life.⁶²

In the third story, 'Seryi avtomobil', already mentioned in section 1.2, we are confronted with a narrator-protagonist who seems only weakly connected with reality; he is in love with a cold-hearted girl who treats him as a peculiar individual and an object of fun. In the course of his sophisticated mission to purify her soul through rebirth he attempts to kill her in a sham accident. After the failure of his attempt, he is caught and imprisoned, and reveals to the psychiatrist his unusual vision of reality. The hero is convinced, as he says, that there exists a limited group of individuals who live a different kind of life, one approaching perfect harmony. He has invented a sophisticated allegory to describe this phenomenon,⁶³ involving Disc with a Centre (representing *истина*, i.e. the real truth), Rotation (existence), and a huge number of Points (human beings), most of which are very distant from the centre and live, in fact, in pitiful spiritual chaos.⁶⁴

Harmony and proximity to the Centre are of special importance for Grin, as we are reminded in the following meditation from 'Chelovek s chelovekom':

но редко, реже, чем ранней весной – грозу, приходится видеть людей с полным сознанием своего человеческого достоинства, мирных, но неуступчивых, мужественных, но ушедших далеко в сознании своем от первобытных форм жизни. Я дал их точные признаки; они, не думая даже подставлять правую для удара щеку, не прекращают отношений с людьми; но тень печали, в благословенные, сияющие, солнечные дни цветущего острова Робинзона сжимавшей сердце отважного моряка, всегда с ними, и они вечно стоят в тени. (1.III:474)

The same kind of inwardly rich people and the motif of living in the shadow⁶⁵ return in 'Seryi avtomobil'. While Grin clearly remains critical and sceptical of the majority of humankind who

⁶² Cf. Gourfinkel (1960:16).

⁶³ It resembles a simplified version of Taoism.

⁶⁴ Obviously, the antagonist of 'Seryi avtomobil', Corrida, is one of these 'remote points', with her lack of emotions and her primitive passion for decorative things.

⁶⁵ Living 'in the shadow' (or 'in a suit of armour') is a category of existence, or the way of quiet living, which appears often in Grin's work. It seems to correspond with the way of leading a quiet life recommended in the Stoic teachings of Epictetus.

constitute the unfriendly society, the protagonist reveals in another long monologue something very significant about the importance of defending one's happiness:

Я вижу людей неторопливых, как точки, ближайшие к центру, с мудрым и гармоническим ритмом, во всей полноте жизненных сил, владеющих собой, с улыбкой даже в страдании. Они неторопливы, потому что цель ближе от них. Они спокойны, потому что цель удовлетворяет их. И они красивы, так как знают, чего хотят. (1.IV:346)

Arguably, the use of the word 'beautiful' to describe the experience of such people comes close to the notion of Socratic happiness, when a highly spiritual man is able to remain calm and inwardly serene in the face of suffering. It is then not happiness that makes him happy.

The heroes of 'Chelovek s chelovekom', 'Otshel'nik Vinogradnogo Pika' and 'Seryi avtomobil' are, without doubt, very different individuals. Nonetheless, they do have some traits in common; they seem to control their desires by stressing the moral imperative which strictly forbids causing harm to other people. A common feature of all three works involves the same structure for presenting the teaching: each wise character presents his vision of a happy life monologically, in an authoritarian way, without putting it forward for discussion by others, as if it were an already perfect system which cannot be undermined or even submitted for serious debate, which leaves no space for question and doubt. The hermit, for example, is happy in his asylum, but he does not take into consideration the fact of human diversity, or that his guest may himself be quite unwilling to live without neighbours, not to mention the question of establishing a family. In each of these plots we are presented with one-sided visions of happiness which the reader has simply to accept or reject. Consequently, since these three attempts at creating a complex system of concepts concerning happiness all verge on failure, so far as the reader is concerned, we must admit the possibility that Grin's ideas on this subject may be better established by building on the indirect hints which are scattered throughout his voluminous oeuvre.

Of secondary importance, for the reconstruction of Grin's sets of rules that allow one to retain happiness, are some other works containing less developed hints. In *Doroga nikuda*, for example, Grin uses the eventful life of the main character to embody some relevant traits. In this story the protagonist Tirrey Davenant is warned by his best friend Galeran not to submit to emotion, but rather to judge every situation calmly and to avoid unnecessary risk:

Бойся несчастий, - внушительно сказал Галеран, беря мальчика за плечо, - ты очень страстен во всем, сердце твое слишком открыто, и впечатления сильно поражают тебя. Будь сдержаннее, если не хочешь сгореть. (1.VI:29)

To spare his friend Davenant unnecessary suffering, Galeran advises him to be open only with the most trustworthy and friendly people. Interestingly, in this work of 1930, Grin comes to a conclusion, which seems contrary to his early view, that loneliness is harmful and dangerous for human beings. Yet again Grin conveys such thoughts through the words of a wise interlocutor.⁶⁶

In another work, *Dzhessi i Morgiana*, telling the story of two sisters, Grin teaches that negative emotions can poison the mind and make the individual suffer constant inner anguish.⁶⁷ Morgiana, the elder sister, is so tormented by envious thoughts concerning Dzhessi that she becomes entirely focused on herself. This is the reason why Dzhessi finds Morgiana deserving of compassion rather than criticism.⁶⁸ In 'Prodavets shchast'ia' Grin warns that people should live with their eyes wide open, since 'часто, по глупости или лени, проходят люди мимо своего счастья' (1.III:365). These two hints – loving life and living with one's eyes wide open – can also be interpreted as Grin's recommendations.

There is undoubtedly one trait which all Grin's positive and successful heroes have in common: their extraordinary will-power. This is shown as a particular advantage whenever they get into trouble or strive for happiness.⁶⁹ Will-power is a complex trait and it reminds us that Grin was an apparently an enthusiast of Nietzsche, seemingly praising the philosopher's image of Superman in his early works.⁷⁰ Grin undoubtedly accepted this concept but transformed it into his own personal image of the strong personality. As Mikhailova notes (1980:31-37), his early stories ('Sinii kaskad Telluri' is perhaps the best example) initiated a long series of works dealing with the notion of individuality and alienation which recurs frequently throughout his subsequent artistic career.

We may conclude, therefore, that for Grin an individual who wishes to secure happiness should follow the simple rule put forward by Gray in *Alye parusa*: he should 'делать так

⁶⁶ 'Одиночество - вот проклятая вещь, Тиррей! Вот что может погубить человека' (1.VI:29).

⁶⁷ Dzhessi, although hurt by her sister, sympathises with her and says with sorrow: 'Ненависть есть высшая степень бесчеловечности, превращенная в страсть; тот счастлив, кто не испытал ее внимательного соседства' (1.V:195).

⁶⁸ 'Бог с ней, - размышляла Джесси, - она правда несчастна до содрогания, потому что с такой страстью погрузилась в свое уродство, хотя я к ней привыкла и ничего особенного не нахожу' (1.V:219).

⁶⁹ Those characters who suffer from weakness of will very often end up in depression (cf. 'Malinnik Iakobsona') or attempt suicide (cf. 'Slabost' Danielia Khortona').

⁷⁰ For an insightful review of Grin's literary and philosophical inspirations, see: Litwinow 1980:27-9.

называемые чудеса своими руками' (1.III:64), which is to say, always count only on his own resources in the pursuit of happiness.

Having analysed the place of material and immaterial goods in Grin's Weltanschauung and having elicited from his oeuvre some sets of rules allowing one to retain happiness, we may conclude that there is a consistent system of eudaimonia in the author's works. Grin conveys this by embodying his thoughts in a fictional guise, covering many concepts superficially in order to highlight the most significant ones. He presented his views without referring to strict philosophical terms.

Such works as 'Chelovek s chelovekom', 'Otshel'nik Vinogradnogo Pika' and 'Seryi avtomobil' resemble veiled philosophical tracts, rather than fully-fledged works of literature. In them Grin appears less concerned with the logical development of plot and characters than with the attempt to present individuals who might articulate more clearly the author's own concepts. His indirect descriptions embody a more complex and profound vision of his eudaimonology. What is more, Grin reveals his understanding of happiness, and of all things connected with it, not so much in narrators' comments, nor by providing additional paragraphs of authorial explanation, but by displaying characters' actions in their fictional worlds. Their responses to life's difficulties show us the way in which Grin wanted problems to be solved or obstacles to be overcome.

2.6 Altruism and the problem of virtue

Беззащитно сердце человеческое. А защищенное — оно лишено света, и мало в нем горячих углей, не хватит даже, чтобы согреть руки.

Aleksandr Grin, *Doroga nikuda*

So far we have examined cases of personal happiness. This section will deal with the question of the pursuit of non-egoistic forms of happiness which, in Grin's work, are represented by altruism. This element of Grin's prose constitutes one of the most significant moral problems in his oeuvre and therefore the one that has been most widely examined by critics.⁷¹

Grin's heroes display altruism either by renouncing their own happiness for the sake of other people's happiness, or by self-sacrifice in the name of moral choice.⁷²

It has been already noted by many critics (e.g. Kovskii 1969, Mikhailova 1980 and Ivanitskaia 1993, to name but a few) that Grin's break with what may be termed his early egoistic worldview took place before the Revolution and was linked to his disillusionment with Nietzsche's idea of the Superman.⁷³ Never content to rest with easy answers, Grin sought other solutions to the question of the meaning of life. He turned to idealism, and his post-Revolutionary works display gradually more and more altruism and begin to describe protagonists who care more for others and less for themselves, to the point where they realise that, as Holbach expresses it, 'to be happy [...] is to make others happy' (Holbach 2004:15).

The problem of bestowing happiness on other people involves the presence of a donor and a receiver. The donor offers things or acts so as to help other people achieve what they desire, with no intention of gaining profit or even words of gratitude from the receivers of their

⁷¹ On altruism in *Alye parusa* and *Doroga nikuda*, see Luker (1973:79; 114).

⁷² The second aspect will be examined more closely in the next part of the thesis.

⁷³ There are various forms of egoism to be found in Grin's work. In *Blistaiushchii mir* Runa desires fame, wealth and splendour, the protagonist of 'Brak Avgusta Esborna' may be diagnosed as an egoist who is too immature to marry. In the death agony of an old man, the actress Elda ('Elda i Angoteia') pursues only financial gain instead of displaying real human compassion. Two of the main characters in 'Gatt, Vitt i Redott' lose their lives striving for self-contentment, and Tart in 'Ostrov Reno' chooses death rather than a return to society (his words 'Каждый за себя, братец!' (1.I:271) are frequently quoted as the most explicit example of Grin's understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy).

help.⁷⁴ One might introduce the idea of the ‘Promethean gift’ to illuminate this aspect of Grin's prose.

The altruistic aim of bringing light into the life of suffering people is the main theme of ‘Proisshestvie v kvartire g-zhi Seriz’, ‘Iva’, ‘Korabli v Lisse’ and many other works. In the first of these, for example, the wonderful magician Cagliostro helps a young woman to overcome anxiety over her husband who is serving at the front and of whom she has heard nothing for many months. His series of skilful illusions brings the woman joy and peace of mind as she realises that her beloved is safe and will surely soon return.

Prometheanism is also to be found at the heart of the poem ‘Li’. The supernatural figure of Li is described by the narrator as quasi-divine, and endowed with magical gifts.⁷⁵ Li appears several times to the narrator who is also the main character, helping him and, by his own good example, encouraging and teaching him to help people in his turn. The greatest of Grin's visionaries, Drud (‘Blistaiushchii mir’) and the magician in ‘Uchenik charodeia’, are, in turn, preoccupied with the idea of bringing happiness to the whole of humanity.⁷⁶ This, once again, brings to mind the mythical figure of Prometheus, an image of great importance to the understanding of Grin’s moral views, as will be outlined in the final part.

It is clear that Grin’s altruistic characters act for the sake of the happiness of others. The question remains as to why in so doing these altruists very often sacrifice their own happiness. To find an answer we must turn once again to the history of philosophical thought and its treatment of the relation between virtue and happiness.

These two concepts have been linked by numerous thinkers as early as pre-Socratic times. Socrates himself was convinced that to be happy is to enjoy life without pricks of conscience. The same idea certainly lay at the basis of Plato's teachings and stoic ethics.⁷⁷ Seneca, the most renowned of the stoic teachers, in turn, explained that virtue is the only

⁷⁴ In ‘Vozvrashchenie “Chaiki”’, for example, Cherniak, the brave and Knight-like individual, acts entirely selflessly in helping to regain someone else’s debt, and at the end he has to escape from the people whom he has so generously helped since he does not want to be thanked and accept gratitude.

⁷⁵ Li has counterparts in other works in the person of Bam-Gran, the magician who is present in ‘Iva’ and ‘Fandango’.

⁷⁶ Even if their utopian visions of a humanity saved from suffering are occasionally naïve, the deeds are undoubtedly poignant rather than unreasonable.

⁷⁷ For more detailed description of the ancients’ ethics, see Tatarkiewicz (1985:539-44).

unerring source of happiness.⁷⁸ Therefore, men who pursue happiness should care only for developing this sphere of life and pay little or no attention to anything else.

Tatarkiewicz avers that stoic eudaimonism was built upon this very understanding of the moral life, and juxtaposes it with the entirely different, but equally influential, ideas of Christianity. Christian preachers and philosophers have claimed that in our earthly existence we should not expect happiness, but focus our attention instead on salvation and the afterlife. Consequently, according to Christianity, happiness is hardly achievable and indeed highly uncertain in this life; instead, it should be seen as reward in heaven for living a morally righteous life on earth.⁷⁹

Spinoza presented another variation of this concept. He claimed in his *Ethica* that virtue and happiness are entirely equal one to the other.⁸⁰ Similarly, Rousseau was of the opinion that virtue is the cheapest way of achieving happiness.⁸¹ Furthermore, as Tatarkiewicz has pointed out, the most common way of interpreting the notion of happiness in philosophy relies on the idea that our conscience dictates the need to obey moral principles. Thus, people do not generally consider the virtuous life as something which leads to happiness, but rather as being only loosely connected with it. This is certainly also the case in Grin's *Weltanschauung*.

For the writer who is a maximalist in terms of moral deontology all utilitarian-orientated calculations of happiness, such as those offered by John Stuart Mill and Bentham,⁸² should be put aside. Conversely, Grin's stance seems accord with Kant's view that, even though virtue is not likely to bring happiness, it is undoubtedly necessary for enjoying life.⁸³

On the other hand, Grin's understanding of the relation between virtue and happiness resembles La Mettrie's views presented in *Machine Man*:

there is so much pleasure in doing good, in recognizing and appreciating what one receives, so much satisfaction in practising virtue, in being gentle, humane, kind, charitable, compassionate and

⁷⁸ See: Seneca (*Letters*, XCII, LXXXVII, LXXXV) and Epictetus (*Discourses*, book 2, chapter 8).

⁷⁹ Matthew 5:3-12 '3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. (...) 10 Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' See also Tatarkiewicz (1985:545).

⁸⁰ 'Beatitudo non est virtutis proemium, sed ipsa virtus' (E5, proposition 42).

⁸¹ Cf. Tatarkiewicz (1985:545) and Dent (1992:240-3).

⁸² For more discussion on the calculations of happiness in the history of philosophy, see Blackburn (2001:71).

⁸³ Ziniewicz presents Kant's ethics in the following way: 'According to Kant, the end or purpose of human life is not happiness which amounts to the fulfilment of our desires and the satisfaction of our inclinations. The end of human life is to develop humanity within oneself, i.e. to develop a good will' (Ziniewicz, (<http://www.fred.net/tzaka/kant2.html>). This seems to be in accordance with Grin's moral views. See also: Stevenson and Haberman (2004:133-4).

generous (for this one word includes all the virtues), that I consider as sufficiently punished any one who is unfortunate enough not to have been born virtuous. (quoted in: Airaksinen 1995:33)

In Grin's oeuvre, taking a decision that is likely to limit a character's happiness requires some higher imperative than the rule of pursuing happiness, which is said to be so natural to all human beings. To choose virtue instead of happiness may be seen as a self-sacrifice, but it is not necessarily so. For Grinian heroes morality is more valuable than the desire for a happy life and satisfaction.⁸⁴

2.7 The place of happiness in Grin's Weltanschauung

Grin's vision of happiness, as shown here, is a complex compilation of many different, sometimes even contradictory, beliefs and philosophical convictions, ranging from Stoicism to resignation in the face of life's apparent absurdity. The author combined Schopenhauerian pessimism with an optimism more reminiscent of the teachings of Rousseau and Tolstoi,⁸⁵ stoic perception of the world with Franciscan-like admiration of nature, to name but a few of the philosophers mentioned in the analysis.

We may conclude that material goods (money, wealth, possessions) play hardly any role in terms of achieving happiness. Conversely, they seem to have a rather negative effect and change people into egoists or even sadistic miscreants. Fame and respect are also of no value since truly independent Grinian characters almost completely ignore the opinion of others. Grin

⁸⁴ There have been innumerable thinkers who considered morality superior to happiness. Nietzsche, Flaubert and the film director Tarkovsky expressed similar thoughts that happiness is not the ultimate value.

⁸⁵ The best example of Tolstoi's pantheistic views is, perhaps, Platon Karataev in *Voyna i mir* who believes that the divine and the world of nature are One. In accordance with Rousseau's optimistic cult of nature, Tolstoi refused the corruptness and flaws of nature and thus preached the philosophy of *непротивление*. This deep cult of nature and admiration for its harmony can be found in Tolstoi's numerous fairy-tales and moralising stories (e.g. 'Tsarstvo bozhie vnutri vas' (1894)).

attaches much greater value to immaterial factors among which love is, without doubt, the most significant and common in his fiction. Family life, in turn, appears very rarely in his works, as does friendship, which, although described as important and highly beneficial, is depicted with a certain scepticism. Contact with nature and personal freedom, in turn, are arguably necessary to achieve happiness. For some heroes the state of eudaimonia can be achieved through their imagination or search for adventure (here we see the opposition between two types of character: introvert, exploring his inner world, and extrovert, travelling the real world). Finally, there is art, which, although it often occupies an important place, like self-satisfaction, is no guarantee of a happy life, and in many works the artist is even inwardly forced to sacrifice his own happiness for the sake of his creation.

The multitude of factors that may have an impact on happiness in Grin's literary works allow us to understand why the author does not provide his reader with a final image of eudaimonia. Grin's highly conflictual prose displays clashes of good and evil in the struggle for happiness, as if the writer wants to test his beliefs on 'the living body' of his literary characters and to present the human condition in general. His literary works are inhabited by hundreds of sensitive characters who frequently fight for happiness in the face of adversity. Grin, however, seems to display a sound faith in the sense of life when one of his heroes says: 'Бог создал мир такой, как надо: для сильных людей'.

From a reading of Grin's works, it may be assumed that people are not born to be happy just as they are, without effort, but that eudaimonia must be achieved through constant everyday struggle. Those who remain unhappy prove that they have failed in the essential human task of 'wrestling with life', to use Epictetus' phrase. Those who remain passive and afraid of taking risky decisions have no chance of achieving real happiness. The character must be self-sufficient (as Aristotle and Schopenhauer argued) and not hesitate to embrace adventure since, as Luker has aptly noted, 'hopeful fantasy and the dream of adventure inspire him and lead him through the story' (Luker 1973:98).

In the choice between self-satisfaction and self-resignation (as an act of altruism) Grin rejects any attempt to pursue one's own happiness. He tries to convince his readers that in such cases they enter another sphere of life, one which is undoubtedly much more important to him than simple eudaimonism. Moreover, he provides us with many practical examples illustrative of Speamann's (2000:24) claim that 'life turning out well is not simply a function of the attainment

of goals; rather it gives the actions themselves a meaning, which they do not possess through the immediate objective of the agent, that is, through his or her direct intention'.

In the next part – Morality – this issue will be scrutinised in greater detail and Grin's moral stance will be illuminated from a different position. Moreover, we will attempt there to reveal the ideas of *moral situation*, *moral readiness* and *existential sketch* – concepts crucial for comprehending Grin's philosophical views.

In conclusion, we may quote the words of George Eliot from *The Mill on the Floss*, which serve perhaps as the best and concise encapsulation of Grin's idea of happiness:

We can't choose happiness either for ourselves or for another; we can't tell where that will lie. We can only choose whether we will indulge ourselves in the present moment or whether we will renounce that for the sake of obeying the divine voice within us, for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives. I know this belief is hard; it has slipped away from me again and again; but I have felt that if I let it go forever, I should have no light through the darkness of this life. (Eliot 1860:424-5)

PART THREE

MORALITY

For if anything in the world is desirable, so desirable that even the dull and uneducated herd in its more reflective moments would value it more than silver and gold, it is that a ray of light should fall on the obscurity of our existence, and that we should obtain some information about this enigmatical life of ours, in which nothing is clear except its misery and vanity.

Arthur Schopenhauer

I don't know why we are here, but I'm pretty sure that it is not in order to enjoy ourselves.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

Man has always tried to ponder the sense of what he does and how he lives and judge the rightness of his own and other people's decisions. He has done so in various ways, frequently through the prism of literature. When reading a work of literature we quite naturally look for echoes and signs of our own experiences, impressions, feelings, choices and judgements. It would be reasonable to claim that the average reader is likely to require literature to bring him not only refined aesthetic pleasure but also a certain insight into life's moral dilemmas. Whether what is involved confirms our beliefs or presents a contrary viewpoint, we can see literature's close links with moral philosophy, dealing with the same set of questions, but obviously using different methods of presentation. Grin's oeuvre is not an exception here.

In contemporary course books on ethics we will obviously find many things which one would be hard put to detect in Grin's works. The reasons are partly to do with cultural-civilisational differences and also with the absence of certain important problems in metaethics, and theoretical and practical ethics that appeared only many decades later. Moreover, as has already been mentioned, Grin did not himself aspire to be a philosopher, nor did he consider himself a thinker who could present answers to all possible ethical problems and construct a great system (as, for instance, Kant and Hegel did).

Grin's earliest critics established that morality lies at the core of his writing.¹ One of the writer's main goals was to depict moral ideals at work in situations which, although unusually dramatic, still are typical of everyday life. Grin's heroes cannot complain about lack of opportunities to display their moral stance; nearly every plot depicts elements of

¹ See Mikhailova (1980:165 and 209-210) for a list of those critics.

struggle where a human life is at stake, be it that of the hero or of some other character, circumstances which, in other words, are always of fundamental importance.

There is little doubt among analysts of Grin's work that the writer should be considered as an exponent in the 20th century of the great Russian tradition of moral writing, as practised by Dostoevsky and Tolstoi. In almost every one of his works we find proof of Mikhailova's conviction that he tried to persuade the reader that the most important thing in life is not to betray one's moral convictions or 'не уступать в главном' (Mikhailova 1980:201). Although critics have generally acknowledged the central place occupied by morality in Grin's work, and rightly identify some of the main issues, there are still key problems that call for further examination. Revealing the moral philosophy underlying his work is consequently of the greatest significance for understanding Grin's worldview.

This enterprise may at first seem an almost impossible task if we take into account the vast range of problems that may arise in this field of literary analysis. Grin's oeuvre may seem to display in this respect an inconsistency of viewpoint which, when taken together with his non-philosophical language and tendency toward indirect utterance, makes it elusive for analytical scrutiny. However, it is worthwhile remembering Camus' words that philosophical writers do not make use of abstract definition and terms, but they create visions and embody symbols as devices to convey their own way of seeing the world.²

In Part Three I shall be concerned with questions of morality, not with ethics as such. The reason is that Grin's work does not provide, in my opinion, sufficient material to create a convincing set of answers to the large area of problems which fall under ethical studies. Morality, in its turn, understood as that part of philosophy which teaches one how to lead a good moral life, is intended to be revealed on the basis of Grin's most representative works. I shall try to find connections between the pursuit of happiness, as described in Part Two, and the morality displayed by Grin's heroes, which, I believe, will reveal the striking originality and value of Grin's complex worldview. I will also try to prove that morality from Grin's point of view is to be regarded as superior to mere happiness. Finally, I will try to answer the question: how is it that Grin, who was so immensely absorbed by the problem of the pursuit of happiness, was at the same time so deeply committed to answering moral questions?

² See: Camus (1955:74-75). We may also evoke here Andreev's words from his letter (dated 10.04.1902) to Gorky on his first version of 'Mysl': 'Художественным требованиям рассказ не удовлетворяет, но это не так для меня важно: боюсь, выдержан ли он в отношении идеи' (quoted in: *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* 1965:143).

Part Three is divided into three sections: Existentialism, Romantic Chivalric Ethos and Promethean Humanism. In the first of these the overview of problems such as the experience of happiness, meaning of existence, freedom, suicide, moral responsibility and loneliness which occupy an important position in Grin's oeuvre are presented and affinities between Grin's Weltanschauung and existential philosophy are emphasised. Within these sections the motifs of nihilism, revolution and escapism are also explored. The subsequent sections focus on the presentation of two special kinds of positive characters in Grin's work: the chivalric knight and the Promethean-like altruist, by highlighting the chivalric and Promethean strands of the plots.

3.1 Existentialism

Nobody can build the bridge for you to walk across the river of life, no one but you yourself alone. There are, to be sure, countless paths and bridges and demi-gods which would carry you across this river; but only at the cost of yourself; you would pawn yourself and lose.

Friedrich Nietzsche

In the history of philosophy the term 'existentialism' is used to refer to the ideas presented in the works of 19th and 20th century philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Camus, Sartre or de Beauvoir, for whom the problem of human existence in all its complexity was of uttermost interest³.

Covering such a vast topic, unsurprisingly, existential philosophy does not form a concise single system and the doctrinal differences between various philosophers who have been labelled existentialists are often significant. What bind them, however, are the questions they posit. Existentialism is a way of philosophising focused on one's individual being and creation of values. The stress lies on individual choices of the person whose freedom is the starting point of the whole philosophy. Fully aware of the gravity of his moral choices and at the same time a lack of any given superior principles to follow, an

³ It is believed that the term 'existentialism' was coined by Marcel in the 1940s.

existentialist independently attempts to answer all question related to his system of values as he is the only judge of his deeds and virtues or sins. In a world penetrated by the absurd and conflicting values he understands that no-one but he himself has to take responsibility for all his decisions. Possible paths of coming into the awareness of one's existence may include despair and anxiety which characterise humans' utmost loneliness. The problems that existentialists discuss in their works revolve around the questions of human responsibilities, aims, choices, emotions and conduct. This includes issues of freedom, loneliness, alienation, authenticity, despair, anxiety, absurdity and boredom. Beside these, there are also three other phenomena which existential thinkers give emphasis to: the limit situation, the other, and engagement.⁴ It is clear that existential thought, more often than not, is pessimistic – as Tarnas (1996:388), a historian preoccupied with the development of Western thought, put it – existentialism is a dramatic expression of a deep crisis within modern spirituality.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the majority of existentialists were not only philosophers, but also distinguished and prolific writers. We learn about their world-views not only from tracts that present abstract thoughts, but also through lively imagery or literary plots. The Dutch critic and philosopher Van Stralen (2005:22) has aptly noted that within existentialism we should always look for connecting links between literature and strictly philosophical works. At the same time it needs to be emphasised that literary works by existentialist thinkers differ significantly from philosophical treatises by the same writers. One of the main distinctions is the way in which philosophers use language when introducing philosophical terminology. The American critic Clive has aptly summarised this contrast as follows:

Whereas the philosophers of “Existenz” use highly technical language in formulating their systematic treatises, the Russian writers created a gallery of characters who embody existential themes and insights not only by virtue of the way they think but also through their actions. Much like Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors, these fictional heroes exhibit

⁴ According to Thornhill, ‘Limit situations’ (*Grenzsituationen*) are moments, usually accompanied by experiences of dread, guilt or acute anxiety, in which the human mind confronts the restrictions and pathological narrowness of its existing forms, and allows itself to abandon the securities of its limitedness, and so to enter a new realm of self-consciousness’ (Thornhill 2006). The Other, as opposed to the Same, is a popular term in European philosophy used by Sartre, Lacan and Levinas (see: Peperzak and Lévinas 1993). Engagement (or commitment) is a term applied by Sartre to describe personal involvement in social and moral reform, instead of an individual remaining passive and self-centred (see, for instance, Howells 2010).

life styles and states of consciousness of a vividness far more persuasive than any discursive argumentation. (Clive 1972:XIV)

Van Stralen (2005:24) argues that a literary work has a certain advantage over a philosophical text, because in the former an author is privileged with far greater freedom to form and transform reality than is a philosopher. Suffice it to compare the highly refined or even esoteric tracts of Heidegger with the far more easily accessible literary works of Camus. At the same time existential literature is so strongly connected with philosophy that, as Van Stralen (2005:23) claims, we should always keep philosophical terms to hand and be ready to apply them in order to solve the riddles of existence as they are presented to us in the fiction. In his collection of essays on existentialism and literature the author notices aptly that with reference to literature ‘the term existence is always connected with a rift in human existence, a form of estrangement which is typical for modern man and which has been profiled more and more clearly since the second half of the 19th century’ (Van Stralen 2005:23).

3.1.1 Grin and questions of human existence

Clive (1972:XIV) notes that in Russian literature we can find many ideas and characters who bear strong existential imprints, even though they were created well before the rise of philosophical existentialism. The critic argues that we can hazard the thought that *Dead Souls*, *Notes from Underground*, *Oblomov* and *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* to some extent influenced the most important Russian representatives of existentialism, such as Shestov, Berdiaiev and Aldanov. Clive makes frequent use of the term “intuitive existentialism”, by which he implies that such writers as those mentioned above cannot be counted *de facto* as belonging to existential literature, but that their works contain many precursory elements of what would later characterise the movement. I shall argue here that Grin was one of them. In other words, it will be claimed that one can discover in Grin’s works an almost ideal representation of the inner struggle of a person tragically ‘thrown-into-the-world’,⁵ an individual who embodies the spiritual crises of twentieth-century man,

⁵ In *Sein und Zeit* (1927) Heidegger proclaims that all human beings are thrown into existence with neither prior knowledge nor individual option. They find themselves in a world that was there before and will remain there after they are gone (Steiner 1978) and this ‘thrownness’ is a profound philosophical issue faced by every individual.

an existential view of the world as we know it from the works of such prominent representatives of this philosophy as Camus, Sartre and Heidegger.

The arguments supporting this claim are based on the analysis of Grin's views on the problems of human existence which are the core elements considered in existential philosophy: fragility of happiness (3.1.3), the absurdity of existence (3.1.4), the problem of suicide (3.1.5), loneliness (3.1.6.1), freedom (3.1.6.2) and responsibility (3.1.6.3.). Within section 3.1.7 I also analyse the options of human conduct which the author rejected.

In the case of Grin's work I am convinced that it is useful, as already emphasised in the introduction to this thesis, to establish a psychologically-grounded biographical basis of a number of major thematic tendencies in the author's work and to consider the historical background in which it emerged. Hence, before moving to the analysis of particular existential motifs in Grin's stories, I shall focus on several important experiences of his life which led to the disillusionment and collapse of his dreams and the traces of which we find in his works.

3.1.2 Grin's personal existential journey

Every production of an artist should be the expression of an adventure of his soul.

William Somerset Maugham

As Schopenhauer pointed out in his *Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life*, it is obvious that a young man might have a natural tendency to imagine the world in much brighter colours than in fact turns out to be the case (Schopenhauer 1974:478-9). It is not necessary to share the German philosopher's perennial pessimism to agree with this thought. People usually grow to understand this truth, as life provides them with more and more opportunities to learn of the imperfection of human nature and of life in general. The same natural inclination to idealise the nature of the world, and to build idyllic dreams, is even more likely to apply to a young man whose childhood has been spent in an isolated province far from the bustling city. An individual with the innate capability for creating original literary works will be even more predisposed to overrate the possibilities which

seem to exist just beyond the horizon of the present. Such an imagination, once stimulated, knows no limits, and with its help it is all too easy to build castles in the air and impatiently anticipate the discovery of Arcadia. This is exactly the kind of imagination with which the young Aleksandr Grin was endowed.

From his early years the writer became engrossed in reading the great masters of adventure stories who portrayed brave captains, pirates and discoverers. The colourful, sparkling fictional worlds of Jules Verne, Robert Louis Stevenson and Thomas Mayne Reid were the everyday nourishment of his imagination, worlds which seemed so different from the grey reality of Russia at the turn of the century. But Grin did not have an easy childhood. Indeed, it would be hard to imagine harsher conditions for a child to grow up in than those in which Grin found himself. His mother died when he was 12, as already mentioned in the Introduction, and his father was an embittered drunkard. There was the cultural stagnation of a provincial town, teachers' lack of understanding for an intelligent but stubborn boy, and finally a general lack of hope for the improvement of his situation in life – all this resulted in the future writer's overwhelming desire to leave his native little Viatka for good. All these and subsequent experiences certainly had an influence on his fictional creations, where Grin presents a range of dreamers who bravely create their own ambitious, alternative visions of reality. *Alye parusa* is an exemplary work in this regard, one which depicts like no other a young idealistic heart. The tale describes a young hero and heroine's dreams of wonderful adventures at sea, stimulated by the picture of a sailing ship (in the case of Gray) and by the fascinating story told by a strange bard (in the case of Assol), dreams which become a kind of charm or amulet which gives the strength to keep their visions alive and defend them against all manner of doubtful people. The main characters maintain their beliefs and dreams, even when they face incomprehension in those who are inimical towards such imaginings. The young heroes are portrayed by Grin with moral features more typical of adult persons. Both Assol and Gray are intolerant of the apathy and mediocrity around them, since they embody high commitment and faith in their own ideals. As a matter of fact, in the case of *Alye parusa* Gray and Assol do succeed in fulfilling their dreams, and it is mainly thanks to this story that Grin is so widely appreciated for creating one of the most charming *феерии* in all of Russian literature.⁶ We can see certain analogies with Grin's own biography here, where dreams of a better life on the sea compel him to leave Viatka, almost against reason, since he was practically

⁶ The Russian term *феерия* means 'extravaganza, fantastic artistic production'. Grin used this word in subtitles in some of his works to denote a plot extraordinarily rich in fantastic elements.

penniless and poorly educated. Unfortunately, the rest of the writer's own life turned out very differently to the dreams he once had.

In the aforementioned biography of Grin, Luker (1980) convincingly describes the unlucky adventures of a young writer who tried to conquer the world, but met with painful disillusionment. Odessa enraptured him with its hubbub associated with a large port city, but from the very beginning – with his fight to gain a place on board ship – Grin faced one defeat after another. As it turned out, the greatest dreams of his life were never to come true. This significant episode had a strong psychological influence on Grin's life and, in fact, on his writing as well.⁷ But the bitter collapse of his dream of becoming a sailor was just the first in a long series of misfortunes that would influence him in creating his Dreamers.

One of the main emotional disasters in that period of Grin's life is described by him in the very short autobiographical work entitled 'Po zakonu'. It is built around personal experience from the time of his life in Odessa. He witnessed a scene in a hospital where two sailors were being treated after a street fight. One of them was said to have stabbed the other with a knife. Grin felt that too much was made of this incident. A military officer asked the injured sailor to decide whether to file a charge or not; surprisingly, after some hesitation, the sailor agreed to do so. Lack of generosity here meant not only an inability to forgive, but rather outright hostility. This kind of revenge was absolutely irreconcilable with the idealistic image of sailors that Grin had always maintained. This brief and seemingly trite event had an enormous impact on his attitude to sailors and life at sea.

Grin's harbour life was by all accounts very hard. During this difficult period the future writer was utterly penniless, often jobless, and suffered daily from hunger and humiliation. As time passed the pain of disappointment and the tragic end of radiant dreams became important themes in many of his works. The stories adopt two different stances in this regard: firstly, they describe the vain and fugitive nature of dreams, and secondly, they express an inner faith in the fact that even eventual defeat does not have to be seen as an unmitigated disaster.

A difficult life lead Grin also to disappointment and doubt regarding the veracity of human feelings which we find, for instance, in the story 'Liubimyi'. Its eponymous hero is a newly-engaged bridegroom-to-be whose warm assurances of love for his future wife are put to an extreme test. This everyman figure (Grin does not give him any name or outward characteristics) is given an opportunity to demonstrate his moral fibre in a situation of

⁷ Unfulfilled dreams about sailing lie at the base of 'Komendant porta', 'Golos sireny' and the protagonist of *Zolotaia tsep'*, the literary vision of Grin's own dreams.

danger. This happens when a false fire alarm causes chaos in a theatre as people try to escape in blind panic. The protagonist reacts with truly inhuman indifference: fearing for his own life, he abandons the girl and darts away like a thoughtless animal. It is his friend who saves the woman, and he admits to being astonished at her fiancé's pitiful behaviour. Such a pessimistic view of the feeling commonly described as "true love" is to be found in several of Grin's works (e.g. 'Kseniia Turpanova', 'Medvezh'ia okhota' and *Doroga nikuda*).

Another example of strong disappointment at people's lack of moral feeling can be found in the story 'Na oblachnom beregu'. A young couple buy their first home in a distant land and use the services of an unknown vendor who turns out, alas, to be a fraudster. They lose all their savings. The emotional damage that they undergo changes their attitude towards people, and their natural faith in humankind is replaced with a much more distrustful attitude.

In turn, the author's experiences in the army influenced a group of works which display the author's deep concern for human beings who are under too much external control and are all too often subjected to humiliation. 'Slon i Mos'ka' and 'Istoriia odnogo ubiistva' address the problem of the unjust, inhumane treatment of soldiers by their superiors, who prove to be heartless oppressors rather than brothers-in-arms.

Many of Grin's works, like *Alye parusa*, 'Novyi tsirk' and 'Proisshestvie v ulitse Psa', contrast individual behaviour with the cruelty of the crowd. The masses seem indifferent towards the dreams of the heroes. The experiences of some Grinian characters even prove that moral disappointment with other people may lead to misanthropy. On the other hand, damage inflicted by other people may often be cured by the influence of some beloved person.

In this context the motif of love in Grin's oeuvre cannot be left unmentioned. According to Luker (1980:3) Grin experienced the dream of an idyllic life spent with a princess-like girl, which seems to have been inspired by the story entitled 'Mila i Nolli' by N.P. Wagner.⁸ However, this vision was brutally confronted by reality – Grin had to face unrequited love, his first marriage was by no means idyllic, and the second one not free from troubles either. These experiences are realised in a few profoundly moving works (e.g. 'Apel'siny', 'Vetka omely').

On the whole, from the moral point of view, Grin divides his female characters into two groups. The first and more numerous group consists of "angelic" women, like the most

⁸ Cf. Luker (1980:3).

popular of all Grin's feminine heroes, Assol in *Alye parusa*.⁹ Such characters seem relatively two-dimensional variations on the seraphic image of woman found in the above-mentioned Wagner story 'Mili i Nolli'.

The second group consists of demonic women who are unable to change their innate instincts; they hurt the male hero or lead him astray, becoming the reason for depression and even suicide on his part.¹⁰ The motif of the "femme fatale", so important in Russian symbolism, reappears in many of Grin stories like 'Koloniia Lanfier', 'Medvezh'ia okhota' and 'Sto verst po reke'. In these works we may detect not only signs of Grin's inclination towards a fashionable decadence, and a fascination for a Schopenhauerian¹¹ (or even Weininger-like) understanding of the destructive role of women, but also elements of the author's own life-experience. The plot of 'Sto verst po reke', for example, tells how the trampling of his dreams leads the main character to a situation of psychological impairment. Deeply hurt and betrayed by the woman he loves, he changes completely. Seeking comfort in philosophical pessimism, he turns away from people and becomes a mistrustful loner. His harsh and strikingly unpleasant response to the innocent girl travelling with him displays a deep and exaggerated misogyny.

In the extremely turbulent period between 1906 and 1910 Grin's dreams concerning revolution, the future of Russia and his own personal life were seriously shaken. Grin, a born romantic and idealist, became disillusioned in his perception of the world and Russian reality in particular. He can then be said to have joined the metaphorical circle of his great Russian literary predecessors like Gogol, Dostoevsky and Tolstoi, who were tormented by a civilisation which they found increasingly devoid of spiritual meaning and comradesly relations.¹² Like his great literary predecessors, Grin, too, eventually overcame the crisis of broken illusions and tried to propose his solutions in his later work.

As Tarnas (1996:389) has put it, to some extent every romantic has to experience a brutal collision between the search for spiritual bliss and the dark reality of the twentieth century. Grin, a romantic dreamer by nature, looked upon it as another inevitably harsh lesson of real life: that this world does not adhere to logical and just rules. A person full of good intentions and acting without any harmful thoughts may find himself rewarded

⁹ Among many examples we might highlight Tavi in *Blistaiushchii mir* and Dzhessi in *Dzhessi i Morgiana*.

¹⁰ Evil women characters have this type of negative impact on heroes in 'Proisshestvie v ulitse Psa', 'Prokhnodnoi dvor', 'Seryi avtomobil', 'Koloniia Lanfier', 'Sto verst po reke', 'Veselaia babochka' and 'Volshebnoe bezobrazie'.

¹¹ On Schopenhauer's understanding of the inferiority of woman, see his essay 'On women' (1851).

¹² For more discussion, see Clive (1972:99) and Jackson (1958:24).

unfairly. If we stick to some moral rules, and we fail to be appreciated for our pure intentions, then our unsuccessful results may be received with enmity and punished. Although this assumption is a truism, it must be noted as having strong consequences for Grin's morality. Grin presents this striking (but very true) principle of life in a few stories, the most compelling of which is 'Vor v Iesu', discussed in section 2.2. The risk of being misunderstood and hurt appears to be one of the reasons for seeking refuge from society in Grin's work and can be found in 'Ostrov Reno' and 'Koloniiia Lanfier'. After all the bitter disillusionment (or even very painful defeats) Grin expresses his deep doubt in the possibility of building earthly utopia. Both his works 'Uchenik charodeia' and *Blistaiushchii mir* resemble *Notes from Underground* in their poignant pessimistic collapse of the utopianism of the main altruistic characters.

3.1.3 The experience of happiness

The first element of human existence to be considered within the discussion of existentialism in Grin's Weltanschauung is happiness. It has already been scrutinised in the previous Part of the thesis but here it will be approached from a slightly different perspective.

The typical Grinian hero often discovers that the world itself is constructed in such a way that any moments of happiness are usually preceded by long and difficult periods of struggle. Moreover, happiness, even when achieved, is a very fragile condition, despite one's attempts to design it according to rational and well-grounded presumptions. Awareness that a person still cannot be sure of his or her happiness, even when leading a life of moderation, with all common-sense rules obeyed, has especially miserable consequences. Let us look at an explicit example from one of Grin's stories of the idea of the unreliability of man's plans.

In 'Zurbaganskii strelok' Grin depicts a drastic set of events that leads the hero into almost utter desolation: his children and wife, the most valuable things in his life, die unexpectedly, leaving him in a state of desperate loneliness and uncertainty as to how to continue his existence. The hero loses the very sense of the meaning of life and slips into

black melancholy.¹³ Much of the work consists of solemn descriptions of the inner chaos of the first-person narrator: ‘Звездное небо, смерть и роковое бессилие человека твердили мне о смертном отчаянии’ (1.II:214-15). For the Grinian hero science (or knowledge) seems to bring no consolation: ‘С сомнением я обратился к науке, но и наука была - отчаяние. Я искал ответа в книгах людей, точно установивших причину, следствие, развитие и сущность явлений’ (1.II:215). Such wise men appear to be similarly devoid of answers to the eternal riddles of existence, indeed they ‘знали не больше, чем я, и в мысли их таилось отчаяние’. The fatal sense of despair is so deep and overwhelming that even the power of art (which Schopenhauer praised as a cure and source of liberating contemplation) leads the hero nowhere:

Я слушал музыку, вдохновенные мелодии людей потрясенных и гениальных; слушал так, как слушают взволнованный голос признаний; твердил строфы поэтов, смотрел на гибкие, мраморные тела чудесных по выразительности и линиям изваяний, но в звуках, словах, красках и линиях видел только отчаяние; я открывал его везде, всюду. (1.II:215)

To intensify the effect of this utterly unnatural state, Grin uses an apt metaphor to link the spiritually broken individual with part of a ‘broken’ landscape: ‘я был в те дни высохшей, мертвой рекой с ненужными берегами’ (1.II:215). A similar sequence of events – despair leading to resignation – is present in other stories, like ‘Ogon’ i voda’ and ‘Sluchai’.

The fragility of human plans and hopes in Grin’s work can be viewed either as random misfortune or, on a deeper philosophical level, as the result of the hostile nature of the world. I believe the latter to be the correct reading: Grin shows the fragility of our plans to reflect one of the most essential features of the world, an innate quality of human existence. He views all human efforts at establishing a happy life with Schopenhauerian pessimism as expressed in his aphorisms and the famous essay ‘On the Vanity of Existence’.¹⁴ This tendency results in the concept of ‘жить в тени’ which is revealed in two of the stories described previously, ‘Seryi avtomobil’ and ‘Chelovek s chelovekom’. Grin suggests that it is preferable to try to stay on the sidelines (or *в тени*, as his protagonist puts it) and live by avoiding competition and other interaction with society. The

¹³ A similar motif appears in the story ‘Plem’ia Siurg’.

¹⁴ It was arguably this bleak pessimism with regard to human life and aspirations that Schopenhauer’s ‘Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life’ were mainly associated with at the peak of his popularity in Russia at the turn of the 19th century. Cf. Nikolai Berdyaev ‘The Russian Spiritual Renaissance of Beginning XX Century and the Journal Put’ (source: <http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Philosophy/Sui-Generis/Berdyaev/essays/rsr.htm> - accessed on 11.09.2010).

strong opposition between the individual and the soulless masses, as well as an extreme hypersensitivity and a sense of one's own uniqueness, and finally misanthropy and misogyny, which resemble the tactic of a tortoise hiding inside its carapace whenever danger appears, result in total existential loneliness.

One of the most interesting stories concerned with the problem of happiness in Grin's oeuvre can be derived from the story 'Beznogii'. The vision of the collapse of great happiness presented here can make the reader anxious. All of a sudden, the hero loses everything that has given him hope, happiness and love. What is more, he becomes disabled and turns to beggary. The physical loss causes even greater damage to his emotional life, which becomes a nightmare. In 'Beznogii' Grin depicts a scenario which reminds us of Schopenhauer's pessimism, because all those dreadful events happen without any moral guilt on the hero's part, nor for any rationally deducible reason. The world appears to be immanently capable of producing such changes, where fate can steal everything that a person has and make a beggar of him at any moment. However, if we were to try to connect such a hero with the biblical Job, we should note that in Grin's story there is no direct consoling faith in a personal God, nor in an afterlife,¹⁵ nor is there any consolation to be gained from one's fellow men.

The question that arises is therefore: what significance should one assign to happiness? The answer Grin gives is: none, if you define happiness with external values in mind. It has already been emphasised in Part Two that in the author's view neither wealth, nor fame, nor respect, love, family life, friendship nor art are necessary to achieve happiness. And although Grin does not put it explicitly, he leaves his readers in no doubt, as will be shown in the following sections, that in his view true fulfilment – true happiness – comes from within a person. This is exactly where Grin's Weltanschauung displays affinity to Existentialism following the view presented by Camus in his famous essay 'The Myth of Sisyphus' published in 1942, where the author addressed directly the question of happiness. The mythical protagonist finds himself in a situation where no external source of values is present, there seems to be nothing to live up to, there is only constant labour leading to nowhere with no resting place and yet, despite all of it, he achieves happiness. As the author puts it: "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Camus 1955:91). In existential philosophy, as well as in Grin's Weltanschauung, it is the inner values that define happiness.

¹⁵ Although, as Litwinow claims in his article 'Religioznye motivy v tvorchestve Aleksandra Grina' (1993:47-51), the writer's characters reveal sometimes certain elements reminiscent of Christian faith.

3.1.4 The meaning of existence

In Grin's literary world life often does not follow the individual's logical assumptions. The protagonists in his stories cannot take anything for granted, in a hostile world they cannot count on the support of kindred spirits either and thus their experiences are rich in interesting consequences.

One of the stories in which we may find a moving vision of the human quest for the meaning of existence is 'Rai' where Grin depicts decadent members of the intelligentsia. This whole work is, according to Litwinow, entirely 'filled with an atmosphere of destruction, alogism and absurdity' (Litwinow 1986:86). The plot conveys a sombre and depressing depiction of the lives of five very different people. Grin provides in 'Rai' five different descriptions, each revealing a more or less earth-shattering collapse of values. The leading force and most lurid individual of the group is a banker who has been corrupted by wealth and power. The other characters are: a book-keeper (grieving over the death of his beloved), a captain (devoid of any hope of love), a journalist (perpetually consumed by hatred for people) and a woman (inwardly burnt out by *ennui*). Although they all appear to die of their own free will after drinking poisoned wine, they have in fact been inwardly dead long before they committed this theatrical deed. Grin deliberately chooses random individuals to show that no matter what status, wealth or characters people possess, they all die from the effect of recognising 'the great mistake called life', to paraphrase Schopenhauer's famous quotation. The sufferings and misery have become so unbearable to the five characters that suicide appears to them the only possible option, a form of liberation.

Also in other Grin stories we find what Dostoevsky, according to Jackson (1958:27), foresaw in *Notes from Underground*: 'uncontrolled egotism, destructive individualism, demand for independent will'. They become tangible facts in the lives of many of Grin's characters.

This is what we find, for instance, in 'Gorbun', where the main character is spiritually crippled and filled with overwhelming resentment.¹⁶ His everyday life is a constant battle with the dark side of existence. Grin's hero witnesses everything that was so dramatically described by Schopenhauer – life's arena where innumerable representatives

¹⁶ He may be compared to the hero of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* who, though isolated from society and hating it, still desperately needs it.

of the *principium individuationis* (which Schopenhauer describes as the most essential rule of the self-preservation of all living cells and the preservation of species) participate in ‘a war of all against all’.¹⁷ The governing features of this continuous struggle are envy, cruelty, stupidity, animal instinct, hunger, collapse of dreams and loss of faith.

Grin heroes discover painfully that, to use Graham’s words, ‘there is no explanation for our life – the world; it is a pure fact and what follows is our choice – free and crucial’ (Graham 1990:76). We find such a deeply disturbing conclusion about life in numerous Grin stories, generating a feeling of the absurdity of human existence which brings our discussion to the main theme of existential philosophy.

The notion of absurdity, as described by Camus (1995), constitutes the dramatic opposition and conflict between two ideals – man naturally seeks for harmony, order and logical answers while the world he is thrown into displays striking chaos and apparent injustice and forces him to accept illogical and unjust conditions: ‘the divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity’ (Camus 1955:5).¹⁸ Furthermore, many other feelings – the futility of life, the senselessness of our aspirations and daily routine – add to the prevailing sense of lack of logical continuity and harmony. The absurd lies, therefore, not within the world itself, nor in man, but only in their coexistence.¹⁹ As a natural consequence (or in the natural process of intellectual development) man’s individual experiences are transferred to an abstract level of generalisation: human life is perceived clearly as beyond man’s control and all attempts to make life organised and well thought-out turn out to be doomed to failure.

It is exactly this understanding of the human condition and the world where ‘we are confronted with the irrevocable and tragic contradiction between intent and effect’ (Van Stralen 2005:8) that we find in Grin’s oeuvre. In some of the author’s gloomy stories (such as ‘Vor v lesu’, ‘Malinnik Iakobsona’ and ‘Kirpich i muzyka’) we may even say it is the key element of the plots. What we find in Grin’s oeuvre and what allows us to draw certain

¹⁷ The term introduced by Schopenhauer and later discussed by Nietzsche, in English philosophical tradition translated as ‘the principle of individuation’.

¹⁸ It should be noted that, although it is Camus who is seen by many philosophers as the father of the European existential concept of absurdity, the concept itself was invented and discussed in the first half of the nineteenth century by another philosopher, the proto-existentialist Kierkegaard. Critical of Hegel’s philosophical objectivism, the Danish thinker tried to analyse man’s existence in an abstract and impersonal way. One of his main aims was to reveal the very essence of ‘existing as a human being’ – the absurd. For Kierkegaard, who was a devout Christian, in the cruel and obscure world the absurd is so deeply-rooted in human existence that it penetrates even religious faith. The famous *leap of faith* accredited to Kierkegaard advances the view that a man is utterly devoid of any visible signs that might lead him to be sure about any values in the world. For detailed accounts of the problem of absurdity in existential philosophy, see, for instance, Mordarski (2009), Hughes (2007), Raymond (1991) and Hochberg (1965).

¹⁹ Cf. Copleston (1981:186-87).

parallels between him and existential thinkers is that the search for the meaning of life has to be limited to one's inner world of values which often proves difficult.

3.1.5 The problem of suicide

Жизнь моя очень проста и нет в ней ничего такого, над чем можно задуматься. Я и сам никогда не задумывался, зная, что бог и вселенная - ряд неразрешимых загадок. Я ничего не знаю. А на земле все ясно... все ясно, и поэтому нельзя жить.

Aleksandr Grin, 'Rai'

In the world of the absurd Grin's heroes often experience various forms of metaphysical crisis, (e.g. groundlessness, lack of any meaning in their lives) which can be described in philosophical terms as despair. This leads them into a void of desperation and depression.²⁰ Born idealists, driven by faith in dreams and the goodness of human nature, the heroes become inwardly hurt and experience the catastrophic fall of Icarus. It is then no wonder that Grinian protagonists find themselves on the verge of committing suicide.

As Clive notes, although the Russian literary tradition 'is frequently identified with the celebration of life *per se*, it is no less preoccupied with the state of inner desperation' (Clive 1972:XXI). Without doubt, Grin's interest in both modes of life is united in a few works where the heroes overcome their apathy through strong links with nature. In Part One we saw the main character of 'Taina lesa' lying on the grass in a forest on the verge of taking the ultimate step – suicide, but saved by a basic impulse: an animal, biological need for life. He is rescued by an unconscious instinct of attachment to life. The problems that I shall address in the following section of the thesis are: Grin's vision of despair, depiction of the ways out of depression other than by evolutionary precondition (i.e. connected with man's sense of self-preservation) and the writer's view on suicide. All of them, as will be shown, are important in my attempt to reconstruct Grin's vision of human existence and morality.

The Grinian hero's descent into doubt is not a momentary weakness, an accidental coincidence, but a critical moment in the complex process of becoming aware of the nature

²⁰ Cf. Ivanitskaia (1993:64).

of the world. The philosophical investigations carried out by the main character in 'Otshel'nik Vinogradnogo Pika' result, for example, in the almost total collapse of his view of the world; his disorientation is a multi-faceted process which increasingly casts doubt on life's most essential truths. Before focusing on the problem of despair in Grin's work, we need to make a specific distinction. There are many examples throughout the author's oeuvre of characters feeling utterly lost and experiencing spiritual chaos. Although everyday disappointments and failures can lead to psychological despair, such a state of mind should not be confused with the much deeper concept of malaise usually described as *existential despair*²¹ which I am going to discuss here. Some Grinian heroes, who may be mistaken for experiencing philosophical despair, suffer from strong psychological problems. In 'Nochleg' and 'Proisshestvie v ulitse Psa', for example, we can trace not metaphysical, but rather individual reasons for the despair and suicide of the protagonists. With regard to morality, however, we should concentrate on examples where purely philosophical facts observed by the characters lead them to the state of despair. This state must stem from the personal conclusion that we all must live in a world that is (and will remain) hostile or indifferent towards us. This notion of despair is to be found in 'Rasskaz Birka', 'Vecher' (a short part of 'Nasledie Pik-Mika') and 'Zurbaganskii strelok'. All the main characters in these works seem to lose faith in the meaning of existence as a consequence of their life experience, but then move from the individual to an abstract or sublime level of thinking, at which point they reach a general recognition of the absurdity of the whole world.

In order to analyse Grin's vision of existential despair I shall return to the story 'Rai'. This work about a group of suicides presents us with variations on the theme embodied in the experience of the eponymous hero of Tolstoi's *Death of Ivan Il'ich*. Clive has observed that 'suddenly the whole enterprise struck him [Tolstoi's protagonist] as hopelessly ludicrous and pointless' (Clive 1972:106). Grin's work, in turn, shows us characters who differ in many respects – psychological, professional, intellectual and moral – in order to convince the reader that *ennui* and despair are the common final point of their meandering spiritual journeys. The dreams and aspirations (and some elaborate plans) of the suicides had all been cruelly broken and their hopes for happiness destroyed.²² This

²¹ Park (1999:36-41) characterises this state of mind as a comprehensive loss of hope for existence which is not limited to one dimension of life, but pervades every corner of our being, leaving no area of life untouched. He notes that the hopelessness that existential despair brings about is permanent and all-pervasive. It may have no objective cause, and we cannot overcome the despair, but only conceal it or embrace it.

²² The story appears to illustrate Schopenhauer's advice not to make large-scale plans for the future, since life can never be foreseen and by applying such plans people usually suffer collapse sooner or later.

burden of hopelessness is for them absolutely unbearable. Their letters reveal complete disillusionment with the futility of their dreams and strivings. Suicide appears to these people to be a way of escaping life in a dreadful world which fails utterly to fulfil their expectations. On the day of their last feast they might all have repeated the words spoken by Camus' Cherea: 'I want to live and be happy. I believe that we cannot be one or the other by pushing the absurd to all its consequences' (Camus 1965:47). And quite like the arch-conspirator from Camus' play the Grinian heroes are also driven by a dread of the absurd.²³

In perceiving the world as hostile, the characters of 'Rai' are similar both to Roquentin in Sartre's *Nausea* and to Stavrogin in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* – two characters representative of European literary existentialism.²⁴ The life of a man suffering from despair appears as a prison where the once-spirited person ends up as a submissive spiritual wreck. For the despairing heroes of 'Rai', living is the constant perception of the existential notion of *being-towards-death*, as Heidegger would have put it.²⁵ This state is for them the worst of all options, one utterly devoid of any value. Again here we find clear correspondences between Grin and the 20th century existentialists, for whom the notion of life perceived as a form of prison limited in space is nothing less than waiting for nothingness. Tarnas (1996:389) rightly notices that the man of the era of crisis painfully concentrates his consciousness on the fact that he possesses no determining essence. Only his existence is given, an existence inherently encompassed by mortality, risk, fear, ennui, contradiction, uncertainty. For a person who has lost faith in the meaning of life and would have therefore to continue a senseless existence, the loss is, as Copleston (1981:187) points out, the worst torture and hence it is no greater sacrifice to give life up. In the dramatic situation of crisis as presented by Grin in 'Rai' we can observe what Jaspers would call a *limit situation*, with its variety of typical existential emotions which we find in the works of the great existentialists: shame, fear, nausea, the sensation of being mortal (finite), and the realisation that one has been "thrown into" the world (see Van Stralen 2005:75). These emotions reappear in many of Grin's works in which the mind sets a trap by perpetually asking questions which cannot be answered.

In stories like 'Otshel'nik Vinogradnogo Pika' and 'Rasskaz Birka' we find characters who become trapped in labyrinths of futile philosophical investigation and look desperately for a way to understand the order of things in the world. But they seek the

²³ For interesting notes on Cherea, see Cornwell (2006:116-17).

²⁴ This is how Clive (1972:XVI) characterises these two heroes.

²⁵ The philosopher used this term in his magnum opus *Sein und Zeit* (1927).

solution solely by cold reasoning and therefore, in Grin's view, they must fail. The eponymous hero of 'Gorbun' resembles Dostoevsky's Underground Man in his dramatic attempt to find a reasonable answer. He, too, remains unnamed throughout the plot and clearly represents an entire category of people. His nickname tells of his physical disability, but more importantly it symbolises the fact that he has a broken soul, a burden he must carry and constantly struggle against. Gorbun's ostentatious dinner and seemingly chaotic utterances, full of veiled resentment, reveal (regardless of his efforts) his painful unfittedness for society and his separation from ordinary people. Moreover, we witness his inability to take decisions and his loss of will connected with collapse of faith. His hatred for his guests, whom he ostensibly wishes to please and befriend, sums up the very artificiality of his attempt to socialise. Grin's hero is, however, condemned to the role of recluse, rebel and outcast who must deal with his existence by himself.²⁶

Jackson describes the latter as a person who 'cannot act because he can find no permanent primary causes, no foundation to rest upon' (Jackson 1958:35). However, in Grin's work that metaphysical doubt concerning the meaning of existence (i.e. the feeling of absurdity) is never expressed as directly as it is in the novel *Grendel* by Gardner, where one of the heroes says: 'I understand that the world was nothing, a mechanical chaos of casual, brute enmity on which we stupidly impose our hopes and fears. I understand that, finally and absolutely, I alone exist. All the rest, I saw, is merely what pushes me, or what I push against, blindly – as blindly as all that is not myself pushes back. I create the whole universe, blink by blink' (Gardner 1972:20-21). In works like 'Otshel'nik Vinogradnogo Pika' and 'Vecher' Grin suggests that through intensive abstract thinking man becomes more and more entangled in a web of questions without answers, where the human mind is simply helpless. A similar disastrous chain of thoughts is described by Dostoevsky in 'Prigovor' (1876). His main hero, the atheist Dolgorukii, is described as 'самоубийца от скуки'. After a long and elaborate series of logically-linked assumptions, he reaches the final point – the conclusion that his miserable life is of no value and should, therefore, be terminated. According to Jackson (1958:59-60), at the root of such a tragic error of the mind lies the conviction that any vision of happiness is united with (and inevitably followed by) its decline and destruction. This view clearly resembles Schopenhauerian philosophical pessimism, an intellectual malaise which Grin also depicts in 'Rai'.

²⁶ Interestingly, a similarly inwardly disturbed but humble hunchback appears as the eponymous character of Thomas Mann's *Little Herr Friedemann* (1896). Much more similar to the Grinian character is, however, the treacherous and merciless protagonist of Lagerkvist's story *The Dwarf* (1944), who is a realisation of the evil sides of human nature.

Such pessimism can also be found in Grin's story 'Zemlia i voda' which describes a disastrous flood in Petersburg. The narrator, who is also the main character, recounts the horrific events and draws a more general conclusion from his experience. His words 'Топе живых более страшное чем покой мертвых' (1.III:264) are reminiscent of King Solomon's famous thoughts on the vanity of existence. Disappointment with other people, the collapse of dreams of an idyllic life at sea, and the absurdity and injustice of fate, all constitute consecutive stages on the road to understanding the real nature of the world in Grin's works. This journey, as has been shown, results in some of the Grinian heroes to becoming 'defeated' by their fate or, in other words, crushed by a harsh life.

In his groundbreaking work *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus advances the thesis that suicide should be regarded as the most essential problem of morality. He claims that: 'There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy' (Camus 1955:3). The French philosopher argues that granting moral permission for this deed leads directly to enormously important consequences. For an existentialist, every man can, in fact, choose freely to withdraw from life, like an actor from a play in which he is participating, once he comes to see his own role as intolerable, for any reason which makes it no longer bearable. This is not so much returning his ticket to God, to use Ivan Karamazov's famous phrase, as quitting a personal drama that is taking place on stage.

But in contrast to Ivan Karamazov's highly abstract, philosophical deliberations, the Grinian hero is inclined to leave the world on the grounds that his own existence seems absurd, defenceless and helpless, rather than that of the whole life of mankind. Such a deed would not involve any elaborate protest or accusation against nature, blind fate or God.²⁷ The Grinian hero does not protest against the unseen laws of the world as such; he merely finds their operations too harsh for him. The Grinian suicide-to-be resembles Sisyphus who finally abandons the task of pushing his stone up the hill. He feels resignation as there seems to be no further hope of happiness and satisfaction in his life. For Grin every tormented hero must sooner or later face this critical moment of choice. In other words, the problem of suicide is inescapable for the Grinian *маленький человек*, who is but a very little cog in the wheel, and therefore he must find the meaning of his own existence. Among characters for whom suicide is the only way out are Glazunov in 'Nochleg' and the eponymous hero of 'Priklucheniia Gincha'.

²⁷ Note, for instance, that none of the depressed characters in 'Rai' sees any solution in protesting against society, or in any act of intellectual rebellion.

For many of Grin's characters honour plays an important role in relation to the moral aspect of suicide, and for some of them, like the protagonist of 'Otshel'nik Vinogradnogo Pika', it plays the dominant role. This virtue is presented in a vein similar to that found in Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, which argues that a man should recognise his dignity and confirm it in his life. The question of honour appears in 'Nochleg' where another *маленький человек*, Glazunov, does not wish to beg for money any more and, full of bitter thoughts about life's numerous injustices and envious of others' happiness, he decides to put an end to his miserable, imperceptible existence. He sees his pitiful life in the darkest possible colours, as devoid of any value, and without any hope for the future. He commits suicide with no witnesses, no testimony and no message to the world: he remains silent to the end. Grin's story can be viewed, in fact, as a paean in praise of the poorest of human beings, those who are broken by fate, humiliated and forced to die in utter isolation.²⁸

In 'Otshel'nik Vinogradnogo Pika' and 'Chelovek s chelovekom' the concept of pride is presented as a solution to the search for the meaning of life. The wise men in both these works suggest discontinuing metaphysical investigation and advocate leading a normal life with "pride" as the main watchword. This key moral notion should be taken as a shield against resignation. Once again we find a striking similarity between Grin's philosophical views and existential philosophy of the 20th century: Camus too writes that 'the sight of human pride is unequalled' (Camus 1955:41). For the French philosopher this universal value cannot be undermined, and, therefore, in his opinion 'no disparagement is of any use' (ibidem).

The motif of suicide reappears again in the short story 'Reka' (1910) which concerns a group of loggers gathered by a fire on the bank of a river. Suddenly, the peace of the evening is disturbed when one of them finds the body of a drowned young girl. A little piece of paper found with her last words says simply that she did not want to live any longer. Then in a solemn atmosphere full of respect for the dead, the loggers discuss the matter, expressing grief and compassion. They do not condemn the suicide for her decision but they feel sorry that a person so young needed to end her life before she even knew what life was. Without any direct utterance, the loggers comment on the injustice of the world, where young and innocent people are driven to the edge of despair. There can be no doubt

²⁸ Here is where Grin differs from Schopenhauer. For the German philosopher, Glazunov would be an example of a man who is too weak to recognise the 'illusion' of suicide and who chooses the way of negation. For Schopenhauer's views on suicide, see his essay 'On suicide' (Schopenhauer 1974:306-11) and §69 of the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*. For an interesting insight on Schopenhauer's views of suicide, see Young (2005:194-95).

that through the prism of his works Grin at some point rejected suicide, though it took him time to reach this conclusion.²⁹

In Grin's comprehension such an act of self-destruction is not an acceptable option, but a failure of will, which deserves rejection. This view of suicide reveals one of the crucial differences between Grin and the Stoic philosophers. Despite many shared points, Grin does not stand for the idea of the followers of Zeno of Kition, who considered suicide not only rational but also noble in some special circumstances.³⁰ On the other hand, the recognition of the great value of human life, no matter how miserable and full of suffering it may be, brings Grin closer to Nietzsche. What is more, Grin seems to agree with Schopenhauer when rejecting suicide on the basis that self-destruction as an escape from life is a mistake associated with the weak mind (or will). Although in Schopenhauer's metaphysics life-denial (*Lebensverneinung*) is preferred to life-affirmation (*Lebensbejahung*), a living body can avoid suffering only through achieving nirvana, i.e. perfecting life and not denying it. In 'Chelovek s chelovekom' the notion of philosophical pride serves as a remedy against suicide. Grin suggests in his later works that suicide can be rejected and that man should be powerful enough to overcome the darkness of despair. However, the only sure path out of this potentially fatal state is acceptance of the absurdity of the world, with all its senselessness and injustice. Camus admires Kierkegaard for taking such a titanic decision when he says that the Danish philosopher 'does more than discover the absurd, he lives it' (Camus 1955:19). This very act of 'living the absurd' is for Camus precisely the noblest of all human deeds.

Generally, it is reasonable to conclude that Grin does not advance any moral condemnation of suicide, which is to say that he does not seek to deprive individuals of the right to make their own decisions at this essential moment of crisis. His philosophy seems quite devoid of the explicitly critical thoughts expressed by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in their works, or indeed of Christian preaching about the sinfulness of suicide. Grin's literary

²⁹ When we consider the chronological order of the stories containing the motif of suicide described here, it turns out that the most depressing work – 'Rai', was written in 1909. In the same year Grin wrote two other stories in which the heroes committed suicide ('Nochleg' and 'Proisshestvie v ulitse Psa'). Besides the pessimistic story 'Reka', between 1910 and 1915 there are a number of works in which the protagonists considered committing suicide but did not do so, because they were saved by others ('Chetvertyi za vsekh' 1912, 'Priklucheniia Gincha' 1912, 'Chelovek s chelovekom' 1913, 'Sud'ba vziataia za roga' 1914). It seems that Grin rejected suicide as an option for his depressed heroes around 1915, with the appearance of such stories as 'Nasledstvo Pik-Mika' and 'Taina lunnoi nochi'.

³⁰ As we know, many ancient philosophers decided to commit suicide when they considered their life no longer acceptable to them, especially because of physical illness. Cleanthes (331-232 BC), a Stoic philosopher of Assus in Lydia and a disciple of Zeno of Kition, is said to have starved himself to death in his 99th year. Seneca is usually regarded as the prime example of a noble suicide. His death, vividly described by Tacitus, and partly modelled on the death of Socrates, as presented in Plato's *Phaedo*, was conceived as a gesture of defiance and of heroic fortitude. For more discussion of Stoic views on suicide, see: Seidler (1983).

therapy, which I will discuss in more detail in section 3.4, consists in showing the extent to which the step into suicide is unjust in relation to the human spirit. In other words, suicide is equivalent to treating oneself as an inanimate object and therefore involves an ultimate humiliation of the spirit.

When the Grinian hero rejects suicide, as the eponymous characters of ‘Rasskaz Birka’ and ‘Nasledstvo Pik-Mika’ do, he immediately begins to find his way out of the depths of depression. This spiritual re-birth cannot happen at once, and it is not an easy process. Grin convincingly depicts his *маленький человек* in such a way that the reader feels not only compassion, but also respect for what then appears as his heroic everyday struggle. Such a character’s heroism is not as evident as the noble altruism of other Grinian characters, but Grin seems to emphasise that the ability to return to life after deepest depression also requires enormous spiritual strength. Will power is indeed necessary to take the decision to live and struggle in spite of the absurdity and injustice of existence. The Grinian hero accepts not only loneliness, but also the aimless course of a rudderless ship on the ocean of life. Camus convincingly presents this situation in his novel *The Fall*: ‘for anyone who is alone, without God and without a master, the weight of days is dreadful.’ (Camus 1991:133).

The question that I will turn to now is: what is the existential path to which would-be suicides return with their perspective on life renewed? What is the life they wish to share anew with those who, like themselves, have embraced the absurd, or those who have yet to recognise its omnipresence?

3.1.6 Naked existence

3.1.6.1 Spiritual loneliness

As Grin depicts the matter, a decision to carry on with life is always linked to the finding of some support, of something that can fill a life lacking solid values. This ‘something’ must be of positive value.

One such value might be belief in God which can help people retrieve their lost sense of purpose at the most difficult periods of life. However, as we saw in Part One, in the world of Grin’s fiction God remains silent, if not absent. He seems not to allow people

to notice him at all. The eponymous hero of 'Poslednie minuty Riabinina' ponders the possibility of living a morally good life without any belief in transcendence whatsoever. His words carry a very authentic ring: 'если бы... человек... всегда понимал... что за гробом... один ... пшик, нуль... он жил бы лучше. Не мерзавцем' (2.II:24). With this existential utterance Riabinin reveals a certain affinity with the philosophy of Kotarbiński, the Polish logician and creator of *independent ethics*, which is to say, ethics disconnected from any divine being. Riabinin suddenly becomes aware of the physical decay of his body when he experiences 'предсмертную тоску каждого мускула' (2.II:23). His own deeply moving thoughts contrast tellingly with the reaction of his un-philosophical friends who are here to assist the dying man. They consider his words purely chaotic speech without any sense – a clear symptom of his mental instability caused by illness. The truth, however, is that Riabinin is actually more sober, more truthful in his apparently "chaotic" thoughts than the rest of his seemingly healthy friends.

Like Ivan Il'ich, Riabinin faces the most essential questions which return to him in the final moments of his life. He appears to be afraid, not only of death ('страх смерти естествен' (2.II:23)), but also of the eternal emptiness he expects to supervene after death: 'Предмет ужаса? Пустота' (ibidem). The whole story is truly existential in manner and message, and Riabinin is clearly a counterpart to the existential heroes of Tolstói, Camus and Sartre in his desperate search for answers to the questions of existence. Moreover, Grin's existentialist hero reveals his thoughts in a moving monologue which clearly proves that, for him, God has always been silent, not only throughout his past life but also at his moment of dying. In this, 'Poslednie minuty Riabinina' resembles other stories by Grin described in Part One, which also show that, although the writer's characters do not deny God's existence, they feel that God remains silent, always absent at moments when men lose their conviction of the meaning of life.³¹

The presence of persons of authority, who might show through their own good example which path people could take in order to escape their depression, is not a possibility available for Grin's heroes, either. There are absolutely no persons of authority for them to imitate; there are no ideal models to follow, whether immaterial divine patterns or any models of human spiritual or intellectual thought. The inability to find a comforting

³¹ This kind of crisis of faith took the most radical form in Nietzsche's famous revolutionary idea of *death of God* (or more precisely burying God) presented originally in his *Gay Science*. This attitude was anticipated forty years earlier in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* where the Danish philosopher appealed to Christianity to reconstitute the real faith since the real God is absent in their church. This important diagnosis of the spiritual condition of the world which 'kills' God and gets rid of objective values gains deep insights in numerous works of existential literature. For some interesting notes on this notion in Nietzsche's philosophy, see: Durant (1967a:312-13) and Herman (2001:42-43).

source of power in another person is the main theme of the story ‘Zhizneopisaniia velikikh liudei’. His huge collection of biographies of the most eminent figures in the history of mankind proves to be of no value for the despairing hero. He loses the books at a game of cards, which apparently comes as a relief to him, since his collection has been useless to him at moments of extreme melancholic resignation. The imitation of earlier noble ideals cannot help in a world where all authority has vanished, crushed by the merciless, overwhelming power of the absurdity of existence.

Culture and tradition offer no fundamental source of support, either. It is very hard to notice any feeling of solidarity with any social group, geographical place or country which could be of help to Grin’s heroes. They are children of an epoch of collapsing values and social chaos. Grin creates an apolitical, antisocial, alienated hero who, through his misanthropic nature, innately prefers retreat and the openness of the natural environment to crowds and confined urban spaces.

What then is left to help the depressed hero find salvation? The answer lies in the existential re-evaluation of all essential values, which is executed by the individual making his way to the point where existence becomes “naked”, devoid of any protective armour. Here again we might compare the Grinian hero with the mythical Sisyphus. Both are alone, unable to rely on anyone, and hence unable to imitate anybody else’s example. It is the hero’s task to discover a sound reason for rolling the rock of his life up the steep hill and finding the inner strength to rebuild a sense of life every time it falls back down.

Grin’s fiction predominantly describes lonely individuals who suffer from a lack of positive relationships and yet feel great need for genuine love.³² The life of the isolated idealist has a two-fold character – both physical and spiritual. By this is meant the state of being alone, not merely without the closeness of another person (be it someone emotionally related, a member of the family, friend or loved one), but also loneliness in the sense of lack of philosophical signposts and spiritual mentors.³³

The depiction of existence as a lonely journey is by no means rare in the literature and philosophy of Grin’s own times and the days that would follow. Tarnas claims that, for man in general at the beginning of the 20th century, ‘God was dead, and the universe was blind to human concerns, devoid of meaning and purpose’ (Tarnas 1996:389). Man had become a lone island, left to his own devices, for whom the whole of life was contingent. Further, Copleston (1981:135) stressed the profound sense of modern man losing links with God which led to his increasing alienation from society, which in its turn grew more and

³² As we noted in the Introduction similar difficulties were experienced by the writer himself.

³³ On this kind of metaphysical loneliness see Lewis (1984:6).

more divided. Jackson wrote thus of this typically existential character: 'Consciousness in him is the awareness of singleness, the awareness of alienation from his fellow man. Hence his feeling of vulnerability before a world peopled with enemies and strangers' (Jackson 1958:33).

The fact cannot be ignored, however, that for Grin there may be some positive value in loneliness, usually in connection with the character's innate need for independence, which is typical of romantic dreamers. Many of Grin's heroes strive for this kind of freedom. One of the happiest loners in the work of Grin appears to be the hermit in 'Otshel'nik Vinogradnogo Pika'. His half-epicurean, half-stoic attitude represents one of the key aspects of Grin's moral philosophy. Through idyllic self-exile at least some part of human spiritual demands may be fulfilled: peace, independence and the opportunity of constantly re-modelling one's life according to one's own wishes. However, as Grin soon discovered and elaborated in later works, the escapist forms of the sequestered life (cf. the hero of 'Krysolov') lack from the moral point of view the kind of deep emotional experience that results from relationships involving other people.

Such emotions are present in the story 'Dacha bol'shogo ozera', for instance. This work contains clearly existential elements – the hero, Burunchei Ossovskii, although inwardly lonely as he struggles with the world, lives among other people and makes decisions that directly affect them. He makes great efforts to help his friend's wife overcome her anxieties by curing her sense of emotional failure.³⁴ Ossovskii displays bitter grief over his own life which, although filled with the value of freedom, still seems unstable and unsatisfactory to him. He has grown tired of travelling, and the family life of his friend is precisely the ideal that occupies his mind. However, he does not hesitate for a moment to help restore their marriage in spite of his friend's obvious guilt. Life could have been entirely transformed, had he married this pure-hearted woman whom his friend simply does not deserve.³⁵ Grin points out that, regardless of Ossovskii's harsh judgement on this pitiful drunkard, morality remains for him the overwhelming priority, and his own private interest cannot be asserted over the need to act altruistically. This is yet another example of a typically existential motif where a protagonist's moral awareness and readiness to act according to his morality are linked closely with his all-pervading loneliness, and state of separation from the life of others.

³⁴ This figure is significant in the light of the ethos of knighthood and will be scrutinised in section 3.2.

³⁵ NB, a similar altruistic stance is to be found in the story 'Chuzhaia vina' where the hero sacrifices himself for the sake of his beloved girl in order to prevent her separation from the man she loves.

As we have seen, in Grin's fiction loneliness becomes a crucial problem in the life of his characters. It is important to note that ending self-destructive thoughts born from metaphysical despair is a necessary condition for beginning the struggle to restore one's sense of the meaning of life. It, therefore, determines the possibility of the individual's freedom.

3.1.6.2 *Paradoxes of freedom*

Freedom, as was shown in Part Two, is one of the essential pillars in Grin's Weltanschauung. Without freedom, according to the writer, man cannot sincerely feel happiness. In Grin's fiction some characters experience almost boundless freedom. This means, very often, that they are not binding themselves to a single place and they are like ships without anchors, unable to remain at a quiet harbour. The hero of 'Dacha bol'shogo ozera', for example, is one such character who is always on the road; the world before him is forever open wide. This special freedom goes hand in hand with lack of obligation to do anything in particular. Many of Grin's characters, be they rich or poor, seem to share this special freedom. For Grin this absence of attachment to one particular place is very often a key factor in establishing personality. The main problem for a critic in terms of the relation that the writer established between freedom and happiness, is what morally significant limits he placed on this invaluable freedom.

The freedom of self-determination, without any doubt, is perceived as a great treasure. However, as the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov* states, it is all too often given away without any opposition. Is it also a kind of unbearable burden for Grin's characters? The answer is undoubtedly negative. For Grin, positive heroes are predominantly the opposite image of what the Inquisitor describes with the following words: 'Give a weak man freedom and he will bind it himself and return it to you' (Dostoevsky 1964:288).

However, it should be noted that, even though many of Grin's heroes freely wander in search of a job and a place in the world, their freedom of choice and direction are not unlimited. The reason for this is the fact that their poverty to some extent narrows the horizon of opportunity, although money as such, as already discussed in Part Two, seems to be of no real value for Grin's literary heroes. The notion of 'freedom from' plays a much greater role at the moment of taking decisions, than does achieving material benefits. This

specific kind of freedom, on the other hand, if approached from the existential position, is always related to moral consequences. It carries an ethical burden in itself.

‘Krysolov’ may be regarded as Grin’s key existential story where the problem of freedom is given full emphasis. Although relatively uneventful, this work is dominated by an oneiric, almost unreal atmosphere which prevails throughout, making the plot dense and difficult to comprehend.³⁶ At a time of revolution the unnamed hero is found occupying an empty bank building, spending long days suspended in a half-dream, suffering from fear, hunger and desolation. The rats who govern the forgotten building (which, in turn, resembles the castle in Kafka’s famous novel) are endowed with magical skills: they speak in human voices and their evil plans to assassinate Krysolov (an enigmatic man about whom not much is known) are to be interpreted at a metaphysical level. As far as the main hero is concerned, although his state of relative security and freedom which he experiences in the building where he hides may seem beneficial to him, there is no doubt that this very seclusion turns him into a paranoiac. It is only when he sets himself free from the trap of self-examination and obsessive alienation that he can truly regain his life, no matter what danger he is to face on the way to save the eponymous Krysolov.

Most of Grin’s heroes meet a limiting of space, be it in respect of imprisonment or the drastic curtailment of their life chances. The prisoners in ‘Chernyi almaz’, ‘Zimniaia skazka’, ‘Zolotoi prud’, ‘Rene’, ‘Fantazery’, *Doroga nikuda*, *Blistaiushchii mir* and ‘Dva obeshchaniia’ all attempt to escape, a course of action which may have dangerous consequences in case of failure. The uncertain freedom of the escapees and the threat of being caught seem to have no decisive impact on their decision to flee. However, Grin appears, in general, to guard the personal freedom of his characters, be they noble and arrested unjustly as in *Blistaiushchii mir*, or their conscience being far from clear, as in ‘Rene’.

Grin always presents loss of freedom as a factor which may have a strong impact on the moral decline of a character. This is the case in the story ‘Istoriia odnogo ubiistva’. The hero, a silent and obedient army private, is egregiously humiliated and ridiculed by one of his superiors. He kills his oppressor in a momentary attack of fury stemming from his deep hatred of army enslavement and the general injustice of life. The discipline of army life has suppressed his freedom to a critical point where his moral conduct comes to resemble the defensive behaviour of an animal towards his assailant. In a similar vein other war stories by Grin such as ‘Na dosuge’ and ‘Slon i Mos’ka’ display the negative impact of depriving a

³⁶ Other works sharing a similar deformation of the depicted world seen through the eyes of the main character include ‘Novyi tsirk’, ‘Prikliucheniiia Gincha’ and ‘Zemlia i voda’.

soldier of his most essential values, self-respect and freedom. The author is not only concerned with the nature of military drill and the need for subordination, but he also focuses on the disastrous impact of an inhumane system on the process of moral collapse among the officers. Poor privates degraded to the status of objects, devoid of the most basic freedoms, become puppets, although some are still able, as in the aforementioned example, to oppose the corrupt situation by undertaking active deeds.

On the whole we may also conclude that in Grin's treatment of the subject of freedom we find correspondences between the author of *Alye parusa* and existential philosophy in which, to quote Sartre's words (1987:23), 'there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom', and Grin believes that this phenomenon of freedom concerns also those who are not aware of its presence.³⁷ This chain of philosophical thoughts becomes the basis of multiple moral implications.

We should also mention here some of Grin's works which show heroes who voluntarily give away their freedom in order to gain certain benefits. In 'Pari', 'Vokrug sveta' and 'Zelenaia lampa' Grin depicts three interesting wagers. These are all based on self-inflicted abandonment of personal freedom. The first story tells of two men travelling under odd conditions organised by a newly-established travel agency: they cannot guess the location of the hotel they will be taken to in the next part of their great trip around the world. For the sake of winning they both agree to follow the conditions of the wager which states that they must be kept in constant uncertainty as to where they are transported while asleep. As a result of this strange competition of the will, they give up their freedom, but gain an opportunity to realise their dreams. A similar wager lies at the root of the plot of 'Vokrug sveta'. It requires great strength of spirit on the part of the main character to travel around the globe by himself, refusing any possible help, as required in the conditions of the wager. His aim is moral in nature since he wishes to win money for a scientific experiment. After accomplishing the journey successfully, he learns that the loser is not able to pay what he owes him. Then another wealthy man offers him the same deal, and the brave traveller surprisingly accepts it, yet again trading his freedom for a morally approvable stake.

³⁷ The meaning of the term *freedom* can be defined at least in two ways: negatively, as 'freedom from something', and positively, as 'freedom to do something'. Both these applications influence man's life and determine it perpetually. Man, as a being driven by needs and desires, faces at almost every step limits on his strivings, and in this respect his 'freedom to do something' meets outward obstacles. On the other hand, when man is unburdened of the duty or necessity to do something, he experiences 'freedom from' and can freely decide which direction to take. For similar accounts of freedom, see Rousseau's treatise 'The Social Contract' (1762), and Fromm's modern analysis in *The Fear of Freedom*.

‘Zelenaia lampa’ is the story of another rich and immoral eccentric, Stil’ton, who, driven by hedonism, tempts a young man called John Eve to accept a seemingly absurd wager. Eve has just arrived in London from Ireland in search of a job, and he is desperate to find some way of earning enough to live. He is yet another *маленький человек*, an uneducated orphan who is learning about the cruelty and injustice of life. In strong contrast to Eve, Grin introduces the reader to a rich businessman who is so bored with his existence that his only entertainment is, in his own words, to make ‘игрушка из живого человека’ (1.VI.462) which he considers ‘самое сладкое кушанье’ (ibidem). Stil’ton requires the young man to go to a rented flat to light a green lamp every day at the same time and spend several hours sitting alone in the room at the window. This absurd wish is to be rewarded with £200 a month and Eve eagerly agrees. Seven years pass before both characters meet again, but there has been a surprising change in their lives. While Eve has become a doctor, the millionaire, by some unlucky turn of events, has gone bankrupt and lost all his fortune – he is a beggar and, with a badly-broken leg, he now turns out to be Eve’s patient. The latter tells him how he became interested in medicine and then used all those countless hours under the lamp to study and finally become a doctor.

The short story ‘Molchanie’ is perhaps the best of Grin’s works in this thematic group although there is no wager in the precise sense of the word. The plot concerns the young man Tom Darl’ who gains employment as a secretary to the grumpy old clerk Tristan Burl’. Darl’ is, in fact, a son-in-law of the old clerk but they do not know each other since the latter broke off relations with his daughter after he learned she had married a secretary. Perfectly aware that his future boss is well known for humiliating and tormenting his secretaries, Darl’ agrees to sign a peculiar agreement: he will not say a single word all the time he is at work, and will remain silent, no matter what his boss says to him. By doing so he voluntarily gives away not only his freedom, but also resigns himself to accept any form of humiliation which his employer may devise. Grin tries to convince the reader that such a trade-off for one’s freedom may be acceptable if there are unique moral reasons for it. In ‘Molchanie’ Darl’ is driven to accept this tough job through his wish to earn enough money to support his beloved wife.

These examples all clearly show that abandoning one’s freedom may be acceptable if the reward for it is sufficiently high and morally right. Moreover, such freedom is sold in a heroic manner, never for material benefit or personal pleasure, and never because of ethical weakness. Paradoxically, it is precisely the decision to give up one’s personal freedom that characterises the maximal freedom of the heroes. From an existentialist point

of view, every one of them chooses a certain path which is connected with undertaking a task akin to that of Sisyphus: none of them knows the possible outcome, but for all these righteous individuals altruistic deeds carry a special moral dimension.

The relation of freedom and morality leads us to the next section which will offer detailed analysis of examples of moral responsibility and authenticity among Grin's heroes. These two crucial notions belong firmly to the most significant ideas of the whole existential morality of both theistic and atheistic philosophers.

3.1.6.3 Infinite responsibility and authenticity

The next issue which I shall discuss here is the treatment of the problem of responsibility in Grin's oeuvre. In order to facilitate the discussion, conversely to the previous sections, let us start each of the traits within this section with a presentation of the views on responsibility in existential philosophy. We will then use this background to set it against Grin's views as reconstructable from his stories only to see how well they fit into the frames drawn by existentialists.

It may seem that existentialism must fall into banality when trying to describe the question of responsibility. And yet in this field philosophy (with reasonable support from literature) continues to present many important views which refresh human perception of this elementary notion. Thus, we should begin with some basic assumptions close to truisms: that taking responsibility for oneself and for others provides proof of an individual's maturity. Being a responsible person means that one is aware of the burden brought about by almost every decision and that one understands the necessity of constantly risking mistakes and miscalculations. Responsible man recognises above all that his own steps determine the price that will have to be paid for any negative consequences. All weighty decisions in life can be seen from either the purely pragmatic (connected with jobs, hobbies, passions) or the moral point of view.

Moral responsibility, focused on here, is usually associated with pricks of conscience in the case of disagreement with a previously accepted system of values. Man, if all legal consequences were to be put aside, should be both a defendant and judge in his own case, according to existentialists. This kind of perception of moral responsibility is not rare in Grin's oeuvre, either.

The main character of 'Loshadinaia golova', for example, wishes for the death of his friend, who is also husband of the woman he loves. After the man's accidental death he

is tormented by thoughts of guilt. Similarly, in 'Chetyrnadtsat' futov' two brothers Rod and Kist, who love the same woman, are travelling along a dangerous mountain precipice. Kist, having jumped over a wide chasm, is waiting for Rod when suddenly a thought flashes through his mind: he imagines that his brother falls into the precipice and dies, leaving him as the girl's only suitor. A moment later Kist feels sorry for his wish since Rod turns out to be too weak to complete the jump successfully. Although the unlucky brother manages to catch Kist's hand at the edge of the chasm, he realises that he lacks the strength to pull himself up and so cuts his brother's hand with a knife, thereby committing suicide for the sake of Kist. Grin depicts the pair of brothers through contrast: weakness of will is opposed to heroism. It is precisely the theme of moral responsibility at the critical moment, which will be so vital in existential thought several decades later, that is presented in this dramatic story. Moreover, moral responsibility in existentialism has, as will be discussed below, also another dimension. And again we are able to trace its presence in Grin's fiction.

Sartre suggests that responsibility is determined by the example which our moral deeds provide for other people. The French thinker claims that 'when we say that a man is responsible for himself, we do not only mean that he is responsible for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men' (Sartre 1987:16).³⁸ According to Sartre's investigations, every morally significant deed should be isolated as an example, a model of our morality that can be imitated by the public.³⁹ In the light of this statement a moral deed becomes an object of judgement against a much wider background than the individual evaluation of the acting person. It may be presumed that this sort of moral responsibility is based on Kant's famous first categorical imperative, which says: 'I should never act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law' (Kant 1993:14).

In terms of Grin's philosophy we should also consider another important passage from Sartre, namely where he argues that 'a coward is responsible for his cowardice' (Sartre 1987:34). This rule also works conversely: noble deeds do not stem directly from the innate character of the person, but from his free will.⁴⁰

³⁸ Cf. also: 'I am responsible for myself and for everyone else. I am creating a certain image of man of my own choosing. In choosing myself, I choose man' and 'Therefore, he is fully responsible for the interpretation. Forlornness and anguish go together' (Sartre 1987:29).

³⁹ This concept of Sartre's may be a variation on Nietzsche's allegory of the *eternal recurrence*.

⁴⁰ 'The existentialist says that the coward makes himself cowardly, and the hero makes himself heroic' (Sartre 1987:35).

Authentic and *inauthentic* are two more terms of existential philosophy that have gained wide currency in Western thought and literature and may be effectively used in the examination of Grin's *Weltanschauung*. For the most part, the use of 'inauthenticity' has been derived from, and certainly associated with Heidegger's discussion of the concept in *Sein und Zeit*, where he contrasts the inauthentic conformity of the masses with public opinion and conventional wisdom, with the autonomy of individual determination and self-expression.⁴¹ Inauthenticity and self-deception in Heidegger's opinion are characteristic of a shallow existence devoid of moral responsibility, a life lived without facing the most essential moral questions. According to Clive (1972:86-87), both Heidegger and Sartre view man as being primordially disposed to hypocrisy in his deepest being. Jaspers links the inauthentic mode of living directly with bourgeois morality.⁴²

According to Tarnas' account of existentialism, in order to be authentic one has to admit, and choose freely to encounter, the stark reality of life's meaninglessness. Struggle alone can confer the meaning of life (experience) (1996:389). Existentialism lays stress on the necessity to be constantly ready to re-evaluate all values. After his spiritual awakening the existentialist is supposed to watch his every step, control to what extent he keeps to his moral standards, and in other words remain true to himself. Being totally sincere and honest with respect to one's own values by implementing them in real life, despite all obstacles, is exactly what the authentic life involves. In this mode of life there is no place for excuses or justifications for one's moral weakness. 'In the bright realm of values,' writes Sartre, 'we have no excuse behind us, nor justification before us. We are alone, with no excuses' (Sartre 1987:23). For Heidegger, authentic existence is tied up precisely with this fully independent and conscious choice of moral path or *being-towards-death*.

Literature, as has been mentioned, has a much wider set of means to describe the phenomena of spiritual life than does philosophy, yet at the cost of lack of explicit terminology. But in its liberation from the narrow frames of academic discourse, literature is able to make difficult concepts live through the creation of vivid images. The role of literature in terms of presenting the problem of authenticity is very significant. However, because of its philosophical connotation, this artistic task is very demanding. Existential writers tend to avoid passing judgements directly, and their aim is much more to arouse the

⁴¹ Inauthenticity has been also called, as Van Stralen (2005:29) indicates, 'mythical drowsing' by Jaspers, 'forgetfulness of Being' by Heidegger, and 'bad faith' by Sartre.

⁴² See Copleston (1981:156). Bourgeois morality is scrutinised in some of the most renowned works of modern European literature, such as Mann's *Buddenbrooks* and Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, and also in the fiction of Camus and Sartre. Sartre's *Nausea*, for example, provides a phenomenological analysis of the bourgeoisie and its inauthentic morality.

reader's concern about their own moral situation and authenticity, than to lead them to any particular conclusion or philosophical position. Close analysis shows that the same approach to moral authenticity can be found in Grin's work.

Since analysis of the most explicit and heroic exemplary characters will be conducted in the last two sections of the thesis ('The Romantic Chivalric Ethos' and 'Promethean Humanism'), it would be appropriate now to focus on choosing examples of the contrary position – that of a spiritually-impaired character. In order to illustrate Grin's understanding of individual determination and independent choice of moral conduct, let us focus on a representative example, the story 'Smert' Romelinka'.

Although neglected by the critics, the story deserves careful examination. Despite its small compass and uncomplicated plot, it expresses clearly the inner feeling of being lost in the ocean of life. Both the title and the figure of the hero bring to mind similarities with Tolstoi's *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*. Like the hero of Tolstoi's work, Grin's protagonist discovers that his entire life has been without abiding value. Romelink still has the time to seek for change, but he recognises that despite his wealth and apparent success in life, he suffers from a feeling of spiritual emptiness. There is nothing that can bring him real fulfilment, and he sees no authentic figure (as Ivan Il'ich finds in Gerasim) to copy or admire. His multiple, almost frenetic journeys in search of lost meaning have not brought any results, and in the actual plot of the story the reader witnesses Romelink's last journey.

Grin depicts his protagonist in a manner which can be classified as an existential literary model: he explicitly stresses Romelink's tragic state of separation from life through spiritual alienation and physical loneliness. In the narrative language of 'Smert' Romelinka' we find several interesting passages where Grin's style closely resembles the later existential literature. While Romelink ponders the possible forms of seeing the world as endowed with meaning, his thoughts are aptly encapsulated in the words: 'мир проходил под его взглядом, замкнутым для него существованием' (1.I:378). This flowing inner monologue is a common characteristic of Camus' novels, where deep self-analysis accompanies the individual's search for hidden values and his place in the world. In Grin's story the protagonist also experiences a deep melancholy, called here 'холодная тоска духа' (ibidem), which makes him resemble a model existentialist recluse. Yet, unlike Kafka or the above-mentioned French literary existentialists, Grin sees hope for his hero. This comes unexpectedly through an apparently tragic event, when his ship is wrecked and sinks. In his desperate fight with the sea Romelink feels that death is staring him in the face, and yet fear of death seems to him something inconceivable. Like an existentialist,

Grin describes accurately the complex feelings of Romelink who struggles with the prospect of facing nothingness, while his body carries on fighting the storm. This titanic struggle results in a metaphorical cleansing of the impurities of his past life. Although Romelink dies, his vision at the close of the story can only be interpreted in a positive and encouraging way. Grin wishes to convince the reader that Romelink has found happiness again, that he is born anew, albeit at the moment of death.⁴³ Finding meaning and happiness in life by establishing healthy links with the outside world makes Romelink resemble the protagonist of ‘Zurbaganskii strelok’ – both characters find themselves in the Jaspersian concept of *limit situation*, as defined in section 3.1.

Three other stories by Grin that illustrate aptly the notion of the ‘inauthentic life’ are ‘Imenie Khonsa’, ‘Kazhdyi sam millioner’ and ‘Nakazanie’. None of them belongs to the canon of Grin’s most popular works, but they all deserve analysis.

‘Imenie Khonsa’ tells the story of a man who wishes to achieve spiritual harmony by applying a special system of rules in his life. Khons invites a guest (the narrator) to his farm in order to persuade him that he has discovered the key to the pure moral life. He has built a system of ethical revival to save the world from decay and advises the following: ‘Люди должны ходить в светлых одеждах, жить в светлых помещениях, смотреть только на все светлое’ and they should ‘Убить ночь’ (1.II:175) Having surrounded himself with only white or light colours all around his household and farm, Khons proudly says: ‘Я чувствую себя чистым душой и телом. Во мне свет’ (ibidem). The narrator is conducted around the farmstead and learns in detail about Khons’ way of life. On the surface everything looks neat and tidy: the reader sympathises with the narrator that this is exactly the most balanced life one might lead in order to attain perfect stability and calmness of mind. However, when night comes, the narrator suddenly wakes up and as he goes downstairs he is shocked to find his host carousing. Extremely drunk, mumbling and unable to stand up straight, Khons is pitiful as he stands before his amazed and embarrassed guest.

Through this unexpected turn of events, Grin’s plot embodies the opposition between the seemingly admirable and the inauthentic, a contrast which is built on two radically different types of behaviour on the part of Khons. In the light of day, when everything is supposedly clearly visible, the narrator is supposed to watch, appreciate and then admire the life and work of the great spiritual inventor. But, when night falls, Khons

⁴³ For more discussion on the motif of ‘happy death’, which we find also in Grin’s story ‘Put’, see: Gooch (1983:112-16).

secretly indulges his guilty habits; under the cover of night he feels safe and therefore his demons are released. Grin shows that Khons' entire system is absolutely worthless, since his nocturnal behaviour reveals the ideal image of the inauthentic, hypocritical life. The story provides an exceptionally clear example of Grin's objections to the possibility of building a system of moral conduct which is utterly incompatible with one's true nature.

The protagonist of the second story, 'Kazhdyi sam millioner', is a poor clerk who has the strange desire to spend at least one day in his life like a wealthy man – by spending a huge sum of money on all kinds of whims and pleasures. He knows he will never become a millionaire, so in order to achieve his goal he resolves to save every penny he can every day according to a very precise economical plan. From the beginning of this peculiar project his entire existence is directed toward the final moment of 'liberation'. The need to save money makes his life poor and vegetative for six long months. However, through enormous strength of will (he is at least able to keep to his resolutions) he manages to fulfil his plan. Grin then slows down the passage of events toward the end of the story, focusing on the hero on the eve of his Grand Day Out.

The clerk decides to go to the pub for a few drinks before falling asleep. He is very excited about the next day, but in the pub he finds out that even a few drinks, a simple conversation with cheerful people in an atmosphere of relaxation can utterly fulfil his longing for joy in life. In other words, at this point Grin dramatises the idea that, in order to enjoy life to the full, one does not have to be rich at all. The moral of this story might be taken as practical proof of Aristotle's rule of the *golden mean*. The ascetic mode of living is depicted as erroneous because it limits and even impoverishes life by refusing the right to seek satisfaction and self-development.⁴⁴ But even more importantly, the realisation of the plan – to be just for one day someone else – would make the hero inauthentic.

Yet another story worthwhile recalling here is 'Nakazanie'. In this work too Grin manages to convey his moral views in a very short, lapidary and yet highly dramatic way. The hero, Vertliuga, who has already been mentioned in section 1.1, is a labourer operating a machine for cutting wood. During one of his shifts he ignores a strong inner voice telling him that he should cease his occupation immediately and go out for a long walk in the forest. Suddenly by an unlucky coincidence he is severely injured and loses both legs. The accident proves fatal, and in the last passages of the story Grin describes his final words as he acknowledges his understanding of the reason for his death: 'А из-за чего? Почему?'

⁴⁴ A positive mirror-image of this protagonist is to be found in 'Otshel'nik Vinogradnogo pika.'

Вот потому... Потому, что воли моей я не исполнил' (1.III:404). Such disobedience is an example of inauthentic behaviour and for Grin is bound to bring its own punishment.

The view of human existence which emerges from Grin's stories is inseparable from the question of ultimate choice and responsibility for that choice. This is where his views once again meet those expressed by existentialists. Moreover, Grin's works suggest that in order to discover one's calling – the meaning of life – one has to penetrate one's own existence, test possible options by practical trial. As the story 'Zhizneopisaniia velikikh ludei' shows, it is pointless to rely on theoretical abstract descriptions – Grin ridicules empty fascination with the biographies of great people. He seems to be of the opinion that words alone cannot change life, for they can only serve as fuel to ignite the striving for authenticity and self-development. Therefore, instead of building elaborate metaphysical systems or conjecturing about the unsolvable mysteries of the world, Grin prefers to focus on the empirical testing of his own literary characters. This is what the focus shall be in the next section.

3.1.7 Existential sketches

3.1.7.1 The painter and his sketches

Что может быть интереснее души человеческой?
Aleksandr Grin, 'Chelovek s chelovekom'

To say that literature serves often to improve the development of the reader's character seems to be trivial, but to claim that it can also be an enhancing tool for the writer is far less obvious and certainly very hard to prove. In the case of Grin, as Litwinow (1986:113) points out, the idea of pursuing self-observation and self-improvement through fictional heroes is highly plausible. Mikhailova (1980:70-74) mentions Grin's literary technique of testing his characters, but when we compare their moral and psychological features it becomes clear that, although fictional, they possess real (or desired) characteristics of the writer himself. In this section I propose a somewhat unusual method

of interpreting Grin's output as a form of writer's therapy – as a search for an ideal hero in a world full of the absurd.

The proposal is based on an analogy between a writer and a portrait painter. Let us say that the latter's greatest artistic desire is to create an ideal portrait depicting a perfect human being of almost inexpressible beauty. The task is so demanding, if it is possible at all, that it is likely to take the painter his entire life to complete it. Let us visualise the artist on his artistic path, spending days, months and years working on his *magnum opus*. This work does not have to be finished, however, to make its unbelievably difficult process of creation worth the effort. Following the claims of existential philosophers, the meaning of such creation lies not in the final effect of the completed canvas, but rather in the process of striving itself.

As with the canvas of a painter, so in the case of Grin some works bring the author closer to his imaginative destination. Regardless of their artistic and moral value, they all keep him on track, and if he sees them to be authentic, they endow his existence with positive value. In this idealistic project we find Schopenhauer's concept based on the Platonic teaching on Ideas. A work of genius, according to the German philosopher, makes the recipient closer to the perfect, divine Idea presented beneath the veil of symbols, allegories, plots, characters and everything else that a work of art can be created to express.⁴⁵ In my opinion, this is the way Grin strives in his fiction to express his ideal of Man.

The hero Grin wants to depict is a strong individual who, at a time of existential despair, would arise like a phoenix from the ashes, and would become more and more confident in the process of self-improvement and the restoration of values. I believe that this interpretation is useful in solving the mystery of the role of the moral element in Grin's oeuvre, and so I propose to see the author as a *metapractitioner* who creates *existential sketches*.⁴⁶

The starting point for my argument are two observations: Ivanitskaia's insightful remark that Grin in his prose tends to depict one general soul,⁴⁷ and analysis of the three key factors recognised in the non-linear composite hero of Grin's work described in this

⁴⁵ Schopenhauer presents his views on genius mainly in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*. Cf. Cartwright (2005:64).

⁴⁶ The direct inspiration for my approach is the critical study of Ivanitskaia (1993) who draws on analogies between Grin and existentialism. The Russian critic employs the term *metapractic* to describe the protagonist of 'Sinii kaskad Telluri'. She has not, however, elaborated upon this interesting idea but focused on Grin's fight for positive values.

⁴⁷ 'Пред читателем все же как бы одна и та же душа' (Ivanitskaia 1993:29).

section: unhampered freedom, the obligation to restore values, and personal responsibility for all his decisions.

Before we focus on the range of positive characters contributing significantly to the portrayal of Grin's morally ideal hero, I would like to examine those works dealing with more negative images of man which embody the writer's critical attitude towards plausible but morally unacceptable modes of living.

3.1.7.2 *Rejected options*

In the light of Grin's *Weltanschauung*, as reconstructed here, it seems that the author considered three moral philosophies: nihilism, revolution and escapism which he consecutively rejected. In this section we shall look at each of them in turn, beginning with a short introduction.

A nihilistic attitude is obviously not an example of moral conduct *sensu stricto* since it is based on the drastic denial of all values. The nihilist not only believes that the world in itself does not contain any values, but that human life itself is in consequence devoid of any value. Therein lies a key difference between nihilism and existentialism.⁴⁸ It may be said that for the nihilist morality is merely an illusion, though a crucial distinction between moderate and extreme nihilism is to be noted – the latter is very rare since it implies the absence of any moral constraints.⁴⁹

Tarnas (1996:390-91) writes that the rapid raise of nihilism in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century stemmed from deep spiritual chaos and a crisis of values. However, before reaching the point of total collapse concerning the meaning of life, twentieth-century man faces *ennui*, the spiritual disease of the decadent. Spleen is strongly related to the fall of values in decadence. Russian literature provides the philosopher with many interesting examples depicting people seized with boredom and doubtful about the reasons for any activity. Although this phenomenon is not as tragic as existential despair, as early as the first half of the nineteenth century both Pushkin's *Onegin* and Lermontov's

⁴⁸ 'A nihilist is a man who argues that the world as it is, ought not to be, and that the world as it ought to be, does not exist. According to this view, our existence (action, suffering, willing, and feeling) has no meaning (...)' (Nietzsche 1968:318).

⁴⁹ For more information on this distinction, see Harman (1977:11-13).

Pechorin personify features of this type of spiritually-broken character. With the coming of the 20th century the category of *лишний человек* in the history of Russian literature seemed not so much to vanish as become animated with new power in an age of deep spiritual crisis.⁵⁰

Grin devotes space to his understanding of the *лишний человек*, embodying it especially aptly in one work – ‘Vozdushnyi korabl’. In this story he presents us with a group of relatively young people all of whom are in the grip of spleen. Devoid of enthusiasm, they almost suffocate from boredom as the hours pass by. Suddenly a beam of light appears in the form of a poetic vision unfolded by one of the participants, a girl gifted with a poetic soul. She improvises a few short poems, and her words act as a fuse which transforms the others spiritually. They all undergo a change: from being passive, weak and almost vegetating spectators, they become interested, fascinated and altered by the Apollonian spirit of Art. The heroes of Grin’s story await the rise of values which one can passionately rely on, values from which one would be able to regain a sense of life. Their *ennui* is recoverable as it is merely a lack of life energy, and it is poetry that cures their ill hearts and brings them back to life and saves them from falling into nihilism.

However, if lack of enthusiasm entails a permanent loss of faith in the idea that there can be any possible sense in one’s activity, this life-attitude can finally lead to total collapse. Thanks to the genius of Dostoevsky, Russian literature is rich in convincing examples of nihilistic modes of living. The greatest of all psychological writers, Dostoevsky manages to foresee the dreadful peril awaiting mankind at the turn of the century. With the figures of Piotr Verkhovensky, Stavrogin and Kirillov, Russian literature and philosophy discover three different types of nihilism. Just as the first of them may be seen as a prototype for the Grinian equivalent of the revolutionary terrorist, Stavrogin and Kirillov can be recognised as inspiring two other characters from ‘Tragediia Ploskogor’ia Suan’ and ‘D’iavol Oranzhevykh Vod’.

The dark story ‘Tragediia ploskogor’ia Suan’, which has already been discussed in Part One, occupies an important place in Grin’s work. We find here not only the archetypic nihilist-destroyer Blium (actually a successor to Piotr Verkhovensky), but also deep scepticism about the escapist inclinations of romantic seclusion. The plot concerns a loving couple who believe they have found the peace of life which they desire. However, their

⁵⁰ Apart from Kavalero, the main hero of Olesha’s *Zavist’*, other representatives of this type of hero can be found in Gorky’s *Zhizn’ Klina Samgina*, Fadeev’s *Razgrom* and Fedin’s *Goroda i gody*. In 1920, when a new type of positive hero was only just emerging as the effect of the formation of the new political system, *лишний человек* became an unambiguously negative character whose inability to conform to the new reality made him an enemy of the state and the progress of society. Cf. Siniavskii (1957).

idyll does not last long, since their peaceful private world, seemingly beyond the reach of any evil from civilisation, comes under violent assault. Blium, the personification of the fatal spirit of nihilism, exhibits the deepest and most miserable form of hatred towards the world and people. He preaches utmost contempt for all values and feels an irresistible desire to cause harm to all around him. His amoralism falls into absurdity, so caricatural is its intensity. At the same time Grin makes him both terrifying and insane, especially when Blium pronounces his guiding principle: to destroy all positive values to the point where all good will vanish.

There is no doubt that Grin does not begin any polemical debate with nihilism; he simply suggests the imperative need to destroy it as it represents a great threat to moral values. The negation that lies at the root of Blium's thinking is like a plague – only by its elimination can mankind be safe again. And so Blium dies, killed in the final scene of the story by the protagonist Ting.

'D'iavol Oranzhevykh Vod' is an even more complex work, in which Grin focuses more on the psychology of nihilism. Somewhere in a vast landscape of trackless forest two strangers meet accidentally and travel together in order to reach a remote city. This journey serves Grin as a background to contrast two opposing attitudes to life. The reader witnesses a complex clash of moral systems in which only one can be victorious. The first is radical nihilism, although not as destructive as in the case of Blium, yet still with a strong inclination to suicide. In an intellectual (metaphysical) collision the nihilist (the Devil of the title) is contrasted with his interlocutor, a jobless wanderer who, despite his poverty, still remains confident of the meaning of life. The wanderer's inner strength does not stem from love or from ownership, but seems to be an innate attribute. It would be worthwhile to contrast these two figures in the following way: whereas the first is a symbol of the collapse of values and the meaning of life, the second becomes for Grin a medium of his faith in proud rebellion against the absurdity of life. The brave hero several times opposes the veiled temptations of his rival to give up and commit suicide; every time he has to refuse Baranov's seemingly logical chain of resigned thoughts. The alluring vision of comfort when escaping the dark torment of existence is decidedly rejected (as in the biblical story of Satan tempting Jesus in the wilderness). It would not be unreasonable to suppose that the two figures represent two opposite sides of Grin's own character. We might see their philosophical struggle as one of the most essential in human life, one that the author also experienced throughout his adult life.

Insofar as any existentialists, as well as nihilists, reject any single source of absolute, universal and transcendent values, they admit only one, extremely significant exception – that of the human being. There can be no doubt that for Grin nihilism poses a great threat for other people precisely for undermining this last, most precious value: the reverence for life. In ‘D’iavol Oranzhevykh Vod’ the final decision to kill the amoral nihilist can be interpreted as a metaphorical annihilation of the aforementioned threat. In light of this story, one of Nietzsche’s famous aphorisms is appropriate: ‘I praise, I do not reproach, [nihilism’s] arrival. I believe it is one of the greatest crises, a moment of the deepest self-reflection of humanity. Whether man recovers from it, whether he becomes master of this crisis, is a question of his strength!’ (Nietzsche 1964:119).

However significant Nietzsche’s philosophy was to the development of Grin’s Weltanschauung, there can be no doubt that the revolutionary concept of the transvaluation of values, which was first sketched in *Antichrist*, is not reflected in Grin’s work. The search for the meaning of life and true values was for Grin not about rejecting and destroying Christianity or rebellion against any pre-existing morality. There is no doubt that in the struggle described by Nietzsche Grin should be regarded as a winner. He defeated nihilism. For him life involves creating values, not destroying them. This titanic clash between two world-views represents a necessary, inevitable challenge on the path to spiritual perfection chosen by Grin’s universal hero.

In the history of pre-1917 Russian literature, Revolution is a subject closely connected with nihilism. This theme constitutes the second option rejected by Grin’s metapractical literary searches for value. By revolution I mean not only that famous and extremely influential event in Russian history, the October Revolution of 1917, or the less known but still important Russian Revolution of 1905, but also in a wider sense the tendency of Russian society to rebel against the tsarist regime. The concept of Revolution will, therefore, be used here to designate the national consciousness movement which led to a total social transformation.

It should be noted that Grin’s early fascination with the idea of revolution and his participation in the Socialist Revolutionary movement were inspired by his desire to improve the social and economic situation of the Russian people.⁵¹ From Grin’s own

⁵¹ SR (Партия социалистов-революционеров; ПСР; эсеры) – the Socialist Revolutionary Party was established in 1901 and played an important role in the Russian political situation till 1917. The SRs' strategy for revolution was based on terrorism and the SR Combat Organisation was responsible for assassinating government officials.

diaries and those of his second wife we know that the young idealist and future writer believed deeply in the possibility of real change.⁵² He joined the revolutionary movement driven by his own innate faith in the equality of all people. However, as much as his aims were noble and he was not prone to use terror to achieve them, many fellow-activists were far from averse to violence.

In Grin's work the question of revolution occupies a relatively important place, yet not a problematic one. It would not be difficult to give his views in brief summary, as he tends merely to express different degrees of disappointment. On the other hand, the question of revolution impacted on the problem of morality and therefore requires greater scrutiny.

The distinction between ideological and military activity for the sake of revolution may be quite fluid. Insofar as Grin's outlook allowed him to write pamphlets like 'Zasluga riadovogo Panteleeva', the problem of involvement in any sort of military activity seems much more complex if we consider his pacifist inclinations. Grin would eagerly have given the organisation his intellectual and spiritual support in order to bring about political change, but the situation seemed rather to require physical elimination of the political opponents. Moreover, fighting in the ranks of revolutionaries was by no means safe, and Grin was constantly at risk of being caught, prosecuted and sentenced without mercy. No wonder this activity required great courage if we take into account the fact that capital punishment was not shunned by the political authorities.

This kind of sentence, imminent death, is the basis of Grin's story 'Tretii etazh'. Its short yet dramatic and brutal plot concerns the last hours of three revolutionaries trapped in a house surrounded by police. Their lives cannot be saved, since the soldiers have already opened fire. As in Andreev's story 'Rasskaz o semi poveshennykh', instead of being full of artificial and pathetic heroism, the last thoughts of these fighters are strikingly humane in their uncertainty, anxiety and sense of absurdity. Grin presents in a masterly fashion the extent to which the ideals of revolution seem divorced from the inner desires and dreams of people involved in revolutionary organisation and acts of terror. Their thoughts are revealed to us through the narrator in the final minutes of their lives. Limited by space, fearing inevitable pain, devoid of any support from those they love, they are left to die an unmourned death. And it turns out that their sincere judgement of their involvement with revolution is negative. This is not, however, a direct criticism of revolutionary ideals. Grin concentrates his attention on showing the extent to which all three are still attached to life.

⁵² See: Litwinow (1986:111).

For these men, dying in such pitiful conditions is pure nonsense and strikes them by its lack of grandiose heroism. In different ways each thinks the same: life could have taken an utterly different course, and looked much more logical, more filled with sense, but now it will end miserably, as they die in suffering for ideals they no longer believe in. Meaningful life – which is to say, life worth living – is taking place somewhere else, outside the trap in which they find themselves. They feel their coming death as deserving of compassion and, therefore, tragic.⁵³

Grin does not offer an easy one-sided interpretation of their dramatic situation – instead he prefers to avoid criticism of the revolutionary movement as a whole or any prophesy of its collapse. And yet his implied conclusions can be only critical: armed rebellion for the sake of revolutionary slogans detracts from the concept of positive values. In the light of ‘Tretii etazh’ it would be right to say that this way leads men astray and brings enthusiastic idealists to spiritual defeat.

In another story from the same thematic group, ‘Marat’, Grin depicts the character of a resolute revolutionary. The reader only gradually learns about Marat’s dedication to the ideals of revolution and his strong spirit which makes him a feared opponent of the tsarist authorities. Marat seems to be in love with a girl, but his altruistic moral sense leads him to set his private life aside and continue with terrorist activity, in order to assassinate an important member of the government. The story ends with a surprising turn of events, however: though seemingly ruthless and determined, Marat refuses to detonate the bomb at the set time.⁵⁴ He aborts his mission to blow up the carriage in which the intended victim is travelling, since he notices that there is a little baby in it, an entirely innocent victim. He carries out his deadly mission only the next day, when the targeted victim is travelling alone. Grin obviously displays unconditional abhorrence of killing innocent civilians in the name of revolution, but, in a wider sense, his objections to violence can also be seen as a denial of armed opposition.

However, the writer’s strongest criticism of revolutionary activity is to be found in the story ‘Karantin’. In this longer and more slowly narrated story, Grin is concerned with criticism on a different but maybe even more convincing level. The hero is supposed to

⁵³ Interestingly, a similar situation of self-analysis at the moment of inevitable death lies at the root of Sartre’s story ‘The Wall’. This kind of focus on the inner thoughts of the protagonist in a moment of extreme tension is common in literary existentialism (e.g. Kafka’s *The Trial*, Camus’ *The Stranger*).

⁵⁴ A similar moral decision is to be found in the story ‘Karnaval’ (1918). Here the heroine is a revolutionary activist involved in a bomb attack during carnival time. However, as the moment of the final detonation comes nearer, she realises that it will cause the suffering and death of innocent people and changes her decision. Taking responsibility and risking her own life, she manages to take the bomb away but dies in the explosion.

commit an act of terror, but before the due date he is ordered to spend some time in 'quarantine', in order to prepare himself and to dull the police's vigilance. During the long days spent close to nature, he meets a peasant girl, and gradually the peacefulness and harmony of country life make him change his mind. Grin describes the rising tide of opposition that fills the young revolutionary's heart. This failed assassin comes closer and closer to the point where he no longer conceives of violence as something desirable. The bloody act of terror will result in someone else's suffering and death as well as his own end (either immediately or after his trial and execution). Almost an exemplification of the principle of non-violence (present in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism under the term *ahimsa*), this story is designed to express Grin's abhorrence of terrorism, perceived by the author as the negation of all that is good and valuable in life. The final decision of the protagonist to give up his involvement with revolution and stay in the village is not only a flat refusal to commit this particular assassination, nor is he merely opposing the revolutionary movement. More importantly, he rejects a way of life connected with violence and terror against innocent people.

Grin does not hide his bitter disappointment with the revolutionaries in other stories, either. In 'Malen'kii komitet' one of the characters accuses the activists of cruelty and lack of mercy. 'Nasledstvo Pik-Mika', in turn, contains a short episode written in a bantering tone, which describes the history of a certain revolutionary fighter who for his own pleasure and culinary delight sold off an entire crate of weapons that were supposed to be used by his fellow-conspirators. Behind its trivial plot and amusing tone there is, however, a hidden and much more serious message. Grin seems to draw attention to the fact that the revolutionary circles were prone to failure, since they attracted egoistic and even utterly mundane individuals far from the liberating ideals of the cause. In such works we can detect Grin's deep disappointment with the activities of the revolutionaries. We may conclude that, though at certain points Grin does seem to be less critical of revolution (e.g. in 'Marat'), as early as in his first published works of the years 1906-07 he already realised the negative value and impractical character of armed revolution.

Consequently, we may assume that the noble Grinian hero definitively rejects revolution, as it is inevitably connected with the death of innocent people, which in turn clearly contradicts his morality.⁵⁵ Violence for the sake of bringing about a new order was unacceptable for such a thorough idealist.

⁵⁵ The same dilemma of 'buying' the happiness of the whole of mankind at the cost of the suffering of a single innocent soul was rejected by Ivan Karamazov.

The third moral attitude rejected by Grin as a source of self-improvement is escapism. This mode of thinking was an important element of intellectual fashion during the period of European decadence. The type of the solitary escapist artist (sometimes with traces of Byronic provenance) is ubiquitous in the biographies of leading painters, poets, composers and writers of the European modernist movement. The opposition between the highly sensitive nature of the artistic individual and the insensitive and indifferent class of philistines was also an important theme in literature. Grin was concerned with this theme in many of his works, at the root of which was his disappointment with human nature in general and his own inclination towards solitude.⁵⁶

Escape from a rotten civilisation (so vividly evoked in the story ‘Otravlennyi ostrov’) was also connected with the idealisation of the world of nature inspired by Rousseauist philosophy (cf. Dent 1992:177-9). These two overlapping impulses result in Grin sending his protagonists to deserted parts of the world where they are supposed to find peace and oblivion away from hostile society. Critics have often referred to two important early stories in relation to the problem of escapism and the alienation of the embittered individualist: ‘Ostrov Reno’ and ‘Sto verst po reke’.

The first of these, as described in Part One, describes the escape of a sailor to a deserted island. This is an act of rebellion and an expression of his desperate need for freedom. Tart, the protagonist, is determined to defend his decision to break away from civilisation, which is symbolised by the ship and its crew. The sailors sent to capture him and bring him back on board aim first at persuading the escapee that he belongs to the crew, but their efforts are futile since Tart is one of the most independent of Grin’s characters. He is certain that he is no longer anybody’s partner or crew member and that he needs only solitude. Then his pursuers decide to take him by force and make him return against his will. Tart does not hesitate to fight for his newly-gained freedom to the point of death. He kills one of the sailors and then dies himself at the hands of one of them – a poignant ending which shows how Grin sees the desire to remain free by defending one’s independence as one of the most valuable of all human qualities.⁵⁷

Another story in which the motif of escapism plays a significant role is ‘Sto verst po reke’. The work concerns the escape from jail of a middle-aged man called Nok. Because of the breakdown of the ship he planned to sail on, he is forced to travel with a strange girl

⁵⁶ In Grin’s fiction there are no such refined characters as Duc des Esseintes or Dorian Gray. Grin makes a few attempts to criticise hedonistic attitudes by linking them with loss of moral feeling in such works as ‘Gladiatory’ and ‘Propavshee solntse’.

⁵⁷ See: Luker (1973:44-45).

down the river to the town in a small boat. Although on the surface the plot seems quite adventurous, in fact it may be seen as a psychological portrayal of an escapist character. Nok has been imprisoned for stealing money to give to his beloved, but she turns out to be a heartless manipulator. The result of this unhappy turn of events is not only their separation. More significantly, the hurt idealist becomes disillusioned with the opposite sex, having hitherto idealised his beautiful lady as the personification of all that is good. He manages to escape from prison, but the mere thought of his unfulfilled love is an irritation to him. His previous heartbreak makes him distrustful of people in general, and of women in particular. He becomes a misanthrope and preaches misogyny. His moral views are quite close to egoism, and as a fugitive on the run he keeps to simple rules of self-preservation.

‘Koloniia Lanfier’, written in 1910, was, as Luker points out, Grin’s first truly romantic work where the author expressed some hope for the future. Gorn, the hero, ‘rejects the idea of death as a means of escape from his private problems, for he sees that it would be a monstrous injustice to himself’ (Luker 1973:48-49). The English critic is right in concluding that in Grin’s opinion ‘belligerently misanthropic isolation amidst the beauty of nature was perhaps not the best answer to the individual’s spiritual problems’ (ibidem).

Over the course of time Grin gradually comes to recognise the negative effects of escapism, and this finds its reflection in his fiction.⁵⁸ His later works concerning the theme of alienation (e.g. ‘Krysolov’, ‘Slabost’ Danielia Khortona’ and ‘Seryi avtomobil’’) show how the emotional emptiness of the characters results from solitude or lack of attachment to any place or person (which was a kind of necessity for Grin, a revolutionary who was imprisoned, escaped, and lived for a long time on false documents). They also show how the other (to use the existentialist term) is always perceived as an individual and any way of perceiving which makes him a mere member of the crowd is to be condemned. Grin extols brotherhood and the need for rich relationships with the other. Works such as ‘Shturman “Chetyrekh vetrov”’, ‘Chelovek, kotoryi plachet’, ‘Nian’ka Glenau’ or *Doroga nikuda* prove that Grin takes a definite stand in criticism of misanthropy and misogyny. He abandoned views both on the inferiority of women and inclination towards contempt for mankind in general.

The need for confrontation with the other is yet another point in which Grin’s works suggest parallels with the literature of existentialism. As Van Stralen (2005:80-81) points out, existentialists argue that by becoming morally ‘awakened’ and aware of all authentic

⁵⁸ In ‘Dikaia mel’nitsa’ Grin half-jokingly describes the history of a lonely wanderer who chances upon an old mill in which he decides to stay overnight. His host attempts to kill him for no apparent reason. The narrator provides a short comment at the end which is an observation and warning that long-standing solitude can have a negative impact on our mental health and therefore should be avoided.

modes of living, an individual can be entirely transformed. After this painful yet rewarding process of development the existential hero cannot safely participate in various situations. He is changed inwardly and has now to remain authentic. Moreover, isolation brings about fear of others who need closeness and wish to offer brotherly love. The existential hero is a figure portrayed in opposition to the bourgeois tendency to concentrate on building and preserving material profits throughout life. The presence of such a character in an existential literary work has a different significance from that usually associated with the typical modernist hero – no longer detachment from the human world, but its opposite: closeness to the other.⁵⁹ We find exactly the same traits in many of Grin's figures who display strong opposition to bourgeois morality (personified, for example, by Runa in 'Blistaiushchii mir') while, at the same time, they look constantly for spiritual fulfilment of the basic need to forge bonds with the other.

The depiction of characters escaping from civilisation and contact with others can certainly be viewed as one of the main themes in those of Grin's stories which may be analysed as quests for finding the answers to the problems of human existence. Through his literary presentation of various incarnations and scenarios of escapism, misanthropy, as well as nihilism and revolution, the author came to the conclusion that such modes of life have to be rejected. Since Grin's large-scale objective was, as I argue here, to present an ideal hero, his search could not, however, end there. On the contrary, Grin's gallery of existential sketches presents numerous positive heroes as well. We shall look at them in detail in sections 3.2. and 3.3.

3.1.8 Grin as an intuitive existentialist

In this section of the thesis I have analysed Grin's works from the perspective of problems related to the question of human existence. The analysis has revealed striking affinities between Grin's Weltanschauung and works of the most renowned existential thinkers of the 20th century. The loneliness of Grin's literary heroes, the huge range of factors determining his work's strong dramatic qualities, the significant moral element and the focus on questions only seemingly simple (such as responsibility, freedom and pride), but in fact requiring great responsibility – all these elements bring the author's oeuvre close to writers and philosophers such as Camus, Sartre, Jaspers and Heidegger. Specific

⁵⁹ For more discussion, see Van Stralen (2005:85).

elements of Grin's plots – suicide, ennui, depression and plague⁶⁰ – seem to have been as interesting to him as they were to the those authors. I believe that Grin can be compared to the German writer Wolfgang Borchert, who, without establishing any links with philosophers, wrote fiction that is no less “existentialist” than that of Sartre. All the findings presented here support the argument that Grin was an existential writer, or, to use Clive's term, an “intuitive existentialist”. We might wish to consider calling Grin a “proto-existentialist”, but this term seems inappropriate since his literary work stretches from 1906 to 1932, a period which also happens to coincide with the rise of existentialism (in 1922 Buber published his work *I and Thou*, Shestov was working on his *On Job's Balances* between 1920 and 1927, and in 1930 *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations* by de Unamuno appeared). Moreover, many Russian writers of the 19th century whose works contain existential elements have been labelled “existentialists” rather than “proto-existentialists”. I would prefer to keep the latter term as referring to the father of the philosophical current – Kierkegaard.

Despite the fact that Grin's stories, like other literary existential works, lack the precision of a philosophical treatise, in my opinion, works like ‘Rai’, ‘Zurbaganskii strelok’, ‘Rasskaz Birka’ and ‘Sinii kaskad Telluri’ should take their place alongside Sartre's *Nausea* or Camus' *The Rebel*. Even if Grin's works do not match the literary level of the more famous works of the French writers, and do not display their richness of philosophical insight, the freshness of Grin's critical examination of human existence in an age of spiritual crisis is indisputable.

The observations presented here both cast new light on Grin's oeuvre and allow us to comprehend better the writer and his philosophy. The author of ‘Ostrov Reno’ was certainly not involved in the philosophical discussions that were already ongoing at the end of his life in Western Europe and that are regarded as giving rise to the existentialism of Sartre, Camus, de Beauvoir and Heidegger. Grin's Weltanschauung did not stem either from academic philosophical education, or from extensive reading or exchange of thoughts as was the case with these acclaimed thinkers. It rather reflected his own independent insight into the nature of the world and man. There are, obviously, some incoherences in his vast literary output. These are, however, by no means rare also in the works of such great thinkers as Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche or Tolstoi as Clive (1972:36) aptly

⁶⁰ The motif of plague destroying a city and symbolising the moral decay of its inhabitants appears in the story ‘Sinii kaskad Telluri’. The protagonist of the work decides to abandon any attempts to help them since he perceives them as unworthy of saving. The story carefully described by Ivanitskaia (1993:10-12) resembles Camus' famous novel but predates it by 35 years.

notices. Moreover, in the case of Grin, as I have argued here, these inconsistencies can be treated as the author's existential sketches – searches for the ideal hero. The discussion on those heroes continues in the following sections.

3.2 Romantic chivalric ethos

3.2.1 The Genesis of the Grinian Knight

One of the most important elements in the work of Aleksandr Grin is the positive figure with a set of features characteristic of the legendary virtuous knight.⁶¹ Following the analysis in section 3.1.7 I argue that the construction of this type of character is based on the same principle and leads to the creation of a *sui generis* hero – it seems that Grin's long-range goal is to create not a single individual in one work but a complex and multi-faceted portrait of the ideal knight.

The chivalric hero can be found in a number of works which span almost the entire creative life of the author. Some of the titles include: *Zolotaia tsep'*, 'Vozvrashchenie "Chaiki"', 'Pozornyi stolb', 'Proliv bur'', 'Iva', 'Dacha Bol'shogo Ozera', 'Prodavets shchast'ia', 'Sto verst po reke', 'Zmeia', 'Okhota na khuligana', 'Iashchik s mylom', 'Medvezh'ia okhota', 'Malen'kii zagovor', 'Korabli v Lisse', 'Krysolov', 'Slovookhotlivyi domovoi', 'Sozdanie Aspera', 'Ruka', 'Kolonii Lanfier', 'Ostrov Reno'.

As in other works, so also in the chivalric group Grin draws a strong contrast between strength and weakness, bravery and cowardice, wealth and poverty, honesty and dishonesty, sincerity and intrigue, love and hate, and finally hope and despair. Strong juxtapositions of this kind, as Ruff (1980:109) has emphasised, are common within the chivalric literary tradition. We find there many impeccably brave heroes who become patterns for others to imitate. They often fight against villains who, lacking chivalric principles, can be seen as the knights' diametric opposites.

The work most important and abundant in chivalric motifs is undoubtedly the novel *Doroga nikuda*, which provides the best example of a coherent presentation of Grin's chivalric morality in a single work. Since I refer to this novel throughout the section, I shall begin my analysis by recounting it here briefly for further reference.

⁶¹ For more on European chivalry, its tradition and codes of conduct see Gautier (1965), Barber (1974), Ruff (1980), Kaeuper and Kennedy (1996).

Doroga nikuda tells the adventurous story of a sensitive young romantic, Davenant. After his mother was abandoned by his father and then died, Davenant is fortunate enough to be supported on many occasions by a number of positive characters (e.g. the restaurant owner Kishlot, the rich man Futroz, the eccentric dreamer Galeran). Although it looks as if he is going to enter upon a good career – he is invited into the house of the rich Futroz and his daughters – the unexpected appearance of his father, a repulsive drunkard, leads to the collapse of Davenant's dreams. When he tries to escape the disastrous influence of his father, his links with the Futroz family are lost and he leaves the city for many years. When the plot resumes, Davenant has become the successful owner of a tavern and changed his name to James Gravelot. However, bad luck strikes him once again. Through a cunning trick of the villain Van Konet, he becomes involved in smuggling, and is condemned to death. Although his friends arrange a jailbreak, this turns out to be futile and Davenant dies of severe injury – albeit in the company of his friends.

It should be noted that both *Doroga nikuda* and all the other abovementioned works of the Grinian chivalric canon contain almost no overt philosophical descriptions. This accords with one of the essential principles of existentialism – namely, that deeds alone speak of morality and that theoretical digressions are to be avoided. Secondly, it is reasonable to claim that Grin creates chivalric heroes by applying the existential principle of the primacy of existence over essence.⁶²

This interpretation is based on the assumption that the Grinian chivalric ethos not only influences the hero's morality, but also determines it entirely. The Knight is endowed with free will and acts according to the dictates of a certain mode of chivalric ethos. In the context of Grin's work the latter provides a constant frame of reference, a set of features which characterise the moral preferences of the hero and manifest themselves in his deeds and way of living. That is to say, the person projects his philosophy through his action.

The Knight acts as he does regardless of possible reward and punishment. Thus, the morality of the Grinian chivalric ethos is independent of various common factors like religion, patriotism, tradition and social convention. The first three elements scarcely appear in Grin's oeuvre at all, so, although the Knight may not deny them as such, it seems they have no impact on his deeds. Society is never regarded as being the locus of truth, but as a mediocre entity in the spiritual sense and something that hinders the moral

⁶² The key existential idea of reversing the traditional order (i.e.: essence preceding existence) occupied a significant place in Kierkegaard's philosophy and was developed further by Sartre. The relation between existence and essence in existentialism has been discussed by Herman (2001:5).

development of the hero. Once again, such a phenomenon implies a way of thinking entirely congruent with existentialism.

In the process of creating his chivalric figures Grin applied the postulate of authenticity. As was described in the section on existentialism, authenticity may be regarded as the pillar of existential morality.⁶³ It is strongly manifested also in the Knight's constant readiness to represent a certain moral set of views and principles – the ethos. He consciously undertakes risks associated with actions which are dictated by his independent decision to follow his chosen moral path.

The sources of the Grinian Knight are to be sought in a character found early in Grin's work ('Koloniia Lanfier'), that of the lonely individualist Gorn who is deeply disappointed with the world of other people. Reclusive and individualistic tendencies are displayed by the majority of Grin's characters, so it comes as no surprise to discover that the Knight is also a dissenter who avoids people and seeks his own way of life. Even so, such a character shows a much greater interest in other people than do any of the misanthropic individuals to be found elsewhere in Grin's early works.

With regard to the innate human desire for happiness, we should note that, regardless of their individual features and the different circumstances in which they are caught up, the knights in Grin's work always share the watchword of the hyper-individualist Tart in 'Ostrov Reno'. Every knight, even at the peak of dramatic conflict, would silently agree with the former's opinion that 'Может быть, не дольше как завтра судьба отнимет все выигранное сегодня, но ведь этого еще нет' (1.I:269). This is at the opposite extreme of bourgeois morality which, in general, is aimed at accumulating money and securing material belongings, as well as at achieving high social status.

Apart from elements of existentialism and romantic individualism, no less significant a factor in the make-up of the Grinian chivalric hero is his strong propensity for altruism. The essential primacy of altruistic morality over hedonism (or egoism) is revealed many times in the 'chivalric' works. In 'Bochka presnoi vody', for example, a group of sailors is sent away from a becalmed ship to search out drinking water for the entire crew. When the sailors arrive at a small island, they suddenly discover gold in a stream. Mindful of their mission to save their fellow-sailors, however, they decide to abandon any selfish plans for personal enrichment and leave the island bearing only the water with them. Altruism is, indeed, the basis of the chivalric ethos in Grin's view.

⁶³ C.f. the Knight in Kierkegaard's existential philosophy, where the chivalric figure embodies the highest moral order.

The author's concern for the condition of others is particularly persuasive in the chivalric works. Grin's heroes display great sensitivity for other people's suffering together with a constant readiness to offer whatever help they can. Although the zenith of altruism will be reached only in the figure of the Promethean hero (to be scrutinised in the final section), the chivalric attitude also reveals convincing attempts to resist evil and an attitude of disinterestedness irrespective of the cost incurred.

I argue that one of the reasons for a total re-evaluation and the search for a perfect personification of moral values was Grin's desire to embody in his work the morally truthful life. Mikhailova writes that in 1909-10 the writer was tormented by the 'страстное желание выздороветь и жить иначе' (Mikhailova 1980:90). His earliest chivalric work is 'Slon i Mos'ka' written as early as 1906. At this relatively early stage, Grin embarks on a quest of spiritual self-development, although he will be haunted by recurrent pessimism which will continue to have a significant impact on his philosophy until the end of his life.

The aim of this section is to present the most important features of the Knight-figure and to present them as the embodiment of moral views which Grin considered impossible to convey through direct philosophical descriptions of morality. Instead, Grin tried to persuade the reader of the validity of his moral views by showing the noble features of the Knight in action, by testing them in real situations, as it were.

This selection does not exhaust the chivalric topic, but for the purpose of this analysis I will focus on the most characteristic elements of Grin's vision of the chivalric ethos.

3.2.2 Characteristics of the Knight

Although the number of chivalric characters in Grin's oeuvre is quite large, it is not easy to define the most important features of the Knight, since the outward descriptions are sketchy and character information somewhat limited. In the aforementioned works we find both heroes who are clearly stylised as embodiments of chivalric virtues, and other characters whose resemblance to the chivalric paradigm is weaker, but still significant. Nevertheless, it is not the specific form in which Grin presents his characters that reveals their affiliation to chivalric ideals, but the essence of their behaviour.

One of the most striking paradoxes in the work of Grin is that, despite the fact that his heroes are usually focused on seemingly ordinary situations, they display many extraordinary qualities of character. Mikhailova notices that in Grin's works 'герои-антиподы сражаются (...) в гиперболических поединках' (Mikhailova 1980:159). They resemble the titans of Greek mythology, 'преодолевая гиперболические препятствия на пути к противоположным целям' (ibidem). Indeed, it would be difficult to find more antipodal characters than the rivals Ting and Blium in 'Tragediia ploskogor'ia Suan' or Davenant and Van Konet in *Doroga nikuda*. Grin himself described this particular feature when he wrote that his literary works depicted the 'настроения сильных натур поставленных в исключительные обстоятельства устремления к цели'.⁶⁴

It should be remembered that Grin unwaveringly avoided using the device of the historical mask and, apart from the short stories 'Naivnyi Tussaletto' and 'Pokaiannaia rukopis'', his oeuvre contains no plots set explicitly in the Middle Ages. Consequently, we cannot talk about any analogies with historical characters. Grin's Knight does not belong to any privileged social group; he does not possess a title or coat of arms, or any special social position. On the contrary, the heroes selected by Grin to represent this almost perfect moral mode of existence are usually poor, lonely individuals, bereft of any relatives and even orphaned. For Grin, the social status of the hero, his outward and 'momentary' features – what Schopenhauer refers to as 'secondary' ones – do not have any impact on what embodies the Knight's exceptional value. Indeed, the idealistic hero deserves particular attention precisely because of his poverty since, having so little, he performs so much. Thus, material status does not only determine the moral power of the Knight; from Grin's point of view it is utterly unrelated to it. In 'Pozornyi stolb' the hero, after abducting the girl he loves, is caught by the merciless citizens of the town and then severely beaten and deprived of all his property. Like Don Quixote, he suffers physical pain and public humiliation as a result of the idealistic uncompromising stance that he adopts.

The same kind of pride underpins the description of Davenant, who, in order to hide from his father, changes his name to Gravelot – which may be regarded as his inner metamorphosis into a chivalric equivalent of the legendary Lancelot. The Knight, having been cunningly deceived and accused of smuggling drugs, is imprisoned and placed in a particularly grim prison cell. Davenant loses none of his chivalrous dignity, however, and remains as convincing a Knight as he was during his more triumphant moments earlier in the novel.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Mikhailova (1980:70).

Grin thus tries to convince the reader of the irresistible spiritual strength of his characters, who, despite the most unfavourable circumstances, confirm their moral stance through new actions. The fact that his characters have to bear severe material and social disadvantages, however, is compensated for by some undoubted privileges, one of the most significant of which is their almost limitless freedom for action.⁶⁵ In the previous section this element was described as a factor typical of existentialism. The chivalric individual exists, so to speak, outside borders, countries and rulers. He travels and has no political or social obligations.⁶⁶ Moreover, the Knight remains somewhat separate from other people. By building his character in this way, Grin once again displays his desire to create as universal and ageless an image as possible.

Another important element in the plot of the chivalric stories is their emphasis on dynamic action. Grin presents his Knight as being constantly on the move and ready for action. When Davenant, for example, is working as the owner of a tavern, a situation which would imply that he might be relatively dynamic in terms of self-improvement, he is nevertheless constantly involved in improving his aim through shooting practice.⁶⁷ Similarly, in 'Vozvrashchenie "Chaiki"', the hero Cherniak seems prepared to take ever new risks; he greets the dawn of each new day as the opportunity for new excitement or adventure.

Grin makes use of a few recurrent devices or motifs to remind the reader of the background of the romantic chivalric epos. There are not many of these but, in *Zolotaia tsep'*, *Doroga nikuda* and a few minor stories, we encounter echoes which, no matter how ahistorical the work, bring to the reader's mind the mood of chivalric times. *Zolotaia tsep'* contains clear chivalric analogies in the depiction of the 'king' (Ganuver), the palace, court and courtly life (Ganuver's enormously palatial house with its large number of visitors and servants), and the ladies of the court (Dige). There is also the motif of the fantastic treasure connected with the mysterious past, and an opponent (Galway) who proves both dangerous and cunning when he tries to cheat his host and rob him. Finally, at the climax of the story, there is also the splendid ball with a huge number of guests at which the disguised villains are arrested. All these elements of the plot remind us of chivalric literature and tradition.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ As Mikhailova has noted: 'Грин дал герою широкую, открытую всем ветрам арену' (1980:162).

⁶⁶ Once again Schopenhauerian influence may be visible in Grin's ahistorical and apolitical inclination. Cf. Mucha (2002:382).

⁶⁷ Mikhailova claims that Grin's romanticism is conveyed in 'движение – окрыляющая мечта, преображающее искусство' (1980:193). Both Stomador and Galeran in *Doroga nikuda* complain about the lack of events in their lives, so they eagerly welcome the opportunity to break out of their stagnation.

⁶⁸ For a detailed overview of motifs typical of chivalric literature, see: Leyerle (1980:137-146).

As in many chivalric legends and works of literature, in Grin's work the road travelled by the hero is often conceived of as a metaphor for his spiritual journey or development (as in 'Proliv bur' and 'Sto verst po reke'), or as a way of realising his already 'fixed' moral views (as in such works as 'Chetyrnadtsat' futov', 'Prodavets schast'ia' or 'D'iavol Oranzhevykh Vod'). Although the tasks performed by Grin's chivalric heroes can be seen as a transposition of the medieval crusades, the plot is not connected with religion, but is meant to be seen as a struggle for a more general conception of good. Such a theme is to be found in the story 'Proliv bur' where the young sailor Aian dreams of becoming a captain. His plans are driven not by selfish ambition, however, but by his desire to meet the expectations of Stella, the girl he loves. During a brief meeting Stella orders him to complete a great mission, as follows: 'Идите, глупый разбойник, учитесь, сделайте образованным, крупным хищником, капитаном. И когда сотни людей будут трепетать от одного вашего слова — вы придите' (1.I:369). Aian recognises that this is not about one particular task, but will involve a completely different way of living, the life of a sea-wolf who is strong, independent and brave. His reply leaves no space for doubt – he will undertake this call to action and will do everything he can to please Stella: 'Вы не будете стыдиться меня. (...) Я приду' (ibidem). The last remark then becomes a telling sign of Aian's existential engagement – his life will be utterly devoted to fulfilling the promise, and he will surely come back a strong captain. The long and perilous path does not frighten him, since he clearly regards the whole of his life as one great mission: 'Я приду, – сказал он, посылая улыбку северу. – Приду! У меня есть песня — моя песня' (1.I:377). He then sings a simple sailor's song expressive of his free and lively soul.

Kovskii points out that 'авантюрно-приключенческая интрига в гриновских произведениях... не более, чем гвоздь, на котором писатель вешает свои картины' (Kovskii 1981:46), and this literary device, in turn, has a strictly moral core. Similarly, Kobzev stresses that the criticism of Grin made by some earlier literary critics concerning his seemingly oversimplified plots and his use of patterns adopted from adventure literature, is incorrect, because in his case 'авантющность никогда не является самоцелью' (Kobzev 1983:17). The adventure elements in Grin's chivalric works should be regarded only as a form of presentation. The conflict between two vividly-presented characters of contrary moral viewpoints is perfectly interwoven with a dynamic and often tragic plot. Grin uses the latter as a means of delivering certain moral ideas and portraying a morally convincing positive hero. A good example of such surface simplicity is 'Iashchik

s mylom' which seems at first glance an unambitious tale aimed only at satisfying the reader's need for the exotic. But this eventful history of a brave young boy who saves a ship from a criminal attempt to sink its cargo is only a frame in which Grin sets down something more significant than a simple adventure. The chivalric hero is not afraid to put his own life at risk in order to foil criminal plans and save innocent people.

So how can we define the physical characteristics of the Grinian Knight? His strength, agility and physical fitness are not supernatural in origin, as will be the case with some of the Grinian Promethean heroes described in section 3.3. Although outward descriptions of the chivalric heroes do not play any significant role, we can note that the Knight figures are usually young, handsome, strong and agile. Grin tries to single out his heroes in order to make them examples for the reader. They acquire remarkable techniques and develop important chivalric skills such as hand-to-hand fighting, fencing or shooting. Such abilities may turn out to be decisive at the moment of conflict with the enemy, hence, a number of Grin's lonely vagrants carry a pistol while travelling without any specific goal.⁶⁹ The typical Grinian Knight is also energetic and lively – quite like the model knight of a medieval book of chivalry (cf. Kaeuper and Kennedy 1996:123), he does not 'pauper his body' because his physical condition is important, as it is proof of the hero's mobility. One might recall here the ancient Greek mode of bringing up the harmonious human being as both fit and morally upstanding, embodying the ideal of *kalokagathia*.⁷⁰ In the short story 'Okhota na khuligana', one of the Knights, the old hunter Fingar, despite his age is still able to demonstrate extraordinary physical skills, invaluable when he seeks out and catches a dangerous murderer. The old man proves not only his fitness and intelligence, but also his moral probity and readiness to risk his life in order to save innocent citizens. Interestingly, he does not refrain from using force and does not hesitate to kill the murderer when he tries to escape.

Another feature of the Knight is his high resistance to pain and the ability to engage in huge physical effort.⁷¹ Davenant has to endure severe injury to his leg while waiting in the prison cell for help to come. At the same time his friends are working secretly to dig a tunnel under the prison wall. Grin carefully alternates the action on both sides of the wall to show how all these chivalric characters need to fight against physical pain and weakness.

⁶⁹ Not only many hunters and soldiers in Grin's works but also the heroes of 'Fantazery', 'Batalist Shuan' and 'Vpered i nazad' carry weapons for their own safety.

⁷⁰ Cf. Dover (1994:31).

⁷¹ Cf. Kauper and Kennedy (1996:177).

None of them complains or harbours doubt about the eventual outcome, since they all have in mind only the final freeing of their comrade.

Courage and resistance to pain are also depicted in the story 'Zmeia', where a young man saves the life of his beloved by draining venom from her hand which has been bitten by a snake. After a while, the girl looks up to find her saviour dying in terrible pain, without a single word of complaint or regret. The Knight takes the highest risks to help the other person and pays the supreme price without demur.

No matter how significant such features of strength and prowess may seem, there are other spiritual characteristics which possess even greater value. Of these, four stand out as most vital and determinant of the Knight's deeds: courage, pride, independence and self-reliance.

Chivalry seems inextricably linked with extraordinary courage. The legendary knight – be he a member of King Arthur's Round Table, Chevalier de Bayard, Guillaume le Maréchal, or any other historic figure – was above all dauntless in the face of danger. In the work of Grin we find many examples of characters possessed not only of bravery, but also of exceptional bravado no less impressive than that associated with the above-mentioned characters. The Grinian Knight, just like his legendary equivalents, is not afraid of death, therefore. One of the writer's pre-chivalric heroes, Reg in 'Sinii kaskad Telluri', says: 'Я и так всю жизнь дразню смерть' (1.II:67). The chivalric ethos for Grin is connected with recklessness rather than with prevarication. Even when the spectre of failure is real, the Knight steps into the action on the basis of the moral view he professes and, to some extent, because of his need for adventure. Stomador and Galeran, two characters in *Doroga nikuda*, may serve as further examples of this attitude. They help Davenant as much out of loyalty as through a desire to break life's stagnation. In the same way Sandi, the hero of *Zolotaia tsep'*, follows the inner voice of his heart from the very beginning, a voice which demands exciting adventures.

Hand in hand with bravery goes another characteristic feature of the heroes – their sense of pride. Since fighting, especially against a tough enemy, involves the strong possibility of defeat, Grin endows his chivalric characters with great stoicism in the endurance of failure. In this respect, such characters resemble the biblical Job – and, like him, they also refrain from complaint. This is a fully consequential presentation of Grin's maximalistic idealism that moral victory is not measured by the battles won. Goan, the hero of 'Pozornyi stolb', after an unsuccessful attempt at kidnapping his beloved Daisy, is caught by the girl's brothers. They first attack him cruelly, then put him in the stocks on the

town square to humiliate him and finally confiscate all his belongings. Yet Grin presents the young chivalric hero as a powerful spirit, invincible and fully in control of himself, despite the negative consequences of his deed. Goan's chivalric stance, where honour as well as his ability to endure physical pain occupy a vital position, does not pass unnoticed by Daisy, who is so moved by his unflinching bravery that she decides to run away with him into an unknown future. Grin's narrator reveals at the end that their mutual love ends happily.⁷² As ever, because of Grin's critical attitude to society, the problem of the hero's honour is unrelated to social approbation and thus, since he acts always regardless of others' opinions, his sense of pride is dependent only on his own utterly concentrated self-judgement.

In respect of chivalric works, independence should be conceived of as embodying the golden principle of being one's own master. The source of this romantic world-view in Grin's work can be traced back as early as the stories 'Koloniiia Lanfier' (1910) and 'Sinii kaskad Telluri' (1912). The Grinian Knight differs from the historic and literary characters to be found in various chansons and eposes – he neither possesses a master (a feudal lord in the Middle Ages), nor serves anybody (be it rich aristocrat or king), nor does he complete any mission (crusade).⁷³ The Knight remains independent in all the decisions concerning his own life, and, as a result, his moral deeds, which invariably involve a high element of risk to his independence, strike the reader as even more convincing.

None of this is meant to imply that the Grinian hero at any time ceases to be loyal to those who are dear to his heart. Such a feature can be seen clearly in numerous works, although this is not a question of loyalty interpreted as blind attachment to another person. Take, for example, 'Pokaiannaia rukopis'', which, unusually for Grin's fiction, is set in medieval times. This story exemplifies a version of loyalty very akin to the chivalric ideal. The servant and bell-ringer Hans reveals complete faithfulness to his lord when the latter, Herzog Pommersy, is attacked by a group of assassins. In the ensuing sword-fight, the two are greatly outnumbered by their enemies and, despite their skills and courage, Pommersy receives a fatal wound. Just before his last breath he orders Hans to take great care of a bag containing precious stones. The servant is supposed to pass the treasure on to the family of the deceased Herzog in order to secure their future. That same night Hans runs to his friend Valer, another bell-ringer, to ask for his help in concealing the sack. Valer, however, displays his vicious character and cunningly invites Hans to place the sack inside a bell

⁷² This work dates from 1911 and it must be noted here that such a happy ending would hardly have been conceivable for the writer at the end of his life, when he aimed to express much stronger tragic themes.

⁷³ Cf. Gautier (1965:22-25) and Barber (1974:218-25 and 291-302).

high up in the top of the bell-tower. While Hans is trying to attach the sack, Valer removes the ladder, which means that the faithful servant will die shortly, imprisoned in the tower. But Hans, who quickly recognises that his death is inevitable, decides to remain faithful and swallows the gems so that they will not come into the hands of Valer. ‘Преданность и верность Ганса глубоко потрясли меня’ (1.III:486), writes the repentant murderer later in his diary, acknowledging the bell-ringer’s enormous loyalty and strength of will. Independent in his decisions, the Knight chooses freely something that might be described as unthinking loyalty but is, in fact, yet further proof of his moral uprightness, since for Grin being loyal to a ‘bad’ character would be unthinkable.⁷⁴

Similarly, in ‘Malen’kii zagovor’ the chivalric character, an active participant in a secret revolutionary organisation, turns out to be disloyal to his superiors, as soon as he discovers that they are willing to sacrifice the life of an innocent girl for the sake of revolution. He ingeniously arranges a way of sending the girl to another town, and then directly opposes his merciless superiors at great risk to his own life.

The Knight, as befits a romantic individualist, is not only independent, but also entirely self-reliant. He can deal with every situation regardless of circumstance – be it poverty, hunger, loneliness or danger – and is always capable of relying on his own mental and physical resources. This ability is possessed by the hero of ‘Krysolov’, a knight-like young man who survives several stormy weeks of revolution in a deserted bank which turns out also to be haunted by demonic rats. He spends all his days on a knife-edge between reality and hallucination, caused by hunger and physical weakness. Yet even in this critical situation, the Knight manages to survive and in the final scene he saves Krysolov from being assassinated.

Some characters, placed in a difficult situation like Gorn in ‘Koloniia Lanfier’, take this as an opportunity to put their inner strength and spirit to the test. This particular exemplary, isolated individual, at odds with the whole world, says to one of the inhabitants of the colony: ‘Что же касается добрых людей, получивших скверное воспитание, – передайте им, что всякая неожиданная любезность с их стороны встретит надлежащий прием’ (1.I:307). His interlocutor notices aptly that this is the remark of a lone wolf, whose free and rebellious spirit cannot be hampered by any limitations imposed from without.

In some works, such as ‘Na sklone kholmov’ or the aforementioned ‘Vozvrashchenie “Chaiki”’, we find echoes of the idea that all strong characters live alone.

⁷⁴ For this reason Davenant and his friends are openly opposed to the evil governor.

Promulgated by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, this important observation so typical of romantic individualism also finds support in Aleksandr Blok's poem 'Не доверяй своих дорог...' (1900), where we find a stanza which might well serve as a motto for many a Grinian Knight:

‘Все, духом сильные,— одни
Толпы нестройной убегают,
Одни на холмах жгут огни,
Завесы мрака разрывают.’

In Grin's chivalric works the Knight not only can be, but often is forced to do without any support. He is left to his own devices because on the metaphysical level he represents the everlasting fight of good will against the cruel world, regardless of the chances of victory and reward. Moreover, the more weakened and deserted the Knight is, the more we as readers are likely to admire his spiritual strength.

Another characteristic of the Grinian Knight is action. This should be understood not so much in terms of the physicality of the hero, but rather of his attitude towards life: it is not simply action, but his constant readiness to confront problems in an active way. Such characters are akin to medieval crusaders, always ready to be called upon when needed, to leave their former life behind and set off on an unknown, quite possibly mortally dangerous mission. Thus, the activity of the Knight is not simply action for the sake of action; in its essence it involves a creative confrontation with reality. As was shown in previous parts of this thesis, the cruel world is full of challenges, and the Knight is required to be constantly on the alert. Grinian Knights are, therefore, practitioners, rather than theoreticians. We are not read any lectures by these morally upright people, and their deeds are neither prefaced nor concluded by any authorial digressions. Since Grin habitually depicts his heroes in action, he may be called a meta-practitioner.

It is not the case, however, that Grin invariably criticises inaction, since he does not discard the stoic or contemplative model of living embodied by the thinker-heroes of 'Chelovek s chelovekom' and 'Otshel'nik Vinogradnogo Pika'. Rather, he is inclined to extol bravery and the readiness to participate in life. Hence also the fact that the heroes of those two stories are portrayed as being at the service of their fellow-human beings, while ultimately serving no master but themselves.

Struggling against the enemy and overcoming one's own weaknesses constitute a major theme in Grin's oeuvre, where most chivalric heroes perceive life as an arena for

battle. Regardless of his ultimately futile attempts to escape prison and defeat Van Konet, Davenant insists that he is satisfied with the outcome of his battle against the enemy. For a romantic knight the idea of battle encompasses his entire existence. The moral nobility of the hero lies in his sensitivity to the needs of other people – heroism is the readiness to become actively engaged, which is also the vital element of existential morality. The success of the whole enterprise of reclaiming a debt in ‘Vozvrashchenie “Chaiki”’ is based entirely on the hero’s decision to take risks. Cherniak proves brave enough to terrify a despicable villain and force him to pay the money he owes. Yet again Grin endows the deed with moral conviction.

In European culture the figure of the knight carries with it romantic connotations involving love for a noble lady (cf. Barber 1974:71-76; Kaeuper, Kennedy 1996:95). In most chivalric works the beloved is an embodiment of the good in which the Knight believes. Sensitive, delicate and full of grace, the woman is an almost perfect personification of the Ideal, and she is often only a passive addressee of the Knight’s glorious deeds.⁷⁵ It is for her sake that the Knight usually challenges the enemy in various situations. In the same way, many of the women characters in Grin’s chivalric works are endowed with positive qualities. Despite being relatively passive characters, they have enormous influence on male heroes, who are often driven by the desire to defend them or win their hearts. On the one hand, the Knight’s beloved appears often as a Dulcinea-like ideal, ethereal, pure and consequently worthy of every sacrifice. On the other hand, Grin in his pessimistic views on human relations does not always allow his knight to attain love. The heroes of the three love works *Doroga nikuda*, ‘Iva’ and *Zolotaia tsep’* all seek true love and are ready to sacrifice everything to achieve it; yet at the same time, the reader can sense that their strivings bear the imprint of tragedy.

In ‘*Doroga nikuda*’ the love motif underpins the entire story. The admiration and fascination which the hero feels for the older of Futroz’s two daughters is presented in a typically romantic vein. Among many symptomatic qualities linking the story with chivalric legends we might name the following: conversations whose true content remains unspoken, or only subtly suggested,⁷⁶ Davenant’s victory in a shooting competition, the figurine of a deer presented to Davenant for winning which operates as a love token, the

⁷⁵ Ferris (1980:34) notices this kind of portrayal of a lady in the poem ‘Life of the Black Prince by the Herald Sir John of Chandos’.

⁷⁶ However, it is noteworthy that the very word *rytsar’* appears directly in their conversation: ‘Элли, вздохнув, встала и пересела к Давенанту. – Он защитит меня и даст мне конфетку. Будьте моим рыцарем!’ (1.VI:37).

road travelled both in the real and the figurative sense that denotes Davenant's self-development, and finally the obligatory struggle to defend the honour of the woman. The triangle *Knight – Enemy – Lady* is depicted on the grand scale in this work with the plot revealing the heroism of the first, the wickedness of the second, and the beauty and nobility of the third, all of which together make up what might be called a *metaphysical image* of human nature.⁷⁷

The final episode of 'Koloniia Lanfier' provides an interesting example of idealistic love. Gorn hurriedly leaves the inhospitable colony and sees for the last time the face of Ester, a kind and sensitive local girl who loves him. He knows that he will never return and realises at the same time that the woman who hurt him many years earlier is also beyond his reach. Even so, his heart still longs painfully for real, overwhelming love. Thus, for such a romantic Grinian hero love is always possible and it cannot be denied merely through the lack of an ideal candidate.⁷⁸

However, Grin does not allow his Knights to torment themselves with the melancholy of unrequited love. Once again, the moral righteousness of such characters transcends whatever grief they may feel at their personal misfortune. Although unsuccessful on the emotional plane, in terms of the chivalric ethos they are still triumphant.

The theme of unrequited love points to another important feature of the chivalric ethos – constancy in feelings and faithfulness. In the story 'Iva', described also in section 1.2, thanks to some help from the sorcerer Bam-Gran, a birch tree branch bursts into leaf after many years of waiting. This miracle of re-birth is a symbol of hope and is taken by the hero as a sign that he should set off on a journey to find his beloved. The latter had refused to live with him many years earlier and had chosen the career of ballerina in a distant town. However, the Knight remains determined and true to his feelings. He manages to find the girl again, now a successful dancer, and shows her the birch branch which he has preserved for her. She remembers her promise to live with him if only the branch were to bud, but now, even when she sees the miracle happen, she refuses him and rejects the summons of his pure heart. She prefers fame, splendour and money to a quiet life spent in the little

⁷⁷ By the term "metaphysical image" I understand the embodying of a certain moral view not through direct utterance or abstract general principle, but rather by means of a concrete, specific situation which leads to general conclusions, without the need for authorial comment or judgment.

⁷⁸ A frequent element in Grin's writing is the longing for an ideal and undefined love. (Ivanitskaia 1993:49-50) In many chivalric works the heroes dream about a certain woman, who sometimes causes them great suffering, or they become disillusioned about ever finding real love. Which is to say that, while Grin does not undermine the concept of ideal love, he convinces the reader that there are many people in the world who cannot feel it or, on occasion, do not deserve it.

village from which they both come. There is no place for love in her inner world. The spiritual strength and moral rightness of the hero remain unrewarded, although this does not mean that he loses. Grin presents the outcome as a moral victory for the Knight, in spite of the fact that the hero suffers sorrow and disappointment.

In the context of love, the knight is usually associated with the tradition of *quixotism*. The word denotes not only the cult of the noble and beautiful lady, but also the Knight's readiness to defend her virtue whenever it is in danger. Similarly, it is also typical of Grinian Knights to defend their beloved, as is the case in 'Pozornyi stolb' and *Zolotaia tsep'*. In *Doroga nikuda* the chivalrous and uncompromising Davenant champions a woman who has been offended by Van Konet: he challenges the boor not because he loves the woman, or because he is the host of the tavern where the scandalous scene takes place. Grin depicts Davenant's action as based on adherence to principle and, in particular, on the romantic cult of women, who should be defended against both physical and verbal attack. Moreover, according to Davenant, Van Konet has committed a crime against love itself, since his words have ridiculed the noblest of all human feelings. Davenant does not pause to evaluate the situation – he immediately acts in order not to let the insult pass unnoticed. Through his deed he upholds the chivalric ethos and his own moral maximalism. This episode shows that for Grin there is no place for passivity, subservience or concealment. The hero is unaware that this manifestation of moral conviction will be the first link in a long chain of events, leading ultimately to misery and death. Grin thus stresses also the symbolic aspect of this adherence to chivalric principles.

Like a typical Knight, the Grinian hero also serves all damsels in distress or danger. In the short story 'Ruka' the narrator describes a brief episode that took place during a train journey. Before him there sits a girl who is fast asleep. Suddenly her hand swings to one side and lies bent in an unnatural position. Normally no-one would pay any attention to such a tiny thing, but the chivalric character is different. His sensitivity and empathy make him think about helping the girl. There is the risk that, if she wakes up, she may become angry with him and feel offended. While helping the girl seems to accord with his heart, it goes against social convention and may be frowned upon. The narrator despises the 'глупую и подлую логику жизни' (I.III:384), but his chivalric character prevails and he decides to help the girl. This seemingly trivial story therefore conveys an important message.

Love, while being a decisive element in the hierarchy of possible good, is, in Grin's opinion, not necessarily the most important factor, however. In several of Grin's works the

hero abandons his pursuit of the beloved for moral reasons. One reason may be a radical change of moral judgement concerning the person loved. In ‘Medvezh’ia okhota’, for example, the main character, Kenin, courts a girl who, although beautiful, is vain. The narrator depicts the girl unsympathetically: she is clearly playing a cruel game with Kenin and treats him with little respect. However, the Knight’s deep devotion also has its limits – reached in this case when he registers the girl’s appalling behaviour when she tries to sell the skin of a bear which he killed in order to win her favour. The whole risky and difficult enterprise of shooting the animal obviously means nothing to the girl. She pays no heed to the chivalric virtues of bravery, *quixotism* and ingenuity displayed by her admirer. However constant the Knight is in his love, he gives up courting a lady when he discovers her moral impurity.

Similarly, in the aforementioned story ‘Iva’, the ballerina is focused on her career to such an extent that she fails to see her faithful young man’s exceptional virtues. Her blind desire for fame obscures any understanding of the power of love. Once again the Knight leaves the scene, but he is only seemingly defeated; in the eyes of Grin he is the victor, since he is finally disenchanted about the object of his feelings. In these examples moral blindness makes both girls unworthy of love, and both are left with no grounds for complaining or displaying contempt.⁷⁹

Among all the moral traits that we can find in Grin’s chivalric ethos, altruism, the ideal of Schopenhauerian morality that was also essential to existential philosophy, occupies first place. Unlike certain other characters in Grin’s works, whose views on life were compared to existentialism in the previous section, the Knights feel morally obliged to renounce their own ego. By this is understood not only their abandonment of the egotistical point of view, but also their ability to subordinate their own feelings to those of the other person, whose happiness, therefore, becomes the Knight’s main goal. Altruism, taken as a disinterested act directed towards someone else’s benefit, reaches its final realisation at the moment of self-sacrifice which, in turn, achieves its most spectacular embodiment when there is no possible reward on offer for committing the deed. Often Knight-figures receive no words of gratitude or praise, and in a number of works there is not even any witness to their moral heroism.

Sometimes Grin attempts to convince the reader that the Knight declines to compete for the lady’s favour because he does not want to win her at the expense of another man’s

⁷⁹ It is noteworthy that Bam-Gran may be seen as the equivalent of the sorcerer Merlin. This reminds us of the importance of the magical element in chivalric literature (cf. Briggs 1977, Goodman 1998).

love. This is the case in ‘Slovookhotlivyi domovoi’, already analysed in section 1.1. Here, the brave and strong individual Ral’f visits his brother Filipp after long years of travel and adventure. Filipp lives quietly in a forest with his wife Anni. This delicate and sensitive girl belongs to that group of refined women characters who make their appearance in Grin’s prose and, from the Knight’s perspective, she is undoubtedly worthy of his effort and sacrifice. Although Ral’f and Anni feel mutual attraction from the very first moment, their brief, silent meeting by a magic boulder in the forest is followed by a rapid change of events. The chivalric hero decides to leave his kind hosts in order to preclude the development of an affair and in this way to prevent any change to the couple’s happy married life. Obviously, he disguises his plans, misleading them as to the real reasons behind his decision. Although he thereby loses the affection of his brother, he nonetheless saves him from deeper unhappiness.

Examples of such self-sacrifice performed, so to speak, on an empty stage are fairly common in Grin’s chivalric works. In ‘Dacha bol’shogo ozera’, for example, Grin shows the hero Ossovskii offering unconditional help to save a friend’s marriage. The intrigue the Knight plans is aimed at saving the happiness of the friend’s wife, rather than supporting the friend himself who has turned into a despicable drunkard. Ossovskii’s virtuous deed is even more poignant if we consider that he is, by all accounts, a much more suitable candidate for husband than his friend, and yet he leaves the village without any explanation or reward.⁸⁰ Once more, Grin displays his moral maximalism when Ossovskii disappears from the scene alone, but carrying with him the chivalric ethos as his only real treasure. The final scene of the story is an important example of the superiority of moral conviction over an egotistical desire to achieve happiness at all costs.

The Knight on principle does not act for the sake of material benefit, even if it might appear at first sight that he does wish to gain something. Material goods play at most a secondary role. The chivalric heroes lack not only property, and things like expensive clothes, carriages, horses and cars, but they often live on the verge of complete poverty (e.g. Sandi in *Zolotaia tsep’* and Davenant in *Doroga nikuda*). They do not possess servants and in their outward appearance never resemble members of the aristocracy or country gentry. This provides more evidence of Grin’s egalitarian convictions, which are so richly exemplified in his fiction. Contrary to established chivalric principles and written manuals, for Grin anyone can be a member of the élite group of Knights, even such men as the

⁸⁰ We may say that the lonely romantic wanderers such as Ral’f and Ossovskii resemble Don Quixote in travelling around the world in an unending journey, in search of happiness. Their moral rightness and readiness to help others in need are, as in the case of Cervantes’ hero, directly proportional to their immense need for love.

penniless heroes of 'Sto verst po reke', 'Prodavets schast'ia' and 'Proliv bur'.⁸¹ Such a method of presenting moral virtue as being embodied in seemingly poor, ordinary people aims to make the chivalric ethos even more compelling. Such an egalitarian approach to the choice of heroes stems from Grin's intention to direct the reader's attention more toward the virtues at stake than to any secondary issues. To belong to the moral élite, one has to follow an unwritten code of conduct, that of the chivalric ethos that is deeply written in the heart and based invariably on altruism.

As we saw in Part Two, money is scarcely of any importance for the Grinian positive hero (while the negative characters think almost exclusively about financial benefit). Occasionally the Grinian Knight may acquire money, but this only occurs in extraordinary circumstances, e.g. when it is used as a means to achieve a 'higher good'. The same is true in the case of competition. When Davenant participates in a small shooting tournament with Futroz's daughters and their friends, or when the young admirer in 'Medvezh'ia okhota' becomes a hunter, the competition is conducted in the most chivalrous way, and the goal is not so much connected with beating the other contestants, as with winning the admiration and favour of the beloved.⁸²

It also needs to be emphasised that every action is directed towards overcoming evil, and dispelling it. Mikhailova notices that Grin seems to believe that 'Зло отступает, если с ним бороться' (Mikhailova 1980:163). Grin presents his readers with the vital lesson that evil can be destroyed only in open battle, where we should place in the balance all that we have, including, if need be, our life. Neither escape, nor the attempt to come to an agreement with the enemy, can be regarded as possible solutions. The Knight, far from 'staying away from trouble', rather chooses to face it and put his entire happiness at stake in a single moment. Moreover, it is expected, following the principle of aesthetic contrast, that a glorious deed requires great effort and must involve extraordinary danger. Kovskii (1988:5) rightly claims that in many works of Grin the negative characters often possess supernatural qualities and personify the extreme of vice. By the same token, some of the positive heroes, such as Drud of *Blistaiushchii mir*, seem to resemble demigods. Although villains may occasionally be portrayed in an exaggerated manner so as to make their vices seem even more striking, they make an ideal contrast to the chivalric heroes who, in turn, may also appear to be quite unrealistic in the extreme of their idealism.

⁸¹ In medieval Europe a candidate for a knight had to meet three main requirements: be an aristocrat, receive proper tutoring during the period of apprenticeship, and complete certain trials. For more information, see Ruff (1980:107).

⁸² For more on medieval chivalric tournaments, see: Barber (1974:155-182,189); Kaeuper and Kennedy (1996:213-240); Gautier (1965:268-78).

The Knight staunchly opposes evil in every form (cf. Gautier 1965:20-21), but most of all when another person is treated not as a subject, but as an object and as a means for the pursuit of another man's selfish goal. Grin describes many evil characters who abuse their power and wealth to humiliate or enslave other human beings with whom they toy simply in order to satisfy their degenerate desires. Among many stories unfolding similar conflicts, *Doroga nikuda* and 'Vozvrashchenie "Chaiki"' explicitly exemplify the common Grinian rule: in defence of a helpless soul the Knight will fearlessly face the villain. In 'Slon i Mos'ka' a young soldier exposes the sadistic practices of his superior, proving that no obstacle can stop a Knight when he sees another man being demeaned.⁸³ Similarly, 'Gladiatory' is a short but powerful evocation of the repulsive degeneracy of a rich man who buys slaves and then forces them to fight each other to the death, just so that he can revel in the sight of their frantic struggle to save their own lives. However, his perverted pleasure comes to an unexpected end when one of the gladiators turns out to be of heroic nature and sacrifices his life in order to kill the oppressor and put a stop to the inhumane game for ever.

Such examples of the chivalric ethos might be contrasted with other works by Grin such as 'Vor v lesu' or 'Sluchai', which present similar cruelty and injustice, but where there is no saviour on hand to confront the evil and restore the natural moral order.

When looking from a higher perspective at the most dramatic works, we may note that the more glaringly apparent the cruelty perpetrated by the negative characters, the more the reader calls for a chivalrous hero to interfere and save the innocent victims. A clear example of rough justice can be found in 'Vor v lesu'. The negative hero of this work, already described in section 2.2, displays enormous lack of understanding for his old friend and, out of pure greed and vengefulness, kills the poor man who simply wanted to repay his old debt and make him a partner in his new business. As Grin intended, every reader must feel sorry for the victim, and we can only imagine the difference, had there been a chivalric character introduced here to change the direction of the plot.

⁸³ Similarly, in 'Istoriia odnogo ubiistva', another soldier commits murder, brought to the verge of total depression by an inhumanly strict officer who uses every occasion to apply mental torture to him.

3.2.3 The evaluation of Grin's romantic chivalric ethos

Жизнь знает не время, а дела и события.
Aleksandr Grin, 'Vpered i nazad'

The chivalric works convey a clear message – that uncompromising altruism and the struggle to preserve or restore the Good is the essence of morality in Grin. Even though Grin's literary knights, contrary to their medieval models, do not seem to be devout, their moral uprightness cannot be questioned. The modern world calls for knights who profess such an ethos; it needs noble deeds and intrepid sacrifices in order to redress the balance between good and evil.

Grin's chivalric stories are not puzzles with elements which need to be deciphered. On the contrary, the plots of these stories serve from the very beginning to embody the author's moral ideal. The chivalric ethos is, therefore, not a theory or a hypothesis; it stems naturally from Grin's observations of human character. The hero reveals his morality to us wordlessly, since any explicit description would be of little use; the narrator does not add any evaluative commentary to help the reader judge the deeds, which is, perhaps, in a way characteristic of Grin who clearly prefers images to abstract descriptions in order to convey his message to the reader. The beauty and rightness of the Knight's ethos is meant to be self-evident, something that does not require anything other than a moment of quiet contemplation on the reader's part. All such heroes occupy a prominent position in Grin's gallery of existential sketches.

Although the Knight is a vital element in Grin's search for philosophical value, this kind of character is not the highest element in the complex moral philosophy which underlies the writer's work. The moral picture of Grin's *sui generis* altruistic hero would not be complete without consideration of what one might call the *Promethean* element. Of

all the numerous forms of self-sacrifice to be found in the work of Grin, the personification of Prometheus is the most sublime, the pinnacle of the writer's altruistic vision.

3.3 Promethean Humanism

Whereas in the first section of this part of the thesis, when discussing Grin's links with existentialism, I referred to the symbolic figure of Sisyphus (with reference to Camus' philosophical tract), in this part I will evoke the character of Prometheus. While the first of these two mythical heroes is a sombre figure embodying the notion of struggle with an irremovable burden, the other represents above all tragic altruism for the sake of mankind in general, and as such, as I will argue, can be seen as the supreme figure in Grin's moral philosophy.

The difference between Knight and Prometheus lies in the scope of their deeds. Prometheus' altruism and sacrifice are aimed at a larger group of people than the individually-driven sacrifice of the former character, though the moral origins of their deeds are the same. The Grinian Prometheus, like the mythical Titan, whom Jung described as the great friend of mankind, becomes man's ally when he strives to restore love, happiness, peace and well-being to all. Importantly for psychological research, Prometheus can also represent a certain view on moral philosophy.⁸⁴

The main thesis of the following discussion is the notion that Grin succeeds in creating in his works a set of figures who truly reflect an attitude of high humanistic altruism. I will aim to find convincing evidence for the hypothesis that *Promethean Humanism* is the appropriate name for the general personal model of morality promulgated in the work of Grin. What I call Promethean morality will be scrutinised in relation to civilisation, injustice, the condition of man, the search for individual happiness and desire for utopia. I shall concentrate on five works which describe five different characters who possess Promethean features. While presenting characters who are fully individualised, each of these works arguably features the same kind of character – from the short story

⁸⁴ Prometheus can be viewed as the sensible person capable of rational planning and foreseeing the future in contrast to his brother Epimetheus, whose lack of any such ability led him to open Pandora's box. For an interesting discussion on Promethean-like philosophy, see: Hardin (1980).

‘Poedinok predvoditelei’ to the long and complex novel *Blistaiushchii mir*, in which Grin manages to display in full his vision of a moral benefactor of mankind.

Before analysing the gallery of Grinian Prometheuses, let us first examine the original mythical character as characterised by Robert Graves in his work *The Greek Myths* (1955).

Prometheus, regarded commonly as a defender of humanity, was one of the seven immortal Titans who were endowed with supernatural abilities. He had three brothers but unlike them he did not support their father Kronos against Zeus, since he believed rebellion too risky and suggested instead a peaceful way out of the conflict between the gods.⁸⁵ He learnt from Athena all manner of practical and theoretical skills and then decided to pass them on to mankind. In so doing, Prometheus can be seen as the ultimate saviour who, according to Kofman, ‘saves men from death, frees them from their dreaded bonds and, like the philosopher in the allegory of the cave, leads them to the light of day’ (Kofman and Woodhull 1987:27).⁸⁶ Therefore, it is the ‘midwife function’ that makes Prometheus and Socrates akin.⁸⁷ Zeus considered such support to constitute too great a danger for himself since it increased the capabilities of once-absolutely defenceless people. The master of Olympus decided, therefore, to exterminate all the inhabitants of the earth, but was prevailed upon by Prometheus to abandon his intention. By continuing to deny fire to humans, Zeus still had control over them, however, and was able to prevent their further development. Once again Prometheus decided to help people – this time by stealing fire from Olympus, which enormously strengthened the power of men vis-à-vis the gods. But Prometheus’ violation of divine law met with cruel and humiliating punishment at the hands of Zeus. Although intended to last for eternity, the sufferings of the Titan were fortunately ended by Heracles, who killed the vulture and freed Prometheus from his chains.⁸⁸

Prometheus is traditionally regarded as not only the introducer of fire, the one who taught mankind how to deceive the gods, but also as an extraordinary character in himself who despised tyranny and all forms of compulsion. What makes him even more worthy of

⁸⁵ Prometheus, as his name in Greek denotes, symbolises forethought and wise counsel as well as the ability to foresee the future.

⁸⁶ The allegory of the cave originates from Plato's *The Republic* (book VII).

⁸⁷ In Plato's dialogue ‘Protagoras’, Socrates praises the Titan for his wisdom and prudence. The Greek philosopher then himself imitates the Titan in order ‘to get them [people – C.M.] out of aporia, and lead them from darkness to light, encouraging them to liken themselves to the gods’ (Kofman and Woodhull 1987:27). Aporia denotes the state of being perplexed, a notion found principally in the texts of Plato and Aristotle.

⁸⁸ Cf. Graves (1967:132-7).

praise is the fact that, as Klęczar (2003:56) notes, his sacrifice was an act of sympathy made for the sake of the weak and vulnerable.⁸⁹

Ancient Greek literature contains two significant versions of the myth which are relevant to our analysis: the interpretation of Hesiod, and Aeschylus's play *Prometheus Bound*. Tarnas (1996:472) notes that in the theogony of Hesiod Prometheus is a serio-comic figure who seems to be merely a trickster, and the myth is presented as a tale of disobedience and folly in the face of divine power. On the other hand, in the work of Aeschylus, Prometheus is endowed with a much more complex and intriguing character. Aeschylus argues that not man, but Prometheus is the source of progress. He leads mankind from savagery to intellectual mastery and dominion over nature, and becomes a tragic hero of universal stature. As Will argues, 'it is an existence from which he looks out, rather than into which he looks and then he is made a representative of a certain moral stand' (Will 1962:85).

While Hesiod's hero is more a symbol of cunning who manages to deceive Zeus himself, for Aeschylus Prometheus displays ingenuity, wisdom and in the end, reveals the deep tragedy of existence. Aeschylus, unlike Hesiod, enriches his own version with a different perspective through some secondary characters. However, in later ancient presentations of the myth an important change takes place – the achievements of Prometheus are demythologised and gradually transferred to humans, as man himself becomes more and more the agent in the development of civilisation. Thereafter the hero was described in different ways throughout the centuries and attracted many interpretations. Sappho, Plato, Aesop and Ovid all refer to Prometheus. The continuing importance of the figure in European culture is demonstrated by the number of traces left in works of art of all genres from the Renaissance to modern times. During the Renaissance, philosophers like Bacon and Erasmus presented alternative interpretations of the myth. Prometheus was also a common allegorical figure in poetry (by Goethe, Byron, Ronsard) and numerous other artists including musicians (cf. *The Lord Masque* of Thomas Campion). In the 19th and 20th centuries, the myth lost none of its significance and served as a means of artistic expression in the music of Beethoven and Scriabin, as well as in the verse of Shelley and the art of Sargent.

I am convinced that, although there are no direct references to the myth of Prometheus in Grin's works, analysis of the intentions, deeds and moral modes of life of

⁸⁹ Klęczar points out that Prometheus' deed was, albeit directly against the divine law, not intended to harm the gods or voluntarily break their law but merely driven by the Titan's metaphysical sense of sympathy for the suffering people who were innocent but cruelly sentenced to annihilation.

certain of his main characters will provide us with a valuable perception on the modern interpretation of Promethean morality.

3.3.1 Being good requires sacrifices ('Sozdanie Aspera')

The first work of the Promethean set chosen for analysis is 'Sozdanie Aspera', written in 1917. Altruism is strongly linked here with a specific way of understanding the role of art in human life; one needs to create one's life as one would fashion a piece of art.

The main character and the embodiment of Promethean morality is a judge called Gakker, who reveals the details of his most precious (life) secret to his interlocutor. In the course of the story we learn that this respected old man, whose duty it has been to serve and preserve the law in a small town, has been leading a double life for over seven years. Gakker decides to reveal the secret because he wishes Asper's legend to live on. Gakker hopes that his interlocutor will not betray him because this would destroy his enormous effort and the piece of art itself.

The judge confesses that some seven years earlier, disillusioned with his biological experiments on living animals, he decided to focus his investigations on human beings. Like the mythical Prometheus, he became interested in 'делание людей'. In Gakker's case, however, this was achieved by creating fictitious characters in the real world through the use of gossip, newspapers and certain actions intended to create the impression that the person actually existed, but remained *incognito*. His first creations – which existed only in the people's consciousness – a veiled lady and a poet, were purely results of Gakker's own need for entertainment. Designed to impress the public, they turned out to be experiments before the creation of his ultimate work – the highwayman Asper.

Gakker reveals the fact that, having created the first two people, he happened one day upon a dangerous criminal in a tavern. The man was seeking refuge from the police. Thereupon Gakker offered to purchase his identity from him in order to use it in his next project. With considerable financial help from the judge, the criminal managed to escape safely from the continent on condition that he would never return. Asper, now a person

with only a virtual existence and animated by the judge's moral convictions, is reborn as a completely different character. Gakker carries out his elaborate plan by using real robberies that take place in the vicinity as opportunities to make Asper famous for his nobility of action: he sends out secret letters and gives money away to the poor – all under the name of Asper. The robber (now famous as the 'роза окрыга'), never resorts to violence, but rather gives toys to children in secret. No wonder the miraculous benefactor quickly gains fame and popularity. There seems to be no way of putting a stop to his brave attacks and, despite the desperate attempts of the police to catch him, he remains elusive. Gakker describes the birth of a real legend, the cult of an unknown, mysterious friend of the people who, like Robin Hood, robs the rich to help the poor. After six years of living such a life there comes the moment when Gakker decides to finish with the entire charade. The final chapter in Asper's life requires, however, a real sacrifice – that of Gakker himself. Since the police have finally placed so many guards around the area that no robberies can happen anywhere, people have begun to doubt whether Asper is still alive. Gakker decides to arrange one last hold-up. Moreover, he plans to make it deliberately unsuccessful. He believes that the kind of noble character created by him should live on forever in the minds of poor people who see him as an embodiment of altruistic self-sacrifice. The judge sees no other way of making Asper immortal. The story ends with a short obituary-like note in the newspaper about an unexpected robbery committed by Asper, which failed and led to his being shot and falling from a cliff.

The key element in this work is neither the activity of the highwayman, nor the giving of money to those in need. The most important factor in the story is the judge's explanation of what motivates his final self-sacrifice. He is convinced that making Asper simply disappear would involve an unforgivable loss, since he regards it as his duty to make the highwayman immortal. Thus Grin seems to attempt to persuade the reader that art endowed with moral meaning is inseparably linked with life, and that the greatest work of art requires its author to embody its values literally in his own existence. The death of Asper seems the inevitable end of the whole notion of creating the noble highwayman. The suicide of the judge may therefore be seen as the finishing touch of a great artist whose masterpiece is a perfect mirror of its author's moral views.⁹⁰

Gakker resembles the mythical Titan Prometheus in his uncompromising striving to immortalise the idea of selfless Good. The veiled lady and the poet first created by the judge embodied the idea of the *acte gratuit*, an action performed for pure joy (or, if taken in

⁹⁰ We may assume that Gakker let the real Asper escape because at that time the judge was not morally 'awakened' and only later developed a strong sense of altruism.

existential vein, out of a notion of pure freedom).⁹¹ With the story of Asper and his final sacrifice, Grin embodies the ultimate moral deed of an entire life. To serve the legend about ‘великодушные разбойники’ Gakker sacrifices his own life. This deed, however, makes him immortal through his heroism. He claims that ‘высшее назначение человека – творчество’ (1.VI:300). In his opinion this special kind of creative activity requires the ultimate sacrifice from its author. Gakker, however, must remain anonymous, deliberately hiding the nature of Asper's birth from the public. The judge firmly states that ‘Имя художника не может быть никому известно; более того, люди не должны подозревать, что явления, удивляющие их, не что иное, как произведение искусства’ (1.VI:301). His art is designed to exert an everlasting impact on people in the village – just as Prometheus’ mythic deeds benefited mankind.

3.3.2 Readiness to create good (‘Gatt, Vitt i Redott’)

In ‘Gatt, Vitt i Redott’ of 1924, Grin argues that altruism always involves the element of self-sacrifice. The plot recounts the story of three friends who travel to Africa in search of diamonds. Unfortunately, they soon become ill with malaria, and are robbed. After a month Fortune suddenly smiles upon them. Late one evening a strange Hindu appears and offers to help them. He gives them three mysterious seeds, which according to him, will bring them enormous strength. He wants absolutely no reward for his kind gift. In typical fairy-tale style Grin goes on to compare the three friends’ completely different ways of behaving. Gatt and Vitt foolishly waste their seeds: the former almost immediately dies through his own stupidity and quick temper; the latter becomes a cruel and merciless hunter who dies from a snake bite (which can be interpreted as punishment meted out to him by Nature for his cruel treatment of animals). The remainder of the story is devoted to Redott. He quickly recognises the power of the seeds and, consequently, the catastrophic consequences of abusing them.

Redott uses only a part of the seed, but sufficient to make him three times stronger than any other worker in the mine. He judiciously hides his gift and takes up work as a

⁹¹ The *acte gratuit* is a term usually associated Gide’s novel *Les Caves du Vatican* (1913) and originates from the motiveless murder committed by the main hero – Lafcadio. Nowadays, the term usually stands for an impulsive act lacking motive. According to the writer himself, his main intention behind Lafcadio’s deed was to show that an act devoid of personal interest by all means cannot be always judged as ‘good’. For more on this story, see Scherr 2007a.

regular miner. His prudence can be linked with the stoic principle that happiness is available to everyone and lies within our reach at any time. Just as a man does not need huge wealth, so he does not need titanic strength in order to lead a happy and good life. Redott works with no special effort and still proves more effective than the rest of the miners. This reasonable, golden-mean-like approach enables him to live without risk of provoking the envy of the other workers. He keeps the remaining part of the seed with him in case his extraordinary strength should be required one day. But Grin does not wish his hero to be merely moderate and prudent. Not surprisingly, an occasion to use his magical power soon arrives, when a terrible accident traps a thousand people in a mining tunnel. Despite desperate rescue attempts, the engineers are helpless and the situation seems disastrous. However, Redott comes upon the scene and decides without hesitation to use what remains of the miraculous seed and save the miners. His enormous strength enables him to remove part of the huge mountain and set the workers free. But such incredible physical effort costs him the ultimate price – his own life, since his heart proves too weak to endure. Soon after their rescue the miners find Redott's body on the ground.

Redott resembles Prometheus both because of his extraordinary strength which he uses wisely and with good reason, as well as for his foresight. The Promethean hero helps those trapped without any hesitation, well aware of the danger to himself and calculating his chances – just like the previously described Knight-like figures, except that this hero's deed embodies quite a different meaning. We may wonder whether his gift might have been used in a more sophisticated way with more people benefiting from it, if Redott had chosen another way of life. Nevertheless, at the moment of seeing other people in need Redott displays highly Promethean moral decisiveness – and renders uncompromising service to mankind, albeit for a small group of poor miners.

3.3.3 Let peace fall over the world ('Poedinok predvoditelei')

Similar concern for a small group of people characterises the deeds of Sing, the main hero of 'Poedinok predvoditelei' written in 1915. Yet again Grin uses a fairy-tale as a device for telling a deceptively simple story about two warring villages in India. The members of the two tribes involved have long been engaged in fratricidal strife. Sing, a

brave young chieftain from the first village, comes to personify idealistic faith in the possibility of bringing people the gift of peace. He devises a noble but risky plan. He sneaks into the tent of Iret, the enemy chieftain, to put to him an idea for preventing the forthcoming devastating battle and finishing the conflict between the villages forever. We realise that Iret is also capable of nobility, since he agrees to fight a duel with Sing to determine which tribe shall be acclaimed the superior. In the fierce struggle that follows, Sing deals Iret a fatal blow, but before his opponent falls dead, he himself bares his chest to Iret and with great courage and determination urges his opponent: 'Ирет, ударь меня в сердце, пока можешь. Смерть одного предводителя вызовет ненависть к побежденной стороне, и резня возобновится... Надо, чтоб мы умерли оба - наша смерть уничтожит вражду' (2.П:384).

The blow is dealt to Sing's heart, which serves as symbol of both faith and boundless devotion to his people. He literally gives his heart as a token of his desire to bring long-awaited peace to both tribes. This remarkable act of heroism reveals the chieftain's moral creed – he believes that universal peace is the utmost value and that a one-sided victory over Iret would in fact signal his personal failure. Moral triumph is possible here only when paid for by the ultimate sacrifice. Grin ends the story by assuring the reader that the heroism of both chieftains brought them great renown, being immortalised in the union of the two villages under the new name The Village of the Two Victors.

Quite apart from Sing's display of remarkable, fairy-tale-like faith in the good and honesty of others, Grin again postulates peace at any price. Like Prometheus, Sing makes the supreme sacrifice. He does not shrink from the risk of being caught when entering the enemy's camp, nor from the danger of being killed in a dangerous duel which could also lead to the collapse of his plan. Moreover, he allows his opponent to kill him which is a truly illogical act in terms of the rules of politics. The heroism of his Promethean deed lies predominantly in two factors: firstly, he freely and deliberately abandons the idea of winning the fight, and secondly, he takes this decision in spite of the total uncertainty surrounding the outcome of his sacrifice, since he cannot know whether the tribes will eventually become reconciled.

Sing is a truly mythical figure, a hero of remarkable virtue who pays the ultimate price for the sake of his countrymen.⁹²

⁹² Sing is reminiscent of the captain of Grin's story 'Vragi'. In this work a sailor dies preventing the shipwreck of his vessel. In 'Poedinok predvoditelei', in turn, we encounter a different kind of sacrifice: it is a

3.3.4. Let the time of love come for ever ('Uchenik charodeia')

'Uchenik charodeia' (1917) features two main characters: the sorcerer d'Obremon and the narrator of the story, François, who is a petty robber. He manages to escape from prison in Paris and spends long months hiding, cheating people who help him, stealing food and money, and slipping deeper and deeper into a moral abyss. When winter ends François gets lost in a large forest and after three days of travelling, tormented by hunger, he comes upon a lonely house in the forested wilderness. Its owner, the old man d'Obremon, not only warmly welcomes the young vagrant, feeds him and offers him a shelter, but also persuades him to become his apprentice.

From the very beginning Grin draws parallels between these two strikingly different characters: one revealing the purely consumerist attitude of a man of the people, the other displaying the hyper-individualistic heroism of a Promethean altruist.

François agrees to become the sorcerer's pupil in order primarily to assuage his hunger. He pretends to be an eager learner and patiently endures his master's peculiarities because he dreams only of using his magic to produce gold. François' narrative style is couched in a colloquial idiom, whereas d'Obremon speaks in an elegant, almost poetic vein. While the boy only feigns interest in reading books, the sorcerer reads in order to increase his already considerable knowledge. This huge discrepancy between the two characters does not stem from the age gap as d'Obremon naively supposes. The boy's lack of respect for the ascetic life of his benefactor anticipates his treachery; like a cat lying in wait before pouncing, he bides his time until he finds the perfect moment to take his victim. The climax of the story is reached with the brutal murder which François commits in the dead of night. As soon as François decides that the wealth hidden in the sorcerer's trunk is within his reach, he acts without remorse.

self-sacrifice aimed at a vague hope and therefore requiring even greater faith, the kind of faith that even the Titan Prometheus would have recognised as truly extraordinary.

The reader may be surprised by the naivety displayed by d'Obremon, but Grin deliberately stresses here the gentle and trustful nature of the old man, as well as his patience and understanding. He is ready to devote his time to teaching his young pupil, because he believes that in François he has finally found a promising follower in his great mission to prove that mankind can return to the state where love rules the world. The sorcerer believes the boy is someone who will be as altruistic and self-denying as he has been. But François, blinded by the desire to become rich, turns out to be devoid of any altruistic reflex at all. A perfect example of this discrepancy of world-views can be found in their descriptions of their dreams: whereas d'Obremon dreams of a fantastic rebirth of ideal love among people who will live on in harmony and happiness thanks to his magic project (which should be seen only as a symbol), François can imagine only his own existence utterly changed and filled with sensual pleasure and great wealth. He reveals the poverty of his primitive dreams when he says that the day after the crime he was going along the river and thinking of 'веселая разгульная жизнь, цвет удовольствий которой обещал шумный Париж' (1.VI:397).

In terms of their attitude to nature and the fruits of the earth, the two characters are also radical opposites. While d'Obremon collects many herbs with great reverence, the boy seems completely emotionless during his long hours of work in the forest, and he draws no pleasure from living close to nature. The sorcerer begins his day very early, always happy to continue his great project spending the entire day focused on his goal. François, on the contrary, sleeps long, and his labour possesses no value for him whatsoever.

In order to comprehend fully the difference between the two opposite modes of life represented by d'Obremon and François, it is worth introducing Fromm's book *To Have or to Be*. In this widely-discussed work, the German-American philosopher argues that there are two opposite modes of existence which he describes as *to have* and *to be*. The distinction is based on a dichotomy in the human way of living. The first mode is focused on possession and can be characterised as being receptive or exploitative. People living this mode are preoccupied with obtaining, trading and consuming goods, and for them 'I have it' tends to become 'it has me'. The second mode, 'to be', by contrast, is rooted in love and sympathy, and is mainly concerned with action and pure existence (i.e. 'being' as opposed to the 'having' mode of life). In such a way of life people tend to develop stronger emotional relations with other people, sharing their experiences and becoming less dependent on things. In general, in Fromm's approach the process of acquiring and consuming goods is contrasted with that of creating and experiencing.

Without doubt we notice that, to use Fromm's dichotomy, d'Obremon exemplifies the mode *to be*, while his antagonist François clearly demonstrates the mode *to have*. The most important thing for d'Obremon is to restore the ideal of love between people. The sorcerer believes without reservation that a world of peace and brotherhood is achievable. The pessimistic view of the world, akin to Schopenhauer's mournful view of the collapse of morality, is disputed in the sorcerer's words: 'И любовь, Франсуа, любовь, крылья которой покрыты жестокой грязью, воскреснет' (1.VI:396). Like the mythical Prometheus, d'Obremon projects his hopes on to human beings. Despite the gigantic gap between his own existence, full of reverence, knowledge and nobility, and that of François, dwelling in the depths of ignorance, d'Obremon takes on the task of carrying the fire of knowledge just like the altruistic Titan. However, through a tragic injustice this beacon of selflessness is extinguished by merciless egoism.

Grin's story may be compared to 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice', the famous ballad of Goethe based on a tale by the Greek poet Lucian. In 'Uchenik charodeia', however, Grin does not repeat the adventures of the disobedient apprentice, but creates a more symbolic and universal image against a well-developed moral background. Just as in 'Poedinok predvoditelei', the idea of regaining peace plays a dominant role in 'Uchenik charodeia', but here it is also linked with the Christian-like commandment of love. In the sorcerer's vision secret magic can change the whole of France into a country of happiness where 'час восхитительный и божественно-мудрый наступит скоро' (1.VI:392).

3.3.5. The tragic fate of Prometheus (*Blistaiushchii mir*)

The most important place in this group of Promethean works is occupied by Grin's multi-layered novel, *Blistaiushchii mir*. From the angle of this dissertation this work, written in 1924, constitutes the finest, most elaborate philosophical utterance in the whole of Grin's oeuvre and requires careful and detailed analysis and interpretation.⁹³ *Blistaiushchii mir* is indeed Grin's *magnum opus* and the rest of his work could even be viewed as commentary on this truly complex philosophical novel.

⁹³ Proof of the complexity and diversity of opinions is that critics have proposed two different interpretations of the final episode of the novel: while some claim that Drud dies on the pavement (Kovskii 1969; Vikhrov 1980), others (Zvantseva 1972; Iablokov 2005) think that his apparent suicide is just a symbol of Runa's mental collapse, the bottom of her spiritual degradation equal to death.

Blistaiushchii mir concerns the idealist Drud who, endowed with the miraculous ability to fly, wishes to free people from soulless stagnation and regain for them the power of dreams. The hero encounters various characters, some evil and driven by their own personal interest, and others too weak to register his message and become spiritually awakened. The only person who has faith in Drud's altruistic mission and who is ready to follow in his footsteps is the lonely girl Tavi.

It is possible to read the story on two levels. It can be treated simply as a well-constituted adventure story filled with a plethora of extraordinary characters and intriguing events. But, if read with care, *Blistaiushchii mir* also reveals a series of veiled but fascinating echoes of the themes of some of the most important works in European literary tradition. Iablokov's (2005) insightful and scrupulous study allows us to discover revealing echoes of Goethe, Lermontov, Cervantes, Dostoevsky and even Blake. In fact, it could be argued that *Blistaiushchii mir* contains Grin's views on almost every element of philosophical enquiry discussed elsewhere in this dissertation: social and political problems, aesthetics, the role of the artist, the idea of happiness, problems of human existence, the chivalric ethos and the altruistic ideal.

In the present analysis I will partially rely on Iablokov's detailed monograph, but I would like also to draw attention to some ideas that have not been discussed previously and that can significantly enrich our understanding of this multi-faceted novel.

Grin's symbolic story of a flying man who, like the wise Zarathustra ascending to the people, wishes to enlighten all mankind and lead it to the imaginary kingdom of 'Цветущие Лучи', is deeply tragic in its moral perspective. In some respects *Blistaiushchii mir* resembles, as Kovskii (1969:81) notes, H.G. Wells's novel *The Invisible Man*.⁹⁴ Despite the element of thrilling and fantastic adventure to be found in both works, they are far from being simple entertainment. Both employ protagonists who, thanks to their remarkable gifts, live outside the law. As a result of their power, they exist on the margins of society, but nonetheless exhibit a moral prowess which is shown through their motivation and deeds. While Wells's hero, Griffin, is an immoral scientist who uses his gift to pander to his own purely egoistic and even immoral needs, Drud is the equivalent of a modern Prometheus, whose every deed is dictated by altruism. Whereas Griffin is a scientist who uses his knowledge for evil ends, Drud on the contrary explicitly criticises men's fascination with science. However, the most important difference is the goal of their actions: while Griffin strives to establish a Reign of Terror, Drud acts to bring people to

⁹⁴ See: Kovskii (1969:81).

spiritual enlightenment, the *Shining World* of the title. Although the two heroes are very different, the general concept of human nature conveyed by Wells and Grin is similar: both writers intersperse their works with pessimistic hints concerning their grim vision of the future.

In his novel Grin presents a vision of society corrupted by consumerism, but he does not limit himself to criticism of its moral crisis. He warns also of what lies ahead for mankind, if we do not undertake the difficult task of reviving moral ideals. The characters of 'Blistaiushchii mir' are psychologically convincing. It should be said that, in general, they invite comparison with those in Greek myths; Grin makes them universal representatives of several archetypal categories.⁹⁵ The mythological way of perceiving *Blistaiushchii mir* is also highly plausible, when we take into account the scale on which the main characters discuss the future of the world and its condition.

Blistaiushchii mir is another example of a phenomenon already mentioned, namely the extent to which in Grin's oeuvre a plot may simply be a peg on which a philosophical picture is hung. Analysis of characters will be of greater importance for revealing the underlying message of this work, therefore, than will analysis of plot. Before considering the central hero, Drud, we shall consider the other characters, since they are the background against which the ideals of Grin's moral philosophy, personified in 'Человек Двойной Звезды', are to be placed. Moreover, analysis of the other characters will enable us to decipher the significance of the protagonist himself, since each of them possesses his or her own attitude towards Drud, and they vary in their understanding of his mission. They have their own problems which they try to solve in relation to Drud, and for that reason the hero is crucial to all of them.

Runa

It is not surprising that certain critics like Zvantseva (1972) and Iablokov (2005) consider Runa the central character of the novel. Their main argument is that she is the only character who experiences a significant change during the period of the action. Moreover, description of Runa occupies the largest part of the novel, and it is precisely with her that the whole plot comes to a close. I do not regard her as the central hero, however, since in my opinion she is merely one of the characters who help to reveal the meaning of Drud.

Runa is twenty-four years old, an energetic, independent, extremely well-read and educated woman; she speaks every European language (!), dresses with taste and is

⁹⁵ Cf. Tarnas (1996:4).

admired as a leading light of high society. She is also extraordinarily beautiful and in her perfection resembles the statue of an ancient goddess. In fact, Runa seems more of a sculpture than a real, human being with genuine feelings. Thus, we can understand why Drud becomes so interested in her from the time he first sees her – her outward beauty arouses his appreciation and, at least momentarily, he falls under her spell. Why, then, does he not choose her as a life-long partner? His reasons turn out to be complex and based solely on moral grounds. Runa, although she makes an effort to free Drud from prison, is driven ultimately by egoistic reasons. Her fascination with the flying man is not the result of any deeper feeling. On the contrary, she wishes to exploit him.

Runa reveals her true nature inadvertently, when describing to Drud her vision of the world which she believes will be achieved under his leadership. She perfectly comprehends the gigantic potential of Drud's remarkable gift, and recognises well how to make use of it, and she pretends to embrace his superiority. Although she describes him as leader of a 'great army' of followers, she, in fact, plans to enslave him and everyone else in her plan for global control.

She tries to persuade Drud, as follows: 'Вам нужно овладеть миром. Если этой цели у вас еще нет, она рано или поздно появится; лучше, если теперь вы согласитесь со мной' (1.III:124), but her words sound more like an order to someone than the enthusiastic agreement of a follower.⁹⁶ The totality of her vision is tightly linked with Runa's dream of absolute power. She would love to have control over the world, but it turns out that she cannot take control even of her own desires: 'В ней встало подлинное вдохновение власти – ненасытной, подобной обвалу. В забытии обратилась она к себе: "Руна! Руна!" (...) прошептав это как богу' (1.III:123). Using Drud as a means for achieving power, she would doubtless make herself divine ruler, an earthly incarnation of God for all people. Drud would only play the role of a marionette in her hands, because Runa is too dominant and would never allow him to exert full power. Sooner or later Drud would become a mere tool in her hands.

So much for Runa's intentions. Let us now consider the psychological reality which underlies them. Throughout the novel Runa is portrayed as an unhappy loveless woman. She is spiritually handicapped, with no awareness of higher human emotions like sympathy and, in terms of morality, she is completely devoid of altruism.⁹⁷ Despite her amazing

⁹⁶ 'Не в цирке или иных случаях, рожденных капризом', she continues, 'но с полным сознанием великой и легкой цели вы заявите о себе долгим воздушным путешествием, с расчетом поразить и увлечь. Что было в цирке - будет везде' (1.III:124).

⁹⁷ It is worth comparing Runa and Morgiana (the antagonist of the "good girl" Dzhessi in *Dzhessi i Morgiana*) in terms of their cold-blooded enmity towards those who reveal sympathy towards them.

intellectual capabilities, symbolising the ultimate development of a science-oriented society in the future, Runa represents also the dramatic collapse of morality and spirituality in the present. Her knowledge appears to be of no avail, given the emotional problems from which she suffers. Knowledge, Grin persuades us, must always be inferior to emotions. Runa embodies the perpetual and unfulfilled dreams of the financial and intellectual élite, who, having once lost real faith and moral purity, end up with the vulgar dream of power and authoritarian domination over ordinary humanity.

The heroine strives to organise a revolution to destroy the current regime headed by her hated uncle Daugovet. Runa's moral views, if we can talk of any on the basis of what is revealed by the plot, are utterly depersonalised, inhumane and mercenary – she acts only according to her calculation of benefit to herself in terms of constant material growth. She is a materialist like Corrida, the heroine of *Seryi avtomobil'*, but of a slightly different stamp. Whereas the latter is simply a vulgar hedonist, devoid of ambition, Runa has attained a higher level of intellectual development. Runa appears as a radical arch-individualist, an egoist who is afraid of nothing.⁹⁸ She despises people (that is clear from her treatment of Gal', the boy who genuinely loves her). After her meeting with Drud, she symbolically crosses out her entire past in her diary and begins a 'new life', since she apparently recognises the opportunity for spiritual rebirth given to her through his appearance. But she wastes this opportunity – her nature prevents any deep change in her character and, as if restating Schopenhauer's views on the unchangeability of the individual's character,⁹⁹ she proves unable to follow in the footsteps of the flying man. Runa's outward beauty may be deceptive, but Drud does come to understand the huge discrepancy in their perception of the world. As a result, their relationship comes to an end.

In terms of character development, Runa is the only character in the novel who undergoes a real change of life, even though this change is palpably negative. From the very beginning of the novel she begins a symbolic descent into the spiritual abyss, because she attempts to gain control of Drud, rather than develop a real partnership.

The heroine of *Blistaiushchii mir* belongs to the high society of the rich, and she constantly moves in hedonistic circles. It is no surprise then that doctor Grantome should advise her to move to the country in order to bring about a real change in her everyday life. He claims that physical work will do Runa good as well.¹⁰⁰ However, as Grin aptly shows, such a recuperative change cannot take place in Runa's life: she is not strong enough

⁹⁸ In fact, Runa can be also interpreted as a debased example of the Nietzschean Superman.

⁹⁹ Cf. Janaway (1999:9).

¹⁰⁰ There is more than a hint here of Rousseau and Tolstoi's notion that the life of luxury has a devastating effect on the individual's morale, and that living in a corrupted society may lead to his spiritual collapse.

spiritually to dig into her deepest feelings and rid herself of the powerful desire to enslave Drud. She is so firmly rooted in the Frommian mode 'to have', that the revolutionary change to the opposite mode, that of 'to be', proves impossible in spite of her attempts. The desire to encompass Drud's figure in her life, to 'consume' his gift and make use of it determines all Runa's existence after their break-up. And, as she remains enslaved by her own passion, she ends up embroiled in total disaster.

Drud is deeply disappointed with her ambitions: 'Дурочка! – сурово сказал он. Ты могла бы рассматривать землю, как чашечку цветка, но вместо того хочешь быть только упрямой гусеницей!' (1.III:128). Behind these seemingly humorous words, he issues a serious reprimand to her immoral views and ambitions. Furthermore, Runa displays a harsh determination to achieve the only goal which would make her content: 'Если нет власти здесь, я буду внизу' (ibidem). She then pushes Drud away – on a symbolic level representing her refusal to accept his gift of selflessness. Runa's words 'Все или ничего (...) Я хочу власти' (ibidem) are the most explicit expression of her inner drive which is obviously irreconcilable with Promethean morality.¹⁰¹

Drud's silent refusal to defer to Runa followed by his departure completely shatters her world-view. She is left in a state of shock and torpor. Her existence becomes utterly empty. Grin also makes it clear that Runa's search for fulfilment in terms of inner desire is the cry of a lonely soul longing for a truly valuable relationship based on mutual understanding and love.

As the novel develops, we learn that in her attempt to hunt Drud down, the heroine's influence and money prove powerless, since the only path that might lead to the healing of her melancholic soul lies in sharing life with the beloved whose death she has ordered. No matter what she imposes on herself in order to escape the vision of Drud, he will haunt her everywhere: be it in her splendidly decorated, but spiritless house, or in the countryside, or in church. She can find no firm refuge, and the oneiric vision of Drud teaching the baby Jesus can be interpreted as blind idolatry: her faith is not genuine and her egoistic desires have led her astray. God appears to her only as form and not content, while her self-love (which can logically be seen as the realisation of Schopenhauer's famous *principium individuationis*) prevents her psyche from being cured and reborn.

After her failure to regain faith in divinity, there is no option for Runa but to destroy Drud once and for all and banish her nightmares for ever. To achieve this end, she hires a

¹⁰¹ In terms of spirituality, to use once again Fromm's spiritual distinction between 'being' and 'having', we may say that the entire novel is a complex depiction of these two modes of living. Grin pessimistically foresees the dominance of the 'having' mode and thereby the moral collapse of mankind.

mysterious person called the Rukovoditel' and orders him to kill the most fascinating and desirable person whom she has ever met.

The Rukovoditel'

It might seem that the Rukovoditel' is the least difficult character for analysis, but in fact there are three plausible interpretations that could be advanced concerning his role in the novel: first, he can be interpreted conventionally as a leader of the secret service; secondly, he can be seen as an incarnation of Runa's evil thoughts (as proposed by Iablokov 2005:122); finally, he may be read as an evil, demonic figure who is summoned from another world to join Runa in her struggle to eliminate Drud.

With his worldwide connections the Rukovoditel' could represent any manner of secret organisation which aims to have a concealed impact on the world's socio-political situation through intrigue and assassination. Moreover, the Rukovoditel' is clearly endowed with infernal features which makes his failure to catch the flying man even more striking. Grin convinces us that, even though the Rukovoditel''s plans were most elaborate (as the hero confesses, they 'предусмотрели случайности, высчитали миллионные части шансов' (1.III:221)), the titanic voice of Prometheus cannot be suppressed. Drud 'смеясь, перешел границу, раскинутую страшной охотой' (ibidem), and by so doing he once again proves that Good is invincible. The failure of the Rukovoditel''s grand plan to eliminate Drud leads to drastic consequences for Runa – the definitive destruction of her soul.

Tavi

As was noted in the previous section, Grin often pits a caricaturally bad hero against a highly positive one.¹⁰² This is also the case in *Blistaiushchii mir*, where Runa is directly contrasted with another heroine – Tavi.

Tavi was orphaned early in life (like the half-orphans Assol in *Alye parusa* and Davenant in *Doroga nikuda*), and her childhood was far from easy. She lives in a shabby

¹⁰² See, for example: *Doroga nikuda*, 'Ostrov Reno', 'Iva', *Dhessi i Morgiana*.

house with old furniture which she inherited from the previous occupant. Tavi's story starts on the eve of her 19th birthday, and we meet her on her way to Liss (one of the most important places on the 'map' of Grinlandia), where she intends to take up employment for three hours a day assisting a rich man called Samuel Torp.

Tavi is undoubtedly focused on 'being', the very true and natural mode of life. She personifies the ideal individual who lives in close contact with nature. The girl can enjoy even very simple events and facts of life; she displays merely a wish to experience it, to share interesting moments with those dear to her.¹⁰³ Thus, unsurprisingly Tavi's possessions are modest. Her inner world, by contrast, is very rich: she reads novels with great enthusiasm and even commitment, transposing literary fiction into her own life. The ability to move fluently between imagination and reality is a phenomenon which the reader discovers in other works of Grin: in *Alye parusa* we find a counterpart of Tavi in Assol, and in 'Slovookhotlivyi domovoi' it is Anni who is more perceptive than the average person. All these characters have clear innocent souls, and they possess many childlike qualities: trust, liveliness, gentleness, curiosity and spontaneity.¹⁰⁴ Thus, to Tavi Drud seems to resemble strongly the character of Montgomery in the novel *Two Dianas* by Dumas which she is reading at the moment.¹⁰⁵

Tavi is very delicate and sensitive, and reacts spontaneously to everything she experiences: 'Осматриваясь, Тави трепетала, как на экзамене' (1.III:145). For her every situation in life is fully appreciated, every person is a living being, and every word contains a meaning to think about. In Grin's pantheon of positive characters, Tavi is also completely unselfish. Her ability to forgive is depicted symbolically in the episode when she kisses the dead Torp (who had planned to seduce her). Thus Tavi, like Jesus in Ivan Karamazov's legend of Christ kissing the Grand Inquisitor, displays Christ-like forgiveness and willingness to leave behind the bad past and forget. Grin extols her action with the following sentence: 'этот поцелуй был единственным поцелуем Торпа за всю его жизнь, ради которого ему стоило бы снова открыть глаза' (1.III:154).

In addition to being contrasted with Runa, Tavi has obviously deep spiritual connections with Drud. The two characters naturally gravitate towards one another according to the old maxim *similis simili gaudet*.¹⁰⁶ It is the striking affinity of their

¹⁰³ Iablokov (2005:92) rightly notes that Tavi may be read as an anagram of the Latin word 'vita', which means life.

¹⁰⁴ See: Iablokov (2005:91).

¹⁰⁵ 'С живостью (...) тотчас нашла она, что неизвестный – вылитый портрет графа Монгомери' (1.III:142).

¹⁰⁶ See: Schopenhauer (1974:321).

characters that makes them understand one another without much need for talking. While the two of them are visiting Drud's friend Stebbs, Drud makes the following remark: 'сo мной жизнь, которую я искал' (1.III:211). Tavi, for her part, trusts implicitly the extraordinary combination of beauty and good that she sees embodied in Drud. She follows him, just as the disciples followed their master Jesus: she has faith in him and is ready to abandon everything for him.¹⁰⁷ Runa, like the biblical fisherman Peter, wishes to liberate herself by giving up her former life focused on hedonism. In fact, though, she cannot do so physically and morally: her inner transformation remains a purely intellectual project. The material seductions of a life of luxury and the prospect of attaining unlimited power are the elements of her life and character she cannot tear up and throw away.

Tavi, by contrast, experiences no dilemmas of this kind. Her nature is uncomplicated and not tangled up in formal schemes, material addictions and social dependencies: 'Она принадлежала к тем немногим поистине счастливым натурам, для которых все в мире так же просто, как их кроткое благодущие; аэроплан и бабочка едва ли сильно разнились на взгляд Тави, разве лишь тем, что у бабочки нет винта' (1.III:187). In Tavi's life Grin provides proof of one of Gide's most famous aphorisms: 'Complete possession is proved only by giving. All you are unable to give possesses you'.¹⁰⁸

Unlike Runa, therefore, Tavi sees the real world not as dichotomous, since for her miracles and reality are united in the process of life: the world is one, united in the full harmony of all phenomena – both ordinary ones such as preparing a birthday party, and those extraordinary, magical ones, like having a conversation with a china figure animated by her imagination or the moment of wonderful flight by Drud in his amusing 'flying' machine. In Tavi's eyes everything is possible and there are no limits to creative imagination and what it can achieve. The all-important Grinian notion of *мечта* (*несбывшееся*) is realised in the life of this simple, unpretentious girl in the most natural way, without any desire on her part to chase after far-fetched ideal concepts. The ability to transform reality through imagination is inextricably connected with the quality of purity of heart, just as we have seen it displayed in Assol (*Alye parusa*) and Anni ('Slovookhotlivyi domovoi').

¹⁰⁷ It is interesting to note that at their first meeting Drud introduces himself to Tavi as Kruks (in Latin *crux* means cross), which can be interpreted as a prophetic hint of the altruistic and tragic character of his own and Jesus' mission.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Manser (2001:123).

Stebbs

Stebbs is a long-time friend of Drud. He once saved his life, and at the time of the novel he is a lighthouse-keeper and a poet. With his character Grin presents a model of the good-natured man who, despite his intentions, is not able to attain the spiritual depths of his dearest friend. Stebbs is a positive individual with many good traits: he is helpful, unselfish, trusting and utterly faithful to Drud. The special locus of his work – a lighthouse – is an asylum, a place of refuge from the world for the dreamer that he is. On the other hand, we learn that he, too, is a tragic character: bound to his work-place, living between the clouds and the earth, he can neither sail nor travel. Iablokov (2005:100-01) suggests that Stebbs can be seen as an example of a slave in the Platonian cave: he has discovered something better about existence from his amazing friend, but Drud's ability to fly, both literal and symbolic, is utterly unattainable for him. Drud, for his part, has no desire to conceal the fact that in his opinion Stebbs' poetry is both grandiloquent and devoid of talent. At the beginning of chapter XVI Grin explicitly stresses the discrepancy between the two friends: 'Два мальчика росли и играли вместе, потом они выросли и расстались, а когда опять встретились – меж ними была целая жизнь' (1.III:128). Incomparable as they are, Drud and Stebbs exemplify the irreconcilable gulf between the average person and the genius – a parallel example of which we find in Pushkin's portrayal of the relationship between the two composers, Mozart and Salieri. From just a few examples of Stebbs' poetry the reader learns that the lighthouse-keeper is tangled up in words – his art is overly intellectual and weak, because it stems not from pure feeling, but from the effort of his intellectual projects. Like Salieri, who marvels at Mozart's incredible genius, the lighthouse-keeper seems helpless when listening to Drud, but at least he is not envious – he accepts the difference between them with humble resignation. He fully recognises the genius of Drud and his own inferior talent. In an act of complete trust, Stebbs offers to destroy his own poetry, as soon as it becomes clear to him that Drud frowns upon it and regards it as having no artistic value. Like Runa, Stebbs may be seen as a utopian, but whereas she dreams of taking total control over the world, he is much more concerned with helping people improve the condition of their lives. Thus his intentions have none of the egoism which characterises the woman's plans.

We can try now to compare the three different modes of life from the perspective of the individual's ability to transform reality in the light of spiritual development: Stebbs, Runa and Tavi represent three categories of human existence. Although Stebbs wishes to imitate Drud, to his deep disappointment he does not possess the necessary gifts to do so.

Runa could follow Drud, but because of her overwhelming egoism she is not able to do so. Tavi is the only one who is destined to join the search for the Shining World, since she is both gifted and willing to follow Drud and help create a real spiritual brotherhood.

Daugovet

Although an episodic character, Daugovet possesses great significance in the moral plan of the novel. The uncle of Runa is the powerful ruler of the country where the action takes place. It is not by chance that two such negative characters should be related to each other. Their ties of blood provide a symbolic link between the financial and intellectual élite and the government. Iablokov notes that Daugovet is similar to the figure of the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (Iablokov 2005:54-6). We soon realise that he is not a perfect ruler at all, but immensely self-interested, and a person willing to abuse his power for personal ends. He illegally enables Runa to see Drud in exchange for a unique book which, as Iablokov stresses, is of importance to Daugovet not for its content, but just for his desire to possess something unique. The governor treats people like objects: an attitude which is revealed neatly when he describes briefly a certain Weiss who merely managed to buy a certain unique manuscript before him as 'безумный, сумасшедший', but the apparent 'transaction' of exchanging one's wife for 300 pages of some ancient text seems quite good to him.

From the mythological perspective, Daugovet may be seen as the equivalent of Zeus: although all-powerful, he is a highly imperfect, cruel and unjust governor, with a clear tendency to punish the innocent people who happen not to share his vision of the world.¹⁰⁹ Daugovet shows his evil nature right at the beginning when we see him attending the circus show. He has apparently hired two killers to eliminate Drud after the end of the performance. When this fails, Daugovet arranges to have Drud kidnapped from his hotel and thrown into prison. Designed presumably as an equivalent of the Grand Inquisitor, Daugovet holds in his hands power over the country. He does not care about any individual, he is willing to violate human rights in order to achieve his own aims, and his main concern is to protect his control over society. As soon as he notices a threat in the person of Drud, he tries to eliminate him at any cost, even murder.¹¹⁰ Thus, the inhumane

¹⁰⁹ And there lies another analogy: like Zeus, who personifies the hostility of the gods toward man, Daugovet embodies the same enmity towards people. On this trait of Zeus, see: Will (1962:72).

¹¹⁰ A similar character is Rumier in 'Sila nepostizhimogo'. This protagonist is terribly afraid of any possible changes that can be brought by the wonderful music played by his patient during a hypnotic dream. The

figure of Daugovet stands in dramatic opposition to Drud's altruism. Like Jesus, Drud has taught the gospel which can raise doubts in the heart of man: the idea that civilisation is corrupt and that man should be allowed to live freely could have a destructive impact on the stability of the country. Daugovet cannot allow people access to Drud's views, since faith might offer mankind something better than totalitarian existence. The Promethean hero is totally unacceptable to Daugovet so, quite logically, he must be eradicated like a dangerous disease which threatens the entire population.

Drud

I argue that it is Drud who is the central figure in the Promethean model of morality to be found in Grin's oeuvre. This protagonist personifies an altruistic ideal through his actions towards Runa, Tavi and Stebbs. At the time of the novel Drud is thirty years old, a recluse possessed of strong Byronic romantic features: individualism, a tendency to dream and a hyper-idealistic approach to life. Also on the psychological level Drud's loneliness and awareness of his distinctness and alienation as an individual bring him close to the mythical figure of Prometheus,¹¹¹ and also to such figures in Grin's early work as Reg, Tart and Nok.¹¹² However, Drud does not share any of the traits of selfish self-protective escapism possessed by these other characters. He is much more connected with the aforementioned Knight-like figures of Davenant, Ossovskii and Cherniak.¹¹³ Yet again the hero is clearly alienated from society, from modern, industrial civilisation (which he fiercely criticises) and from government. Like the other Promethean characters, Drud also possesses titanic features – the ability to fly without mechanical help and extraordinary abilities of perception. Similar to the sorcerers Bam-Gran, d'Obremon and Cagliostro,¹¹⁴ Drud is able to perform miracles that amaze people. On the other hand, he can also be seen as unhinged and completely disconnected from events in the real world. Living on the margins of society, Drud resembles in some respects the eponymous hero of Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*.¹¹⁵ Like Prince Myshkin, he is a symbol of purely altruistic morality and all

immoral doctor, driven by fear and envy, does not want to allow the passionate musician to reveal his mysterious musical piece.

¹¹¹ For more discussion on this topic, see: Will (1962:77).

¹¹² The protagonists of: 'Sinii kaskad Telluri', 'Ostrov Reno' and 'Sto verst po reke'.

¹¹³ The main characters of *Doroga nikuda*, 'Dacha bol'shogo ozera' and 'Vozvrashchenie 'Chaiki''.

¹¹⁴ The three wizards from 'Iva', 'Uchenik charodeia' and 'Proisshestvie v kvartire g-zhi Seriz'.

¹¹⁵ In terms of the attitude of ordinary people towards an altruistic character we may also find an analogy between Myshkin and d'Obremon – the hero of 'Uchenik charodeia'. The sorcerer is treated by his disciple

his actions are driven by the maximalist Promethean position which he adopts.¹¹⁶ He sees not only more than ordinary people, but sees the world with utterly different qualities which makes his personality seem so out of place in the spiritually degenerate society of the future.

A straightforward interpretation of Drud's ability to fly places him at the physical forefront of mankind but, if taken symbolically, his gift represents the unbounded spirit expressive of superhuman possibilities – both in the sphere of reaching for the sky and the superiority of faith over science. Drud's far-sightedness enables him to view the world from a higher perspective than that of any other human being. Unlike the pilots whom he ridicules for their entrapment in metal vessels and their constant fear of death, Drud is not limited physically in any way, and he is able to perceive the beauty of the earth as freely as the birds. Moreover, his gift symbolises also a kind of inner need, a moral obligation deriving from what he feels is his debt to the rest of mankind, since he has been given so much more than they.

Echoing Rousseau's teachings, as discussed in subsection 1.2, Grin criticises civilisation as being remote from its natural roots; in this sense the novel is clearly an apology for a life spent close to nature. Both Drud and his double, Doctor Grantome, praise nature's beneficial impact on the individual's psyche. Drud proves it by such words as: 'Страстно я привязан к цветам, морю, путешествиям, животным и птицам' (1.III:126); the doctor – by advising Runa to move to the countryside as the best cure for her mental problems.

Although we have mentioned some important analogies with the New Testament, Grin tries not to make Drud resemble a false prophet or use any negative associations with his iconoclastic allusions. Some critics consider the scene at the church (where Runa has a vision of Drud teaching Jesus) as iconoclastic (cf. Kovskii 1969:86-87), but in fact Drud is not the same kind of messiah as Jesus was. Runa's vision should be seen only as a reflection of her distorted mind and ruined faith, not as any kind of religious view emanating from the author himself.¹¹⁷

Another interesting analogy lies in the fact that Drud bears certain resemblances to Napoleon. The flying man, like the French hero, also represents the Promethean desire to change the world and free people. However, as Iablokov notices, although the two

with the utmost disrespect: 'Старик – ты делал стекло, в наивной и безумной мечте представляя, что с помощью волшебства создашь несметное состояние! О хилый дурак, жалкий безумец' (1.VI:400).

¹¹⁶ Although it may seem that his range of influence is relatively limited, he is apparently active on a much greater scale that is only hinted at in the novel.

¹¹⁷ For this point, see Iablokov (2005:120).

superman-figures share several points of similarity, ‘несмотря на “высокий” романтический ореол наполеоновского образа, герой Грина (...), решительно отвергает “наполеонизм” – отказывается от “сверхчеловечески”–диктаторской роли’ (Iablokov 2005:37-39). Grin, like Dostoevsky depicting the fall of Raskol’nikov, rejects the Napoleonic mode of genius. The protagonist in Grin’s novel has an altruistic nature, which naturally goes hand in hand with an unwillingness to use violence. This prevents him from giving serious consideration to any form of rebellion or revolution as a means of achieving some remote goal, be it even that of total liberation. Grin is apparently against violence and any form of organised mass revolution. Consequently, it appears evident that Drud is much more of a spiritual leader than a political one. He is depicted as a guru who possesses a key to secret knowledge and who wishes to reveal this to other people, who are currently not enlightened and dwell in the darkness like the slaves of Plato’s cave.

There is also a significant analogy with Nietzsche’s Zarathustra; like the ancient wise man, Drud’s mission is to open the eyes of men who are blind to a higher spiritual truth. He ‘ascends’ to people like Zarathustra when he takes part in two rather unsophisticated performances. His contact with ordinary people has both profane and sacred features: he tries to convey a hidden message in a place not conducive to spiritual ceremonies, and he does so because apparently that is the only place where he can come into contact with people at all. He appeals to the heart, standing on the side of faith and against cold reason to propose venturing into the irrational element in order to discover the mystery of the world.

Drud’s mission does not involve any metaphysical promises of an afterlife (which would associate him with Jesus), or of any idyll on an earth freed from suffering (which would bear resemblances to the dreadful utopia of Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor). On the contrary, the core of Drud’s Promethean plan for benefiting mankind lies in the total transformation of human spiritual perception which he hopes to inaugurate.

However, the public’s response is insufficient and wrong-headed – people admire Drud for external (ephemeral and profane) qualities which easily amaze them, but do not provoke any deeper insights in them.¹¹⁸ They admire science and are blind to everything that seems to stand against it.¹¹⁹ The only exception, however, the person endowed with the

¹¹⁸ Runa appears to be an exception, albeit a rather tragic one – she is definitely a more sublime being, but her ability to perceive the miracle is only partial, since, because of her egoistic nature, she cannot comprehend it completely as Drud intended.

¹¹⁹ Their reaction resembles yet again the legend from *The Brothers Karamazov*. It seems plausible to suggest that Grin intended the episode to depict one of the most important ideas of the Grand Inquisitor: people in the future will need miracles, not God. We cannot be surprised that, although people are fascinated by Drud’s

ability to trust Drud, to have faith in the apparently incredible, is Tavi. Although Drud's project appears to contradict the principles of physics, this is of no significance for her, as she is not burdened with scientific knowledge and her heart inclines her to believe in miracles. As soon as Tavi shouts out her enthusiastic words of approval, Drud immediately recognises that Tavi's imagination is able to penetrate where that of the crowd cannot. At this moment Tavi becomes closer to Drud than anyone else. Once again we see a possible analogy with the life of Jesus – believing in the existence of good and of miracles is tantamount to participating in that good oneself. Drud gives her the opportunity to experience the Shining World at the same altitude as he.¹²⁰ Grin's humanism, as exemplified in the mission of Drud, is entirely centred on man, who deserves attention, respect and the chance for change.

It is of great importance that in the plot of *Blistaiushchii mir* Drud kills five people and that these are the only fatalities in the entire novel. Obviously, every one of these deaths must have a reason. As was the case with the Knight-figures, Drud acts both in self-defence and in order to prevent vicious individuals from inflicting harm on a noble and innocent individual (e.g. Tavi). The first person to die in the novel is the assassin who tries to stab Drud after one of his performances and who then falls to his death in an accident. Drud manages to avoid being stabbed and then suddenly ascends high above the street – the man catches his clothes and tries to take him to the ground, but without success, and a few moments later the assassin himself crashes on to the pavement. The casualty dies, so to speak, of his own volition, because there has been no physical attack on Drud's part. The second victim is Torp, the immoral seducer who may have seriously threatened Tavi's life when she went to meet him as her future employer. Drud, however, prevents him meeting Tavi by causing Torp's heart attack. The other victims are the three policemen who are shot by Drud, after they have tried to kidnap Tavi from her flat for no reason other than Daugovet's determination to trace Drud's whereabouts. Left by herself, the innocent Tavi is defenceless against the powerful machinery of the state. Drud behaves both like a judge, who is given the special privilege to execute justice, and like a Knight, rescuing the girl from danger.

amazing exploits, he himself cannot be pleased with their reaction to his performance – they have utterly missed the point and proved the Inquisitor's bleak prophecy to be true.

¹²⁰ This can be compared with the passage from the New Testament where one of the two thieves who is crucified with Jesus humbly supports Jesus' innocence, revealing his faith and asking to be remembered by Him when the Son of God comes into His Kingdom. The famous reply is: 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise' (Luke 23:43).

Grin uses his unusual hero as a means of expressing his own fundamental beliefs directly through the characters' utterances. *Blistaiushchii mir* differs in this respect from the vast majority of Grin's works. From the reader's point of view, Drud is a character whose philosophical messages command trust of a highly anti-materialistic nature, directed against civilisation. Drud's impassioned and refined speech and his flight are aimed at convincing people that science should not replace faith and become their religion. He ridicules aeroplanes and technology by contrasting them with his bizarre machine with its 4000 little bells.

Let us now focus on analysing the title of the novel. It is obvious that Grin is not trying to create any vision of a real, specific land, however remote. Instead, he proposes a different way of life, a mode of existence completely unlike that of our common expectation. This, then, is not a science-fiction project, and Drud is not an extra-terrestrial guest trying to invite people to live in another dimension. His mission is exclusively concerned with what is potentially available to everyone here on earth. Grin tries to persuade us, in fact, that the mythical banishment from Eden can be interpreted as depriving man of the ability to see the earth as a positive idyll with all that that involves.

To cast further light on this problem, we might recall the words of the little boy Markel, an episodic character introduced in the memoirs of the elder Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Though ill and on the verge of death, Markel claims that 'life is so joyful and gay' (Dostoevsky 1964:319). When his mother cries bitterly, anticipating his premature death, Markel soothes her with the childishly simple, but moving words: 'Mother (...) don't cry. Life is paradise and we are all in paradise, only we don't want to know it, and if we wanted to we'd have heaven on earth tomorrow'. (ibidem) But Markel's words are not taken seriously and prove to have little effect on his brother, the young Zosima, until Zosima reaches another level of spiritual enlightenment. As for the boy's doctor, he claims that 'his illness is affecting his [Markel's] brain.' (Dostoevsky 1964:320) Similarly, Grin's altruistic dreamers often seem mentally unstable to those who do not understand the way they view the world. Markel's simplicity and love of life resemble the attitude of Tavi. The dying boy says to his relatives: 'Why not go straight to the garden and walk and enjoy ourselves, love, praise and kiss one another, and bless life?' (ibidem) Tavi also loves nature and praises it, as when she contemplates the flowers bought for her birthday: 'Смотря на них, Тави захотелось в сады, полные зеленого серебра лиственных просветов, где клумбы горят цветами и яркая, как громкое биение

сердца, тишина властвует над чистой минутой' (1.III:191). The child-like naivety and innocence of Tavi and Dostoevsky's Markel seem to point in the same direction. The concealed message that Grin conveys in his novel is that the great truth of existence is open to all those with the eyes to see. However, it is hardly possible to teach the adults because, apparently, as man grows older and becomes more attached to society, he gradually loses this special ability to see the world in a holistic unity.

Drud, like the great prophets and spiritual leaders such as Jesus, Gauthama Buddha or Zarathustra, does not set any limits upon his spectators – he does not choose members of some selected social group or other. In Grin's egalitarian view the Promethean leader must treat all people equally. This is why Drud chooses such an inconvenient place as a circus arena where seemingly nothing can really be taken seriously, let alone a real miracle of spiritual metamorphosis. However, there is no doubt that Drud gives every spectator the same chance to benefit from witnessing his performance.

To comment on this bitterly pessimistic scene it is worth recalling the triad of spiritual life proposed by Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: camel, lion and child. The distinction stems from the idea that humans are born incomplete and should carry on a process of spiritual development. The evolution of spirit, seen as intrinsic to human nature, is thus realised through the consecutive stages of the camel, the lion and the child. This symbolic image has been referred to by various Eastern mystics as it outlines the path to (spiritual) awareness. If we refer the distinction to the characters from *Blistaiushchii mir*, Tavi can be seen as akin to Nietzsche's concept of the child, the crowd can be viewed as camels, and Runa as the lion, since she is energetic, rebellious and highly individualistic. She is able to aspire to things beyond the crowd's limited imagination. However, although strong and determined, she lacks the necessary qualities to develop to the highest spiritual level. Through his circus act Drud is, obviously, trying to enlighten the camels, but not surprisingly his efforts end unsuccessfully. A good example of such a metaphorical camel is the figure of the 'all-knowing' clown Arsi, who has worked for years in the circus. His life is utterly monotonous, with everyday actions repeated without any deliberation on his part concerning the deeper nature of things. He likes to repeat the words: 'Я знаю и видал все, поэтому ничему не удивляюсь' (1.III:73). The clown has imprisoned himself in a confined space of carefully-built and seemingly unshakeable convictions and this has resulted in his spiritual blindness to miracles. He is terribly frightened about the new show since he senses that it may completely ruin his concept of the world: 'на больном, желчном лице клоуна отражался тусклый испуг, что его бедную жизнь может

поразить нечто, о чем он задумывается с волнением, утратив нищенский покой, добытый тяжким трудом гримас и ушибов'(1.III:73-4). Arsi represents the entire group of spiritually-crippled spectators. It is difficult to see how there could be any evolution or process of enlightenment in the hearts and minds of such people.

To be able to see the Shining World by following Drud is possible only for the few, who are strong enough to be reborn and recreate their system of values. They can then see the whole of existence anew, like the child, who for Nietzsche notably personifies the highest level of human spiritual evolution.

It might be worthwhile connecting *Blistaiushchii mir* with the concept of *oneness* as described for centuries by various mystics all over the world in different cultures and religious traditions – such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Christianity, Manichaeism.¹²¹ From this point of view Drud would seem to be a prophet of total monism, according to which the world is conceived as a unity of matter and spirit, and which views the division into imaginable (ideas) and apparent (matter) as the result of human error, a gap in the individual's ability to perceive the world as a coherent whole.¹²² Grin's fantastic hero may thus be seen as an embodiment of this lost, once innate ability to exist in unity with the entire world.¹²³

Like other Promethean heroes in works of this group, Drud makes a great effort to improve the situation of those who are spiritually crippled, as well as to help his fellow-men. Grin convinces the reader of the genius' (or the Superman's) moral obligation to attempt to bring about change in the world. Even though the situation seems hopeless since in times of moral and spiritual crisis people may appear devoid of the ability to develop, Drud remains completely firm in his vocation of spiritual leader.

¹²¹ 'Oneness' usually refers to the philosophical belief that the entire creation is united. In *Doors of Perception* (1954) Huxley specifically refers to Eckhart's concept of *Istigkeit* (Is-ness) and the notion of *being* in Platonic philosophy. This idea appears also in Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence' (1803), and in another of Huxley's works 'Heaven and Hell' (1956), and many other works from the fields of literature, philosophy and natural sciences.

¹²² As William James notes, 'Whether materialistically or spiritually minded, philosophers have always aimed at cleaning up the litter with which the world apparently is filled. They have substituted economical and orderly conceptions for the first sensible tangle; and whether these were morally elevated or only intellectually neat, they were at any rate always aesthetically pure and definite, and aimed at ascribing to the world something clean and intellectual in the way of inner structure.' (James 1987:625-819). The same idea was stated explicitly also by Marcus Aurelius in his *Meditations*: 'All things are linked and knitted together, and the knot is sacred, neither is there anything in the world, that is not kind and natural in regard of any other thing, or that hath not some kind of reference and natural correspondence with whatsoever is in the world besides. (...) For all things throughout, there is but one and the same order; and through all things, one and the same God, the same substance and the same law' (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Book VII, §7, 1997:79).

¹²³ Iablokov (2005:80-83) refers to the idea of 'целесообразная причастность к космическому потоку живой жизни' and names some famous believers in this philosophical concept such as Goethe, Nietzsche, Bergson, de Chardin, Tolstoi, Prishvin.

3.6 Grin's ideal hero

In this section I have examined works that reveal a very important element of Grin's Weltanschauung – the Promethean ideal of life. Gakker, Redott, Sing, d'Obremon and Drud act selflessly, driven by the desire to help to improve the lot of other people. This is the aim of their lives. They all are aware of the extraordinary position which they occupy in respect of the rest of mankind, and this awareness of the moral obligation to change oppressive reality has a profound impact on their lives. Promethean characters display an uncompromising readiness for self-sacrifice, just as we saw with the Knight-like heroes. They all risk death as the ultimate cost of their mission. Once again, their decisions are self-imposed and stem from their free will to act in a certain way. What differentiates them from the chivalric characters is their inner ability to see deeply into the future, to foresee achievable possibilities. Davenant, no matter how noble his moral code of conduct, still lacks the prophetic features which characterise the Promethean hero.

The solution to the problem of the Superman is best drawn in *Blistaiushchii mir*, but works previously analysed also touch on this question, offering insights into Grin's concept of genius – the person who not only possesses extraordinary gifts (be they of intellectual, physical or magical nature), but who is also inwardly bound to the moral realisation of his titanic possibilities.

All Grin's titanic heroes seem to share the same important character trait portrayed by Aeschylus in the prototype of the Promethean myth mentioned in the introduction to this section – they all embody a certain moral **attitude from** which they look **out** rather than **in**. As in the case of the chivalric figures, we learn that at the basis of the whole process of creating these fascinating works and characters there must lie a very profound and morally significant mode of life – yet further evidence of what was for Grin the most important spiritual value. The five portraits described in this section occupy the most important place in Grin's gallery of existential sketches.

Final conclusions

The main aim of this thesis has been to establish a coherent image of Grin's Weltanschauung with reference to the legacy of the European philosophical tradition. It is by no means easy to present an analysis of the philosophical views of any writer, especially a writer like Grin, taking into account his varied interests and extensive thematic range. In fact, all Grin's works, whether a long novel or a short story, reveal aspects of his Weltanschauung. The thesis is structured as a pyramid: starting with problems of nature, society and civilisation through to more complicated ideas of happiness and morality, I have tried to cover the most important domains of human philosophical enquiry.

I have shown that in the writer's view we find numerous affinities with the works of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, the Stoic philosophers, Rousseau and Fromm. Moreover, it has also been shown that the most vital elements of Grin's Weltanschauung are strikingly similar to the ideas expressed by prominent existential philosophers of the twentieth century: Camus, Sartre, Heidegger and Jaspers. Grin's presentation of the world and human life is also strongly linked with the Russian tradition of metaphysical literature of such masters as Dostoevsky and Tolstoi. I believe that in the light of these findings, one would be justified in regarding Grin, like his great literary predecessors, as a *writer of ideas*.

I have also argued that, taking into consideration the multitude of motifs typical of existential philosophy (such as suicide, freedom, loneliness, moral responsibility and the question of absurdity) and Grin's treatment of them, we can view him as an existentialist. It is for me beyond doubt that throughout his creative life Grin was looking for a kind of morally ideal character. He did so by creating a large number of works (*existential sketches*, as I have called them) focused on a similar type of hero. Starting from early revolutionary characters and escapists, hyper-individualists of the Nietzschean type, and passing through a vast gallery of everyday people to the noble chivalric characters and uncompromising Promethean altruists, issues of morality were always at the heart of the writer's fiction.

Grin's attention was focused almost entirely on his heroes who, possessed of free

will and in search of harmony with nature, personal happiness and virtue, find themselves thrown into a dark and complex world. We observe the type in hundreds of variations on the same theme: the condition of the human soul and ways in which it is projected through various characters. Endowed typically with nothing more than a powerful imagination and a brave and pure heart, Grin's protagonist always tries to make sense of the world and to search for happiness. What he seeks, however, is not the fulfilment of material desires, for money and luxurious goods are of no value to the author. What counts are interpersonal relations based on love, trust and mutual understanding in which freedom, self-esteem and honour are of ultimate importance. Yet, it must be remembered that whenever morality demands that he renounce personal happiness, the ideal Grinian protagonist does not hesitate to do so.

Nature is man's ally, according to Grin's philosophy. Employing the topoi of forest, mountain, village, river and sea, the author aimed to display the pure environment that can provide man with the conditions in which he can develop and live happily. Like Rousseau, Tolstoi and Schweitzer, Grin believes that we should treat all living beings with respect and demands that we do likewise; and in this sense he resembles pantheistic thinkers. The author employs folkloric themes and patterns to remind us that, once the links with nature are broken, we find ourselves in a hostile world of chaotic change – typically the world of city life-areas where man becomes intoxicated with consumerism and the cult of possessions.

The simplicity of Grin's plots may be quite misleading because many apparently short and two-dimensional stories in fact reveal great insight into philosophical dilemmas. In this respect Grin follows the short prose of Tolstoi whom he deeply admired.¹²⁴ Like Tolstoi, Grin in practically every work tries to convey a message for his readers to ponder over. With plots based on or related to everyday life, Grin's works deal with utterly pragmatic problems. He does not concentrate on analysis; he is no theoretician, as I have argued, but a *metapractitioner* who tries to use literature as a medium to convey certain virtues and modes of conduct. He does so in authoritative ways which often preclude the discussion of opposed viewpoints. For this reason, certain critics have accused Grin of portraying a two-dimensional world – one which contains all too strong a division into good and evil.

Although it may be a point of criticism that Grin tends to express his ideas through fictional voices that brook no argument, there can be no doubt that in doing so he might be

¹²⁴ Such stories as 'Tri startsa' and 'Mnogo li cheloveku zemli nuzhno' prove Tolstoi's mastery at short yet powerful imagery aiming at presenting his philosophical views in a clear and accessible way.

regarded as a follower of such authoritative philosophers as Seneca, Spinoza and Schopenhauer. In their works there is often a sense of the author presenting his views as if lecturing students. Grin seems rather to treat his fiction as a kind of personal existential therapy - where he asks questions and tests his heroes by subjecting them to various everyday dilemmas and conflicts. Faced with the absurdity of existence, his heroes struggle to create values for themselves in order to make their life meaningful. This is a work of Sisyphus who overcomes rejection of his task and therefore, as Camus would say, he is triumphant.

One question that remains to be answered is the following: what was the evolution of Grin's Weltanschauung? As mentioned briefly on several occasions, there seem to be a number of motifs evolved in Grin's fiction. Some, like the transition from the Nietzschean superman to much less self-centred idealism and altruism, have already been widely examined by critics. Others that are more closely linked with the existential character of Grin's Weltanschauung, like the problem of alienation, responsibility for others, and the opposition between *being* and *having* – still call for further enquiry.

In 1953 Berlin expanded upon the ancient Greek proverb used once by Tolstoi: 'The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing'. Following this distinction, the British philosopher divided writers and thinkers into two categories respectively: those for whom the world cannot be reduced to a single concept (like Shakespeare, Goethe and Pushkin), and those who view the world through the prism of a single idea that defines everything else (like Plato, Nietzsche and Proust). I hope that the analysis presented here has demonstrated that for Grin there existed but one single, all-embracing concept – the limitless power of the human spirit and its unconfined dignity – and hence he should be viewed as a "hedgehog".

I believe that the attempt to reconstruct Grin's Weltanschauung, which presents him as a great man, thinker and humanist, will not only inspire other researchers but will also encourage renewed interest in readers who will return to Grin in search of new and original interpretations.

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