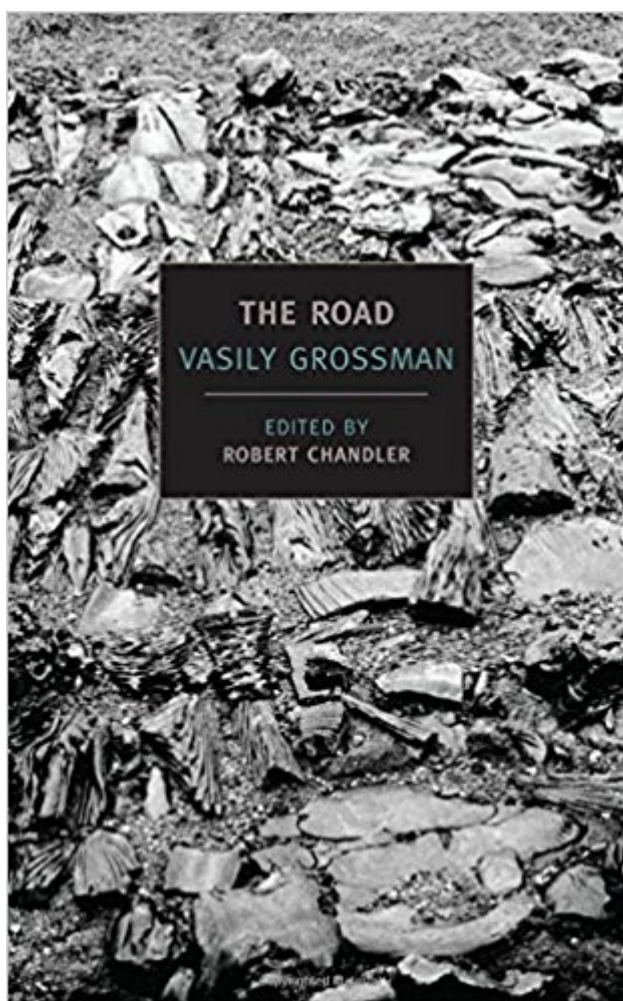


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# The Road: Stories, Journalism, And Essays (New York Review Books Classics)



## Synopsis

The Road brings together short stories, journalism, essays, and letters by Vasily Grossman, the author of *Life and Fate*, providing new insight into the life and work of this extraordinary writer. The stories range from Grossman's first success, *In the Town of Berdichev*, a piercing reckoning with the cost of war, to such haunting later works as *Mama*, based on the life of a girl who was adopted at the height of the Great Terror by the head of the NKVD and packed off to an orphanage after her father's downfall. The girl grows up struggling with the discovery that the parents she cherishes in memory are part of a collective nightmare that everyone else wishes to forget. The Road also includes the complete text of Grossman's harrowing report from Treblinka, one of the first anatomies of the workings of a death camp; *The Sistine Madonna*, a reflection on art and atrocity; as well as two heartbreaking letters that Grossman wrote to his mother after her death at the hands of the Nazis and carried with him for the rest of his life. Meticulously edited and presented by Robert Chandler, *The Road* allows us to see one of the great figures of twentieth-century literature discovering his calling both as a writer and as a man.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Another superb translated work to appear [in 2010] was *The Road*, comprising Vasily Grossman's short stories and journalism. Although occasionally tainted by propaganda, his stories — particularly the later ones — are extraordinary, punctuated with small details that stop the eyes and drag them

back to read certain phrases again. "The Guardian" Grossman's unsparing, literary account of the horrific ways Nazi Germany implemented its ethnic-cleansing program at Treblinka was one of the first reports of a death camp anywhere in Europe and eventually provided prosecutors at the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal with crucial background information. The surprise is that up until now an English-language translation of Grossman's lengthy article has never been published in its entirety. That will soon change with the publication of *The Road*, a collection of Grossman's best short stories and war-time articles, including "The Hell of Treblinka." --Tobias Grey, *The Wall Street Journal*

Grossman's greatness is manifested in a constant ability to surprise his readers: where we lazily expect darkness and gloom, Grossman provides lightness and humour; what might seem at first glance to be narrow polemic turns out, when paid more attention, to have the grandeur of tragedy.

David Lea, *The Literateur* "Vasily Grossman is the Tolstoy of the USSR."

Martin Amis "the collection is a treasure trove that lends the reader an insider's understanding of what it was like to live through the Soviet era, at the same time as it introduces us to Grossman's enduring preoccupation with the wonder and terror of humanity. A wonderful collection, this is an introduction to the man and his times that also tells us much about his love, his pity and his faith."

Gillian Slovo, *The Guardian* "Grossman's work excavates from the Soviet rubble vital artifacts of the bitter, the tragic, the self-sacrificing, the indomitable and, ultimately, the inspiring. [The Road is] a volume that is sensitive to Grossman's often lyrical language and frames each entry within its time through comprehensive notes."

Ken Kalfus, *The New York Times* "[Grossman's] report 'The Hell of Treblinka' was one of the first to report on an extermination camp, and was used as testimony in the Nuremberg trials. 'Treblinka' is included in the recently published book, *The Road* an original collection of Grossman's short stories, essays, and letters translated into English for the first time. This collection serves as a fantastic view into the man's work, and will hopefully lead readers to seek out his two books of fiction put out a few years earlier."

Jason Diamond, *Jewcy* "Soviet author Grossman volunteered for the army when the Germans invaded in 1941 and spent more than three years as a special correspondent at the front for the army newspaper *Red Star*. His wartime writing established him as a major "voice" of war "a status resembling in many ways that of Ernie Pyle in America" Grossman was a perceptive observer with an eye for essential detail. His vignettes of the fighting at Kursk and the battles that brought the Red Army into Berlin are models of combat reporting, and the elegiac realism of his description of Treblinka merits wide anthologizing in Holocaust literature."

"Publishers Weekly

Vasily Semyonovich Grossman was born on December 12, 1905, in Berdichev, a Ukrainian town that was home to one of Europe's largest Jewish communities. In 1934 he published both "The Town of Berdichev" a short story that won the admiration of such diverse writers as Isaak Babel, Maksim Gorky, and Boris Pilnyak and a novel, *Glyukauf*, about the life of the Donbass miners. During the Second World War, Grossman worked as a war correspondent for the army newspaper *Red Star*, covering nearly all of the most important battles from the defense of Moscow to the fall of Berlin. His vivid yet sober "The Hell of Treblinka" (late 1944), one of the first articles in any language about a Nazi death camp, was translated and used as testimony in the Nuremberg Trials. His novel *For a Just Cause* (originally titled *Stalingrad*) was published in 1952 and then fiercely attacked. A new wave of purges directed against the Jews was about to begin; if not for Stalin's death, in March 1953, Grossman would almost certainly have been arrested. During the next few years Grossman, while enjoying public success, worked on his two masterpieces, neither of which was to be published in Russia until the late 1980s: *Life and Fate* and *Everything Flows*. The KGB confiscated the manuscript of *Life and Fate* in February 1961. Grossman was able, however, to continue working on *Everything Flows*, a novel even more critical of Soviet society than *Life and Fate*, until his last days in the hospital. He died on September 14, 1964, on the eve of the twenty-third anniversary of the massacre of the Jews of Berdichev, in which his mother had died. Robert Chandler has edited and translated numerous Russian titles, including Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate* and *Everything Flows*. He is the editor of *Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida* and the author of a biography of Alexander Pushkin. He has co-translated numerous works by Andrey Platonov, including the award-winning *Soul*, which is published by NYRB Classics. He lives in London. Elizabeth Chandler is a co-translator of Andrey Platonov's *Soul* and Alexander Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*. Olga Mukovnikova is a freelance translator, translation reviser for Amnesty International, and a member of the Chartered Institute of Linguists.

A truly essential 300+ page collection (plus nearly another 100 pages of appendix, notes, bibliography, etc.) of various writings by the masterful Russian author Vasily Grossman (author of the masterpiece *Life And Fate*, a novel based on Grossman's own experiences in the USSR which was smuggled out of the Soviet Union and eventually published to worldwide acclaim). "The Road" is exactly as described in the subtitle: a collection of stories, journalism, and essays. Some of these pieces are quite renowned and famous such as "The Hell Of Treblinka", one of the first accounts of the infamous Nazi death-camp. Consisting of 5 parts the book contains Part One: The 1930's,

featuring three selections most notably "In The Town of Berdichev" one of Grossman's earliest successes and reckonings with the realities of war. Part Two: The War, The Shoah contains both biographically-based fiction as well as journalistic pieces such as "The Hell Of Treblinka". Part Three: Later Stories includes 6 stories including the extraordinary "Mama" (dealing with the life of an adopted girl during Stalin's purges in the 1930's) as well as the bleak and horrifying story "The Road". Part Four: Three Letters consists of Grossman's writings to his deceased mother (killed by Nazi forces). These letters are harrowing, extremely personal, and beautiful though tragic examples of Grossman's inner-strength, vulnerability, feelings of guilt, and will. All personality traits which allowed him to produce writing of the quality of a novel such as Life And Fate. Part 5: Eternal Rest contains appendixes, afterwords, chronology, notes, etc., which round this magnificent collection off nearly perfectly. For those who love Life And Fate or Everything Flows this collection is an essential collection. It contains much very rare material translated with the highest degree of scholarship and contains some of Grossman's most intimate and powerful writing. It also serves as a unintended "supplement" at times to Life And Fate, allowing readers who love that work further insight into its authors life, mind, and style. While some of the material contained within this collection is available elsewhere, much is not, making The Road an essential addition to any Grossman collection. As a collection, editor Robert Chandler has created an extremely powerful work which in many ways stands on its own as one of the finest windows in Grossman's personal world and that of all humans. A truly magnificent anthology of one of the 20th Century's greatest writers.

Christina Georgina Rossetti. Every now and again I come across a passage in a book that I immediately perceive to be the 'emotional core' of the book. In the case of "The Road", a collection of stories and other writings by Vasily Grossman, I came across a passage that I thought served not as the 'core' of the book but, rather, one that, instead, placed a bookmark on the beginning of the road that Grossman travelled as a writer and as a man. The passage is found in "The Hell of Treblinka". Grossman, who was likely the first reporter to view and write about the horrors of the Nazi death camps, wrote this piece shortly after the liberation of Treblinka. It is a stunning piece of writing. Toward the end of the article, Grossman tries to make sense of things. He asks: "A particular kind of State does not appear out of nowhere. What engenders a particular regime is the material and ideological relations existing among a country's citizens. It is to these material and ideological relations that we need to devote serious thought; the nature of these relations is what should appall us." When Grossman wrote this article, in September 1944 it was clear that his focus was solely on the Nazi death machine and the active and passive acceptance of that regime by

Germany's own citizens. But, by the end of his life Grossman's focus evolved. In "The Hell of Treblinka" he looked at the material and ideological relations existing amongst the citizens of other countries, specifically Germany. By the time he wrote *Life and Fate* (New York Review Books Classics) and *Everything Flows* (New York Review Books Classics) his focus had turned inward, toward his own country and people. Neither book was published during Grossman's lifetime because he had the audacity to suggest that Stalinism and Hitlerism were but two sides of the same coin. He turned his focus toward the idea of freedom and to the entirely subversive (in the context of the USSR) concept that any ruler, be it Stalin, Lenin, or Hitler, who deprived people of freedom and dignity bore more similarities to each other than differences. His statement in *Everything Flows* that: "[n]o matter how mighty the empire, all this is only mist and fog and, as such, will be blown away. Only one true force remains; only one true force continues to evolve and live; and this force is liberty. To a man, to live means to be free" stands as a testament to the place that Grossman's road led him. For me, the brilliance of the short stories and articles set out in "The Road" lies in the fact that they allow the reader to follow Grossman as he set out on his literary and life's journey. As edited and translated by Robert and Elizabeth Chandler, Grossman's writings are set out in chronological order. We see his earliest writings from the 1930s. Grossman's writing style was still a work in progress and you can see him work on finding a style that was at once his own but still acceptable to the apparatchiks that controlled and approved all writings for publication. The second part, those stories and articles set during the War, see Grossman truly emerge. As set out on the excellent introductions to each section and the meticulous end notes written by the Chandlers, the war and the Shoah were searing experiences for Grossman. Apart from his coverage of the horrors of Stalingrad and Treblinka, Grossman learned that his mother had been murdered in the early months of the war in her home town of Berdichev. Finally, we see his post war stories in the 50s and early 60s before his death. By the time we get to those later stories, particularly "The Road" and "The Dog", we begin to see the themes of life, fate, and freedom mature and ripen. Nadezhda Mandelstam once wrote that "a person with inner freedom, memory, and fear is that reed, that twig that changes the direction of a rushing river." It seems to me, after reading this book that Grossman became absorbed with that sense of inner freedom, the ability of individuals to live as free men and women even in a society that denies them their outer freedom. In summary, Vasily Grossman's *The Road* serves as a reminder of a man who put his life and fate into his writing and left a body of work behind that I would hope will get as much exposure as possible. I would add that this compilation stands alone, due in no small part to the editing and notes provided by the Chandlers. It can be enjoyed however even if you have not read *Life and Fate* or *Everything Flows*. However, for me,

reading those books first enabled me to more fully appreciate the writings in *The Road*. I can only recommend all of these books and assure you that I think the reader will be rewarded if they do so.

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