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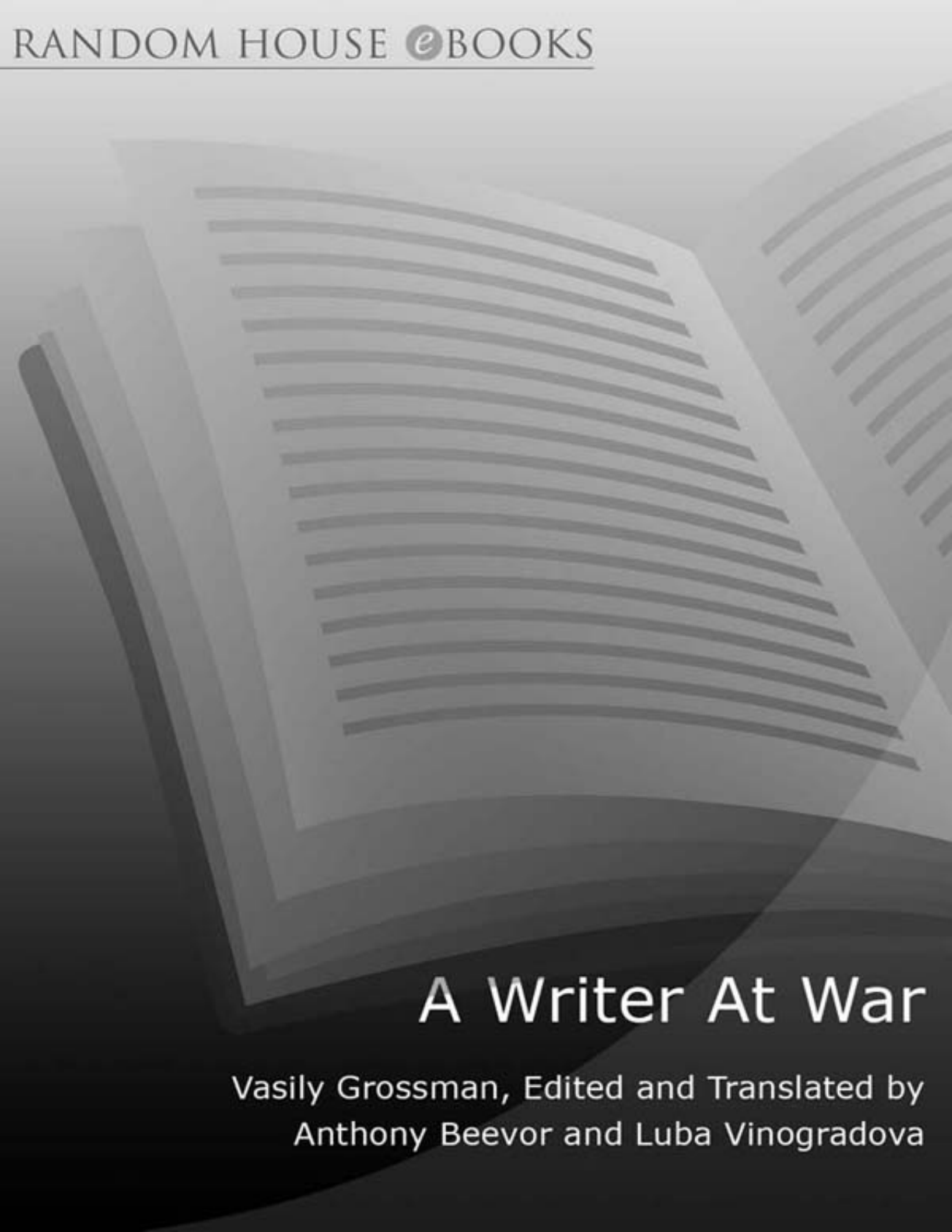

A Writer At War

Vasily Grossman, Edited and Translated by
Anthony Beevor and Luba Vinogradova

A Writer at War

Vasily Grossman with the Red Army
1941–1945

EDITED AND TRANSLATED
BY
Antony Beevor
AND
Luba Vinogradova

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Also by Vasily Grossman in English

LIFE AND FATE
FOREVER FLOWING

Introduction

Vasily Grossman's place in the history of world literature is assured by his masterpiece *Life and Fate*, one of the greatest Russian novels of the twentieth century. Some critics even rate it more highly than Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* or the novels of Solzhenitsyn.

This volume is based on his wartime notebooks, but also some essays which are all in the Russian State Archive for Literature and the Arts (RGALI). We have also included some letters in the possession of his daughter and step-son. The notebooks reveal a good deal of the raw material which he accumulated for his novels as well as his articles. Grossman, a special correspondent for the Red Army newspaper, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, or *Red Star*, proved to be the most perceptive and honest eyewitness of the Soviet frontlines between 1941 and 1945. He spent more than a thousand days at the front – nearly three out of the four years of war. The sharpness of his observation and the humanity of his understanding offer an invaluable lesson for any writer and historian.

Vasily Grossman was born in the Ukrainian town of Berdichev on 12 December 1905. Berdichev had one of the largest Jewish populations in central Europe and the Grossmans were part of its educated elite. Vasily had been given the name of Iosif, but like many assimilated families, the Grossmans russified their names. His father, born Solomon Iosifovich, had changed his to Semyon Osipovich.

Grossman's parents separated and, as a young boy, he lived in Switzerland for two years with his mother before the First World War. In 1918, just after the revolution, he was back in Berdichev. The Ukraine and its rich agriculture was destroyed first by Field Marshal von Eichhorn's German occupation, which stripped the countryside.[1] Then, as the German armies withdrew in November as revolution broke out at home, the Russian civil war began in earnest with fighting between White and Red Armies, while Ukrainian nationalists and anarchists resisted both sides. Whites and nationalists, and in some cases Red Guards, vented their blind hatred with pogroms across the Ukraine. Some say that around 150,000 Jews, roughly a third of the Jewish population, were murdered during the civil war. Famine followed between 1920 and 1922, with hundreds of thousands of deaths in the Ukraine alone.

Grossman went to Moscow University in 1923 where he studied chemistry. Even at that early stage, the unmilitary Grossman demonstrated a fascination for the army. 'At first glance, Father was a completely civilian person', said his only child, Ekaterina Korotkova-Grossman. 'One could see this immediately from the way he stooped and the way he wore his glasses. And his hands were so clumsy. [Yet] he first showed an interest in the army when he was still a student. He wrote in one letter that if he was not called up he would volunteer.'

In 1928, when only twenty-three and still a student, he married his girlfriend in Kiev, Anna Petrovna Matsuk, known as Galya. This relationship produced a daughter in January 1930. They called her Ekaterina, or Katya, after Grossman's mother. In 1932, ten years after the civil war, an even worse man-made famine, provoked by Stalin's campaign against the kulaks and the forced collectivisation of agriculture, killed over seven million people.[2] Parents crazed by hunger ate their own children. It was the

epitome of what Osip Mandelstam described in a memorable poem as 'the wolfhound century'. If Grossman did not witness the worst horrors of the famine, he certainly heard of them or saw the results, as skeletal figures begged beside railway tracks in the hope of a generous traveller throwing them a crust. He described this Ukrainian famine in his last novel, *Forever Flowing*, including the execution of a woman accused of eating her two children.

The consequence of Stalin's cruel treatment of the region, as Grossman himself was to discover, would be the widespread Ukrainian welcome to invading German forces a decade later. Stalinist agents are said to have spread the rumour that the Jews were responsible for the famine. This may well have been a factor later in the Ukrainians' enthusiastic aid to the Germans in their massacres of the Jews.

Grossman's marriage, frequently interrupted by his absence in Moscow, did not last long. Galya had left their daughter with his mother, because Kiev was the epicentre of the famine and the child stood a far better chance of survival in Berdichev. Over the following years, Katya often returned to stay with Grossman's mother.

Writing started to interest Grossman rather more than his scientific studies, but he needed a job. On his eventual graduation, he went in 1930 to work at Stalino (now Donetsk) in the eastern Ukraine as an engineer in a mine. The Donbass, the area enclosed by the sharp curve of the lower Don and Donets, was a region he came to know again during the war, as the notebooks show. In 1932, Grossman, exploiting a misdiagnosis which listed him as chronically tubercular, managed to leave Stalino and move back to Moscow. There, he published his first novel, *Glück auf!* (*Good luck!*) set in a coal mine. It was followed by *Stepan*

Kolchugin. Although both novels followed the Stalinist dictates of the time, the characters were entirely convincing. A short story, ‘In the Town of Berdichev’, published in April 1934, brought praise from Mikhail Bulgakov.[3] Maxim Gorky, the grand old man of Soviet letters, although suspicious of Grossman’s failure to embrace socialist realism, supported the young writer’s work.[4] Grossman, whose literary heroes were Chekhov and Tolstoy, was never likely to be a Stalinist hack, even though he was initially convinced that only Soviet communism could stand up to the threat of fascism and anti-Semitism.

In March 1933, Grossman’s cousin and loyal supporter, Nadezhda Almaz, was arrested for Trotskyism. Grossman was interrogated by the OGPU secret police (which became the NKVD in the following year). Both Almaz and Grossman had been in touch with the writer Victor Serge,[5] who was soon to be exiled, in 1936, and became in Paris one of the most outspoken critics of Stalin on the left. The cousins were extremely fortunate. Nadya Almaz was exiled, then given a short labour camp sentence which kept her out of the way during the Great Terror towards the end of the decade. Grossman was not touched. Their fate would have been very different if the interrogations had taken place three or four years later.

Life for a writer, especially one as truthful and politically naive as Grossman, was not easy over the next few years. It was a miracle that he survived the purges, which Ilya Ehrenburg later described as a lottery.[6] Ehrenburg was well aware of Grossman’s gauche and ingenuous nature. ‘He was an extremely kind and devoted friend,’ he wrote, ‘but could sometimes say giggling to a fifty-year-old woman: “You have aged a lot in the last month.” I knew about this trait in him and did not get offended when he would remark suddenly: “You’ve started to write so badly for some reason”.’

In 1935, when his marriage to Galya had been over for several years, Grossman began a relationship with Olga Mikhailovna Guber, a large woman five years his senior. Like Galya, Lyusya, as he called her, was Ukrainian. Boris Guber, her husband and a fellow writer, realised that his wife adored Grossman and did not try to fight events. A Russian of German ancestry and from a distinguished family, Guber was arrested and executed in 1937 during the madness of the '*yezhovshchina*', as the purges were called.[7]

That year, Grossman became a member of the Writers' Union, an official seal of approval which provided many perks. But in February 1938, Olga Mikhailovna was arrested, simply for having been Guber's wife. Grossman moved quickly to persuade the authorities that she was now his wife, even though she had retained the name of Guber. He also adopted the two Guber sons to save them from being sent to a camp for the orphans of 'enemies of the people'. Grossman himself was interrogated in the Lubyanka on 25 February 1938. Although a political innocent, he proved extremely adept in distancing himself from Guber without betraying anybody. He also took a great risk in writing to Nikolai Yezhov, the chief of the NKVD, bravely quoting Stalin out of context as the reason that his wife should not share any guilt attributed to her former husband. Olga Mikhailovna was also saved by the bravery of Guber himself, who did not implicate her even though he was almost certainly urged to do so during brutal interrogation sessions.

It was a time of profound moral humiliation. Grossman was as helpless as the rest of the population. He had little alternative but to sign when presented with a declaration of support for the show trials of old Bolsheviks and others accused of 'Trotskyist-fascist' treason. But he never forgot

the horrors of that time, and recreated them with powerful effect in a number of important passages in *Life and Fate*.

The worst of the terror seemed to have passed once Stalin made his pact with Hitler in 1939. Grossman had been able to spend that summer on the Black Sea with his wife and adopted stepsons at the Writers' Union resort. They spent a similar holiday in May 1941, but he returned to Moscow a month later and was there when the Wehrmacht invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. Like most writers he immediately volunteered for the Red Army, yet Grossman, although only thirty-five, was completely unfit for war.

The next few weeks became traumatic for Grossman, not just because of the crushing German victories, but for personal reasons. He was living in Moscow with his second wife in a small apartment and, for reasons of space, she discouraged him from asking his mother to leave Berdichev and seek refuge with them in Moscow. A week later, by the time he realised the extent of the danger, it was becoming too late for his mother to escape. In any case, she was refusing to leave behind an incapacitated niece. Grossman, who failed to get on a train to bring her back, would reproach himself for the rest of his life. In *Life and Fate*, the morally tortured physicist Viktor Shtrum is made guilty of exactly this.

The notebooks begin on 5 August 1941, when Grossman was sent to the front by General David Ortenberg, the editor of *Krasnaya Zvezda*. Although it was the official Red Army newspaper, civilians read it even more avidly during the war than *Izvestia*. Stalin insisted on checking every page before it was printed, which prompted Grossman's colleague Ehrenburg to joke in private that the Soviet dictator was his most devoted reader.

Ortenberg, concerned that Grossman would not survive the rigours of the front, found younger and militarily experienced companions to go with him. Grossman joked about his unfit state and lack of military training, but it was not long before, to their utter astonishment, the bespectacled novelist dramatically lost weight, toughened up and beat his companions at pistol shooting.

Vasily Grossman's mother in her passport photograph

'I'll tell you about myself,' he wrote to his father in February of 1942. 'I have been almost constantly on the move for the last two months. There are days when one sees more than in ten years of peace. I've become thin now. I weighed myself in the *banya*, and it turned out I am only

seventy-four kilos, and do you remember my terrible weight a year ago – ninety-one? My heart is much better . . . I've become an experienced *frontovik:*I can tell immediately by the sound what is happening and where.'

Grossman studied everything military: tactics, equipment, weaponry – and army slang which fascinated him especially. He worked so hard on his notes and articles that he had little time for anything else. 'During the whole war,' he wrote later, 'the only book that I read was *War and Peace* which I read twice.' Above all, he demonstrated extraordinary bravery right at the front, when most war correpondents hung around headquarters. Grossman, who was so obviously a Jewish member of the Moscow intelligentsia, managed to win the trust and admiration of ordinary Red Army soldiers. It was a remarkable feat. In Stalingrad, he got to know Chekhov, the top-scoring sniper in the 62nd Army, and was allowed to accompany him to his killing lair and watch as he shot one German after another.

Unlike most Soviet journalists, eager to quote politically correct clichés, Grossman was exceptionally patient in his interviewing technique. He relied, as he explained later, on 'talks with soldiers withdrawn for a short break. The soldier tells you everything he has on his mind. One does not even need to ask questions.' Soldiers more than almost anyone else, can quickly spot the self-serving, the devious and the false. Grossman was honest to a fault, often too honest for his own good, and soldiers respected that. 'I like people,' he wrote. 'I like to study life. Sometimes a soldier makes me toe the line. I know army life as a whole now. It was very difficult at first.'

Grossman was not a dispassionate observer. The power of his writing came from his own emotional responses to the disasters of 1941. He later wrote of 'the penetrating, sharp foreboding of imminent losses, and the tragical realisation that the destiny of a mother, a wife and a child

had become inseparable from the destiny of the encircled regiments and retreating armies. How can one forget the front in those days – Gomel and Chernigov dying in flames, doomed Kiev, carts of retreat, and poisonous-green rockets over silent forests and rivers?' Grossman, along with his companions, was present at the destruction of Gomel, then they had to flee south as General Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group swung round in the vast encirclement operation to cut off Kiev. The German armies captured more than 600,000 prisoners in the most crushing victory ever known.

Early that October, Grossman was attached to the headquarters of General Petrov's 50th Army. His descriptions of this general, who punched underlings and turned aside from his tea and raspberry jam to sign death sentences, read like a terrible satire of the Red Army, but they are devastatingly accurate. Grossman's uncomfortable honesty was dangerous. If the NKVD secret police had read these notebooks he would have disappeared into the Gulag. Grossman was not a member of the Communist Party, and this made his position even less secure.

Grossman was once again nearly encircled by Guderian's panzers as they raced for the city of Orel and then enveloped the Bryansk Front. His description of their flight is the most gripping account of those events to have survived. Grossman and his companions returned to Moscow exhausted, their shot-up 'Emka' car proof of the danger that they had been in, but Ortenberg ordered them straight back to the front. That night, searching for an army headquarters, they almost drove right into the arms of the Germans. As a Jew, Grossman's fate would have been certain.

That winter of 1941, after the Germans were halted outside Moscow, Grossman covered the fighting further south on the eastern edge of the Ukraine and close to the Donbass which he knew from pre-war years. He began to

prepare his great novel of the first year of the war which was published during the early summer of 1942 in instalments in *Krasnaya Zvezda*. It was hailed as the only true account by the *frontoviki*, as the front-line soldiers of the Red Army were known, and Grossman's fame extended across the Soviet Union, far beyond the respect he earned in literary circles.

In August, as the German Sixth Army advanced on Stalingrad, Grossman was ordered down to the threatened city. He would be the longest serving journalist in the embattled city. Ortenberg, with whom he had a difficult relationship, recognised Grossman's extraordinary talents. 'All the correspondents on the Stalingrad Front were amazed at how Grossman had made the divisional commander General Gurtiev, a silent and reserved Siberian, talk to him for six hours without a break, telling him all that he wanted to know, at one of the hardest moments [of the battle]. I know that the fact that he never wrote anything down during the interview helped Grossman to win people's confidence. He would write it all down later, after he returned to a command post or to the correspondents' *izba*. Everyone would go to bed, but the tired Grossman wrote everything meticulously in his notebook. I knew about it and had seen his notebooks when I came to Stalingrad. I even had to remind him about the strict ban on keeping diaries and told him never to write any so-called secret information there. But it was not until [after his] death that I had a chance to read their contents. These notes are extremely pithy. Characteristic features of life at war are seen in just one phrase, as if on photographic paper when the photo is developed. In his notebooks one finds the pure, unretouched truth.' It was at Stalingrad that Grossman honed his power of description:

‘the usual smell of the front line – a cross between a morgue and a blacksmith’s’.

For Grossman, the battle of Stalingrad was undoubtedly one of the most important experiences of his life. In *Life and Fate*, the Volga is more than a symbolic thread for the book, it is the main artery of Russia pumping its lifeblood to the sacrifice in Stalingrad. Grossman, like many fellow idealists, believed passionately that the heroism of the Red Army at Stalingrad would not just win the war, it would change Soviet society for ever. Once victory over the Nazis had been won by a strongly unified people, they believed that the NKVD, the purges, the show trials and the Gulag could be consigned to history. Officers and soldiers at the front, with the freedom of the condemned man to say whatever they wanted, openly criticised the disastrous collectivisation of farms, the arrogance of the *nomenklatura* and the flagrant dishonesty of Soviet propaganda. Grossman later described this in *Life and Fate* through the reaction of Krymov, a commissar. ‘Ever since he had arrived in Stalingrad, Krymov had had a strange feeling. Sometimes it was as though he were in a kingdom where the Party no longer existed; sometimes he felt he was breathing the air of the first days of the Revolution.’ Some of these optimistic ideas and aspirations appear to have been encouraged in a whispering campaign instigated by the Soviet authorities, but as soon as the end of the war came in sight, Stalin began to tighten the screws again.

The Soviet dictator, who took a close interest in literature, appears to have disliked Grossman. Ilya Ehrenburg thought that he suspected Grossman of admiring Lenin’s internationalism too much (a fault close to the crime of Trotskyism). But it is far more likely that the Soviet leader’s resentment was based on the fact that Grossman never bowed to the personality cult of the tyrant. Stalin was conspicuously absent from Grossman’s

journalism, and his sole appearance in Grossman's fiction, written after the tyrant's death, consists of a late-night telephone call to Viktor Shtrum in *Life and Fate*. This constitutes one of the most sinister and memorable passages in any novel. It is a scene which may well have been inspired by a similar night-time call from the master of the Kremlin to Ehrenburg, in April 1941.

In January 1943, Grossman was ordered to leave Stalingrad. Ortenberg had called on Konstantin Simonov to cover the dramatic end of the battle in his place. The young, good-looking Simonov, was a great hero in the eyes of the Red Army and almost worshipped as the author of the poem 'Wait for Me'.[8] This poem had been written in 1941, just after the outbreak of war, when he had to leave his great love, the actress Valentina Serova. The song and poem became sacred to many soldiers of the Red Army, with its central idea that only the love of a faithful fiancée or wife could keep a soldier alive. Many of them kept a hand-written copy of it folded in their breast-pocket like a talisman.

Grossman, who had been in Stalingrad far longer than any other correspondent, felt betrayed by this decision. Ortenberg sent him nearly three hundred kilometres south of Stalingrad down into Kalmykia, which had just been liberated from German occupation. This in fact gave Grossman the opportunity to study the region before Lavrenty Beria's battalions of NKVD security police moved in to take revenge by massive deportations of the less than loyal population. His notes on the German occupation and on the degrees of collaboration with the enemy are poignant and brilliantly revealing of the compromises and temptations which faced civilians caught up in an international civil war.

Later that year he was present at the battle of Kursk, the largest tank engagement in history, which ended the

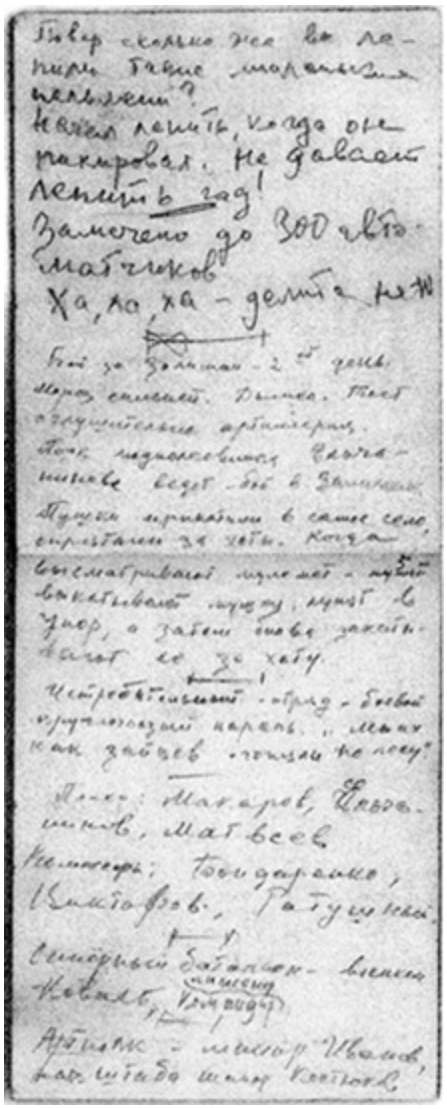
Wehrmacht's ability to launch another major offensive until the Ardennes in December 1944. In January 1944, when attached to the Red Army advancing westwards through the Ukraine, Grossman finally reached Berdichev. There, all his fears about his mother and other relations were confirmed. They had been slaughtered in one of the first big massacres of the Jews, the main one just before the mass executions at the ravine of Babi Yar, outside Kiev. The slaughter of the Jews in the town in which he grew up made him reproach himself even more for the failure to save his mother in 1941. An additional shock was to discover the role played by their Ukrainian neighbours in the persecution. Grossman was determined to discover as much as he could about the Holocaust, a subject which the Soviet authorities tried to suppress. The Stalinist line was that the Jews should never be seen as special victims. The crimes committed against them should be seen entirely as crimes committed against the Soviet Union.

Just after the Red Army reached Polish territory, Grossman was one of the first correspondents to enter the death camp of Majdanek near Lublin. He then visited the extermination camp of Treblinka, north-east of Warsaw. His essay, 'The Hell Called Treblinka', is one of the most important in Holocaust literature and was quoted at the Nuremberg tribunal.

For the advance on Berlin in 1945, Grossman arranged another attachment to the 8th Guards Army, the former 62nd Army of Stalingrad fame, and he again spent time in the company of its commander, General Chuikov. Grossman's painful honesty ensured that he recorded the crimes of the Red Army as much as its heroism, above all the mass rape of German women. His descriptions of the sack of Schwerin are some of the most powerful and moving of all eyewitness accounts. Similarly, his Berlin notebooks, when he was there to cover the fighting in the

city and the final victory, deserve the widest possible audience. The fact that Grossman had seen more of the war in the East than almost anybody is of inestimable value. ‘I think that those who never experienced all the bitterness of the summer of 1941,’ he wrote, ‘will never be able fully to appreciate the joy of our victory.’ This was not boasting. It was the simple truth.

These pages from his notebooks, together with some articles and extracts from letters, show not just a great writer’s raw materials. They represent by far the best eyewitness account of the terrible Eastern Front, perhaps the finest descriptions ever of what Grossman himself called ‘the ruthless truth of war’.



A page from one of Grossman's many notebooks.

1 Field Marshal Hermann von Eichhorn (1848–1918). Following the harsh terms exacted by the Germans in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Eichhorn's task in 1918 was to supervise the stripping of the Ukraine to feed German cities starving from the British blockade. This policy was naturally hated by the Ukrainians and Eichhorn was assassinated in July.

2 The latest estimates for famine victims between 1930 and 1933 range from 7.2 million up to 10.8 million.

3 Bulgakov, Mikhail Afanasievich (1891–1940), the author of the novel *The White Guard* (1924) which he adapted for the Moscow Art Theatre as *The Day of the Turbins* (1926). Most improbably, this humane depiction of tsarist officers and intellectuals turned out to be Stalin's favourite play. His

masterpiece, *The Master and Margarita*, was edited but unpublished when he died.

4 Gorky, Maksim, pen name of Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov (1868–1936), playwright and novelist. Gorky had supported the revolution and been a friend of Lenin, but the dictatorial stance of the Bolsheviks horrified him and he left for Western Europe in 1921. Stalin, using flattery and underhand methods, persuaded him to return to the Soviet Union in 1928, where he was fêted. The city of Nizhni Novgorod was renamed Gorky in his honour. In return Gorky became a tool of the regime, supporting the doctrine of socialist realism in October 1932. He was the grand old man of Soviet literature until his death.

5 Victor Serge (1890–1947), pen name of Viktor Kibalchich. Born in Belgium, he was the son of an Imperial Guards officer turned revolutionary and a Belgian mother. Serge, an anarchist in France, was a libertarian socialist, who went to Russia in 1918 to join the revolution, but was horrified by Bolshevik authoritarianism. He is best known for his outstanding autobiography, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (1945), and the novels *Men in Prison, Birth of our Power* and *The Case of Comrade Tulayev*.

6 Ehrenburg, Iliya Grigorievich (1891–1967), writer, poet and public figure, wrote for *Krasnaya Zvezda* during the war. Later, he worked with Grossman on the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the Black Book on atrocities against Jews, which the Stalinist authorities suppressed soon after the war. Ehrenburg had a much better nose for surviving the dangers of Stalinist politics.

7 This name came from the chief of the NKVD at the time, Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov (1895–1939), known as the ‘Dwarf’ because he was so short and suffered from a crippled leg. Yezhov took over the NKVD on Stalin’s order from Genrikh Yagoda (1891–1938) in September 1936. He was replaced by Lavrenty Beria in December 1938, and thus took the blame for the excesses away from Stalin. Like his predecessor, Yagoda, he was accused of treason and executed.

8 Simonov, Konstantin (Kyrill Mikhailovich), (1915–1979), poet, playwright, novelist and correspondent of *Krasnaya Zvezda*. Simonov later wrote his own Hemingway-style novel about the Battle of Stalingrad entitled *Days and Nights,* published in 1944. Although physically brave, Simonov, as Grossman reflected later, lacked moral courage in his relationship with the Soviet regime.

Translators’ Note

Any translation from the Russian which hopes to be readable in English requires a slight compression of the original, through the deletion of superfluous words and repetitions. This is especially true of the bureaucratic solemnities of military Russian, but we have, in the cases where Grossman himself was clearly amused by the original formulation, rendered a virtually literal translation to convey the flavour. Certain Red Army terms, like ‘tankists’ and ‘artillerists’ have also been left in their original form. The Russian words, acronyms and initials which we have left untranslated are listed in the glossary.

The Red Army, when talking of the enemy, used to say ‘he’, not ‘they’. As this can be highly confusing in places, we have avoided a literal translation and substituted ‘they’ or ‘the Germans’.

We have provided details on most of the characters mentioned in the text, but it has not been possible to obtain information on Grossman’s colleagues at *Krasnaya Zvezda* whose personnel files remain closed as the newspaper is still a military unit.

It is extremely hard, especially when dealing with some of the fragmentary notes, to achieve the right balance between intervention in the interests of general understanding and respect for the original jottings. We have strived to keep all explanations to the linking passages and to footnotes, but occasionally words have been added in square brackets to aid comprehension.

Glossary

Front, when written with a capital letter refers to the Soviet equivalent of an army group, for example, Central Front, Western Front or Stalingrad Front. A Front was commanded by a colonel general or marshal later in the war and usually consisted of between four and eight armies.

Frontoviki, is the Red Army term for soldiers with real experience of fighting at the front.

GLAVPUR (*Glavnoye politicheskoye upravleniye*), was the main political department of the Red Army, headed for most of the Great Patriotic War by Aleksandr Shcherbakov. It was a Communist Party organisation, controlling the political officers and political departments – the commissar system first instituted during the Russian civil war to watch commanders, of whom many had been tsarist officers, and ensure that they were not secretly in league with the Whites. Commissars, or political officers and instructors, were not part of the NKVD, but worked with them on cases of suspected disaffection.

Gold Star, a popular term for the medal of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Hero of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union's highest award for valour and distinguished service, consisted of a

small gold bar with red ribbon from which hung a gold star.

Izba, was a peasant house, or log cabin, consisting usually of one or two rooms. The window frames were often decorated with ornamental carving.

Komsomol, acronym for the Communist Youth movement. Membership could extend until around the age of twenty, so there were many active Komsomol cells within the Red Army. Children joined the Young Pioneers.

Muzhik, archetypal Russian peasant.

NKVD (*Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del* – People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs), a direct descendant of the Cheka and the OGPU secret police.

NKVD Special Departments were attached to Red Army formations in a counter-intelligence role, which in Stalinist terms meant looking for treason within as much as espionage without. Their role was also to investigate cases of cowardice as well as 'extraordinary events' – anything deemed to be anti-Soviet – and provide execution squads when necessary. The Special Departments were replaced in the spring of 1943 by SMERSh, Stalin's acronym for *smert shpionam*, or death to spies.

OBKOM, acronym for the Oblast (or Regional) Party Committee.

Political officers,*politruks*, or political instructors – see GLAVPUR.

RAIKOM, acronym for local Party Committee.

Stavka, the general staff, a name which Stalin resuscitated from the tsarist command in the First World War. He, of course, was commander-in-chief.

Ushanka, a typical Russian fur hat with flaps tied up over the crown.

Valenki, large felt snowboots.

The Writer at War

PART ONE

The Shock of Invasion
1941