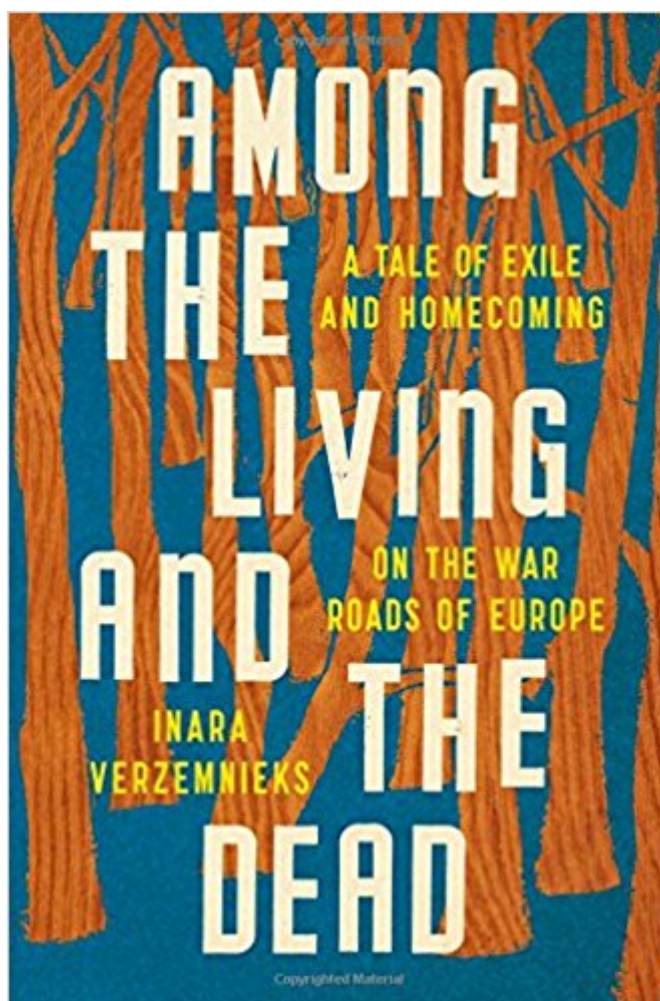


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Among The Living And The Dead: A Tale Of Exile And Homecoming On The War Roads Of Europe



Synopsis

“Extraordinarily tender and finely wrought.” —Eliza Griswold, author of *The Tenth Parallel*

It’s long been assumed of the region where my grandmother was born—that at some point each year the dead will come home. Inara Verzemnieks writes in this exquisite story of war, exile, and reconnection. Her grandmother’s stories recalled one true home: the family farm left behind in Latvia, where, during WWII, her grandmother Livija and her grandmother’s sister, Ausma, were separated. They would not see each other again for more than 50 years. Raised by her grandparents in Washington State, Inara grew up among expatriates, scattering smuggled Latvian sand over the coffins of the dead, singing folk songs about a land she had never visited. When Inara discovers the scarf Livija wore when she left home, in a box of her grandmother’s belongings, this tangible remnant of the past points the way back to the remote village where her family broke apart. There it is said the suspended their exile once a year for a pilgrimage through forests and fields to the homes they left behind. Coming to know Ausma and the trauma of her exile to Siberia under Stalin, Inara pieces together Livija’s survival through years as a refugee. Weaving these two parts of the family story together in spellbinding, lyrical prose, she gives us a profound and cathartic account of loss, survival, resilience, and love.

Book Information

Hardcover: 288 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company; 1 edition (July 11, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 039324511X

ISBN-13: 978-0393245110

Product Dimensions: 5.8 x 1 x 8.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #150,968 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #116 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Russia #383 in Books > History > Asia > Russia #438 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Military > World War II

Customer Reviews

“A highly polished memoir of enormous heart.” —Kirkus (starred review)

Verzemnieks does not shirk from confronting the extremities of human behavior; but

she also gives us the rich textures of a world in which poetic mythology coexists with sophisticated modernity, the dead mingle with the living, and the hardships of a traumatic past are countered by the strength of memory and of lasting attachments.

• - Eva Hoffman, author of *Exit into History*

“Spellbinding and poetic, this is a moving tribute to the enduring promise of home.”

• - Booklist

“The astute reportorial sensitivity of a master Eastern European historian like Timothy Snyder, as filtered through the lyric sensibility of a García Márquez, and suffused in the aching nostalgia of a latter-day Proust.

• - Lawrence Wechsler, author of *The Passion of Poland*

“Poetic, melancholy, colored by the dark beauty of the northern landscape, this memoir of loss and recovery from the tragedies of the twentieth century will linger in your imagination, widen your historical perspective, and make you grateful that language has such power.”

• - D. J. Waldie, author of *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir*

“An exquisite book for the ages as it unfolds from its first mysterious sentence into a masterpiece about war, survival, memory, and, most movingly of all, human need.”

• - David Finkel, Pulitzer Prize winner and author of *The Good Soldiers*

Inara Verzemnieks teaches creative nonfiction at the University of Iowa. She has won a Pushcart Prize and a Rona Jaffe Writer's Award, and has been a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in feature writing. She lives in Iowa City, Iowa.

Her writing style is really different but fell into it after a short while. Good book, worth the read.

"The road I must travel to reach my grandmothers lost village is like tracing the progression of an equation designed to restore lost time" this sentence captured me and kept me reading: "Among the Living and the Dead" This the beginnings of her homecoming. It is history as poetry, prose and philosophy all woven together. This new breakthrough style of memoir, new to me, reads like a novel, and a love story. Inara's search for her grandmothers, and her own roots is compelling. She combines history, personal experiences and exhaustive research seamlessly. It's a spellbinding narrative, about how Latvians came to be a nation and how it's spirit lives on in the author. She tells about the displacement of Latvians during WW II, their struggles to survive under alternating occupations. Exploitation by Germans and Russian. No stone is left unturned. Every ethical dilemma is confronted unflinchingly. As a Latvian Displaced Person (DP) three years older than her father I am delighted that she has told our story so intimately. Speaking of fathers, as an aside, without giving away too much, pay attention to her father and grandfather. My memory, the stories

I've heard everything I've read comes alive as I re-read this book. It is not just the "real deal", it's something more, it is a new voice, a tour de force.

The gifted writer of this excellent book folds the reader into her family. With her, we experience the struggle of family members forced into exile abroad and feel their longing for their people and the cherished homeland they left behind. Together, we drive and walk the quiet lanes of northern Latvia, some disused and now nearly grown over, to find the family elders who suffered not only the war but decades of deportation, privation and Soviet occupation. This is the collective memory of a family and an entire people; it is a study of human behavior, Baltic history, and Latvian mythology. Thoroughly researched and gently written, this book is a gem.

Beautiful, resonant, horrifying, edifying, and tragically relevant. I absolutely could not put it down. Don't start it if you have plans; you'll cancel.

Among the most moving and brilliant nonfiction I have read: *AMONG THE LIVING AND THE DEAD*, by Inara Verzemnieks. I think the only book I have read that, upon finishing, I held it to my chest. Beautiful, hard-wrought, very moving. Highly recommended.

An exquisite writer with a long and profound career ahead of her.

This is a great story of discovering a family's past history. Verzemnieks has a great way of blending both the past and present together. It is a book that makes you think of how politics can shape the struggles of families and their history.

How can a book this profound and poetic also contain a meticulously reported history of a people and their land? How can one family's epic struggle become so personal for each reader? How can the story of Latvia be such a compelling representation of the United States today? Because this writer and this book are exceptional.

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