

Roads

Marina Antropow Cramer

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War is always an agent of change, but never more so than for schoolmates Filip and Galina. It's World War II, and, to protect Filip from being drafted, Galina agrees to marry him when he turns eighteen. Marina Antropow Cramer's *Roads* follows the evolution of this Russian family in Yalta from the brink of the Bolshevik Revolution to the immediate aftermath of World War II and asks what roads people will walk down to survive.

Filip and Galina's precipitous decision pulls Filip from his comfortable position as the only child of a well-to-do Party family into the household of his peasant wife. As the war enters its nadir, the family, desperate to survive, volunteers for relocation to Germany as farmers. In transit, they discover they've been tricked. They survive forced labor camps only to end up as political refugees, perceived as a threat by Germans and Soviets alike. Barely able to make a life in postwar Germany yet equally unable to go home, the long road through the war leads this family to unexpected places.

The role of status and privilege looms obliquely throughout the novel, especially as the family is pushed farther and farther to the margins of society. Cramer explores the dynamics of privilege in interesting ways, but nowhere as dramatically as in the various characters' reaction to their changing circumstances during this period of massive upheaval. With more than apt characterization, Cramer explores characters' adaptability as social critique.

Roads is a subtle investigation of war and everyday people struggling to find refuge. In the case of Filip, Galina, and the family that forms around them, Cramer deftly illustrates the price ordinary citizens pay once the war machine is in motion. When the resolution is reached, it hovers, a tenuous moment that leaves some characters with new strength and others poised to plummet and break.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (May/June 2017)

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