

A Radioactive Wasteland: Chernobyl's Quest for Shanith Shantih Shantih

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Abstract

“How many times has art rehearsed the apocalypse, offered different technological versions of doomsday” (Alexievich 24)? Perhaps many, Eliot’s “The Waste Land” being one amongst those. The five-section long poem offers an interesting vignette of the decaying world around Eliot that deeply affected his psyche. Seething with intertextuality, Eliot enforces the idea of chaos and malaise with a religious dedication which is then juxtaposed onto the grave incident at Chernobyl, Ukraine throughout this paper. This research aims to establish a cohesive relevance between what was and what is, between Eliot’s waste land and Alexievich’s Chernobyl, both of which have shared a similar fate in terms of its physical, moral, and spiritual decay. In establishing Chernobyl as a contemporary waste land, one realizes that Eliot’s efforts through fiction do not crumble when put into the realm of reality. “The Waste Land” is in fact a grounding testimony as to what will continue to happen, as in the case of Chernobyl, if man does not steer himself onto the righteous path to attain peace: ‘shantihishantihishantih’.

KEYWORDS: degeneration, physical, moral, spiritual, wasteland, Chernobyl

Introduction

T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land”, published in 1922, is a monumental work of the twentieth century that earned him an international reputation. A central piece of modernist poetry; “The Waste Land” expresses with a forceful intensity the disillusionment and disgust of the decaying world after the First World War. The poem traces the sickness of the modern civilization with all its sterility and rootlessness that has led it towards degeneration – physical, moral, and spiritual. Eliot thus renders the contemporary world as a ‘waste land’ exhibiting a damaged psyche, a stunted consciousness, and wasted morals. Humanity can, however, redeem itself by following the three-pronged dictum: Datta (to give), Dayadhvam (to sympathise), and Damyata (to control) thereby leading to peace; “shantihshanithshantih” (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 69).

The Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster of April 26, 1986 happened near the Ukrainian city of Pripyat in the then USSR at Nuclear Reactor Number 4. The incident occurred due to flawed Soviet reactor design combined with inadequate personnel. Large amounts of radioactive material were released into the atmosphere thus setting off an international outcry over the dangers posed by the emissions. Millions of acres of forests and farmlands were contaminated, thousands of people were evacuated, and the livestock was gravely affected. Several radiation-induced illnesses and cancer deaths were expected in the long haul. Although under check, the

contaminated area around the nuclear reactor still remains uninhabitable. The incident was indeed the worst nuclear disaster ever seen.

Svetlana Alexievich's *Chernobyl Prayer*, which also goes by the name *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*, is a religious dedication towards bringing out the facts, testimonies, and emotions of the Soviets concerning the disaster at Chernobyl. The brilliant infusion of monologues in the narrative provides for its reader to connect to an event that is largely estranged to them; thereby not letting the pathos precipitate. The book echoes Alexievich's prowess as an investigative journalist and an oral historian which grounds the book into reality; not letting it stray from the truth.

Chernobyl metaphorically presents itself as a contemporary wasteland whose essential spirit has met with a death from which it can hardly redeem itself, unlike Eliot's hope for his waste land. As per the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a metaphor is "a figure of speech in which a word or a phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them". This paper reads the disaster at Chernobyl through the prism of Eliot's "The Waste Land", which has been plagued with an abysmal degeneration. In his 'waste land', humanity has lost itself and the society is at the best a shallow reservoir without sympathy and compassion as rendered post the world war that Eliot witnessed. The world war revealed man's ability to destroy and confiscate power with little regard for human life. Moral and spiritual destitution is rampant with the only salvation being a journey back towards the Divine and the Divine Principles. Thus, bringing out the relevance of Chernobyl as a decaying waste land, Eliot's vision of realistic pessimism is channelized into stark reality.

A relevance of this sort contributes to a larger than life discourse where literature paves way for reality. Literature, as an agency, is often considered to mirror the society and its denizens. Chernobyl, however, is one of the many incidents where society seems to have followed into the footsteps of that which finds immortality amongst a mere few pages. The realization that humans haven't come far from that which destroys is an extremely important one. Mass destruction, chaos, and suffering caused by the world wars should have been a lesson enough for mankind but with all its obsession about science and technology to assert superiority rather than to ease the lives, man has drifted far away from faith, empathy, and scruples. Perhaps, events like Chernobyl are just the universe's way of reminding man of his position in the larger cosmic play; catching "God by the beard" (Alexievich 59) isn't a joke.

Physical Degeneration

"The Zone. It is a world of its own. First it was invented by science-fiction authors, then literature gave way to reality" (Alexievich 33). Aptly so, Eliot's "The Waste Land" can be credited to having foreseen what would become the world's worst known nuclear disaster – Chernobyl. Eliot's conception of a barren land, mutilated by its own conscience and devoid of morality, is in perfect tandem with the world created post-Chernobyl. Eliot tries to "show you fear in a handful of dust" (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 54) and thereby depicts a tragically sincere picture of the malaise and confusion of the modern world. Alexievich attempts a similar feat in her *Chernobyl Prayer* that can be read along the lines of the running theme of "The Waste Land": degeneration – physical, moral, and spiritual.

Blood was shed and thousands were killed during the first World War. Eliot laments how he “had not thought death had undone so many” (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 55). But the world during and post Chernobyl saw an estimated death count between 4,000 to 93,000. Yet, ironically, the Soviet death toll, till this date, records an unchanged figure of 31 since 1987 (“VichnayaPamyat”). The radiation that was released from the reactor core was roughly equivalent to 1,000 Hiroshima bombs (Gould 331). The mortality rate outstrips the birth rate by 20% in the worst hit provinces of Gomel and Mogilyov(Alexievich 1). The incidence of cancer in Belarus shot up straight from 82 in 100,000 to 6,000 in 100,000 (Alexievich 3).

Eliot’s corpse in the section ‘The Burial of the Dead’ is but a microcosm of the thousands of corpses that lay in the cemeteries of Ukraine. Lyudmila Ignatenko’s account of the death of her husband in ‘Chernobyl Prayer’ is heart-wrenching in terms of its gory albeit a realistic picture of one’s physical suffering,

He began changing; every day, I found a different person. His burns were coming to the surface. First these little sores showed up inside his mouth and on his tongue and cheeks, then they started growing. The lining of his mouth was peeling off in these white filmy layers. The colour of his face...The colour of his body...It went blue. Red. Greyish-brown” (Alexievich 12). “He was passing stools maybe twenty-five, thirty times a day. All bloody and gooey. The skin on his arms and legs was cracking. His whole body was coming up in blisters. When he turned his head, clumps of hair were left on the pillow. (15)

Yet another account, by Gennady Grushevoy – chairman of the Children of Chernobyl Foundation, in the book describes the lungs of an individual burned by ‘hot particles. “They looked like the sky at night” (Alexievich 152). Gennady laments how an individual is restored to dust but the radionuclides remain “immortal, and their dust...capable of killing again” (152). The effect of such an observation alone is enough to strike fear for what is in store for the future generation – death – innocent, undeserved death.

A research by USA today shows that 2,397,863 people were registered with Ukraine’s health ministry to receive ongoing Chernobyl-related health care, 453,391, out of which, were children – none born at the time of the accident. Pregnant women would rush to the hospitals to get their pregnancies terminated out of fear of birthing a child with defect. A “Murmur of maternal lamentation” (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 67) spread across Ukraine and Belarus.

Moreover, physical degeneration of the sort is not only limited to humans, but rather extends to each possible living creature in Ukraine as well. Man killed man; as it wasn’t enough, man also killed animals. “In the land of Chernobyl, man’s plight makes you sad, but the plight of animals is even more pitiful” (Alexievich 30). The task of treating humans was gargantuan enough, let alone attempt to save each animal, bird, bee, worm, fish or insect that existed. Though initially, strategies were made to accommodate a safe evacuation of the animals as well, the implementation of the same restricted a further progress in the direction.

To put the animals out of their misery, volunteers and conscripted soldiers scavenged the cities and villages with rifles to shoot the strays. Various accounts in the book narrate how happy the animals were upon being greeted by their fellow humans in a deserted place, and how they were bereft of their lives subsequently (Alexievich 107). Stringent laws commanded that no pets shall accompany the owners during evacuation and house pets were abandoned with little to no food for their survival. Bio-burial sites were dug to dispose of the killed animals. They would heap “the tripper full of them” (Alexievich 109). “They were tipping them out of the truck into the pit, and this little poodle began scrabbling about... Nobody had cartridges left... They shoved it back into the pit and covered them all up with earth” (110). It is pitiful to acknowledge the fact that no cartridges were left at the end of the day to shoot a single poodle suggesting that a large amount of ammunition was utilized for the purpose and yet it could not be fulfilled.

Mother Nature was brutally defied along with each of its creation. Lands became uninhabitable; water, undrinkable; air, unbreathable; food, inedible. “Ants are all that’s left, *everything* else on earth and in the sky has died out” (Alexievich 98; emphasis added). Every possible object that had absorbed the radionuclides was buried deep within the soil; as if to conceal the sins and mistakes committed. Houses were torn down to a rubble and buried; forests were cut down and buried; even the top most level of soil was buried deep within. Potatoes, onions, mushrooms, beetroots, and pumpkins were not fit to be consumed.

Everything that the “brown land” (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 60) spewed became venomous. Meat and poultry were to undergo various homegrown procedures to make it a little less harmful. Milk and milk products were considered to be equally fatal. This state of pollution deeply resonates Eliot’s vision of a waste land,

The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;
Departed, have left no addresses. (*Collected Poems* 60)

The land where once the Soviets, or Eliot’s ‘nymphs’ resided, has been submitted to a state of decay. The life-giving soil itself has become unsustainable. Even the very own symbol of regeneration and life - water- became an enemy to man. Chernobyl thus presents itself as ‘wormwood’,

And there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountain of waters; And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter. (Kings James Version, Apoc. 8:11)

Moral Degeneration

Three graves exist on the Ukrainian soil: one where the humans lay, the other where the animals are buried, and the third which buried the houses. “Man saved only himself: everything else he betrayed” (Alexievich 30). The almighty, crown creation of Nature did as he pleased with the world around him. Quoting Ivan Michurin, “We cannot wait for the favours of nature; our mission is to take them from her.” Sardonic how our art is just about human suffering and love, not about everything living. Purely human dimension. And yet, man is capable of destroying everything - every living thing, whilst creating is beyond him.

The Zone is where people killed people even for a TV set or a fridge. Evacuated houses were looted to paddle the wares and bear the profits. To this extent, the evacuees would often leave up a note on the door pleading that the scavengers may utilize the services but kindly leave behind their memories and homes, to which they hoped to return to someday (Alexievich 72). Human moral compass deflected greatly. “If someone fell in the street, it was rare for people to come over and help them up. Everybody would creep on by” (Alexievich 133). Wives left their conscripted husbands and took off with their children. Unmarried men who were ordered to serve in the Zone found themselves as unfavourable bachelors. Katya’s story in the book talks of her boyfriend who is an artist that dated her for she is a child of a Chernobyl evacuee – a treasure source of an account of that night, what she saw, what she did, how she reacted – all to be utilized to create his art. One is almost reminded of the purely sexual relationship between a typist and the “carbuncular” (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 62) that is devoid of an emotional connect in “The Waste Land”.

Men who were drafted to serve in the Zone were seldom provided with protective hazmat suits or necessary equipment to avoid exposure to radiation. In conversation with Peter Sagal on *The Chernobyl Podcast*, Craig Mazin, the screenplay writer of the HBO miniseries – *Chernobyl*, talks about how the men would construct their own armours out of the scraps of lead that were ripped off from the machinery inside the Nuclear Plant to protect the machines from damage by radiation (“Happiness of All Mankind”). Mazin points out how reckless it is of the Ukrainian government to not provide protection in terms of suits and masks to the clean-up workers, especially in a place where even the best of the robots malfunctioned due to high levels of radiation. It was as if men were sent to die with no regard for their lives. A similar tone is echoed by Alexievich in recording Slava Konstantinovna Firsakova’s narrative regarding how “...progress calls for sacrifice, and the more we progress, the more victims it calls for” (157).

Furthermore, the ‘actual’ radiation dosages absorbed by the workers were disguised with false numbers which came nowhere close to the actual figures. Colonel Vodolazhsky, a Hero of Russia, is buried in Belarus. Medical reports on the amount of radiation to which each individual was exposed state that he had been subjected to seven rem whereas the actual figure was 600 (Alexievich 176). More so, some of the data was stamped ‘secret’ or ‘top secret’ altogether, as per a doctor’s testimony. Medicine and science, thus, were merged with politics.

Affected conscripted soldiers and liquidators who besought medical aid post-service were met with disappointment and outrageous remarks. The necessary documents recording the dosages of radiation they were exposed to, during their

service, were refused to them with incredulous justifications. Some were told that their documents had been destroyed upon the expiration of the three-year statutory storage period. Others were faced with the answer that the documents were destroyed during the post-perestroikadownsizing¹ of the army when the units were disbanded. While yet another laughable argument on the part of the Ukrainian government was that the documents have been destroyed on account of being radioactive (Alexievich 89). And without the necessary documents, no doctor would agree to treat the conscripted workers by a word of mouth. A release of those documents to the individuals would mean revealing the actual dosage of radiation incurred inside the Zone. Considering the actual magnitude of the accident, the numbers would have to be sky-rocketing for the government to conceal it from those whose very lives it endangered. An ethical levity of the sort disrupted the entire idea of comradeship upon which lay the Soviet foundation.

This secrecy, in a way, did debilitate the moral outlook of the Ukrainians. Accounts narrated by Alexievich voice out pathos for those who suffered and for those whose loved ones suffered. Be it a father lamenting for his daughter or a husband for his wife, or a mother inquiring after her child, or for that matter a wife mourning her ailing husband; officials maintained a stoic attitude towards people. Doctors diagnosed the silent and invisible killer, but when asked the result, a standardized response followed: ‘That’s not your concern.’ “So whose concern is it then”? (Alexievich 45). Following the death of Nikolai Fomin’s daughter who faced a similar fate, doctors refused to identify radiation from Chernobyl as the cause of death parroting that radiation as the cause of death hasn’t been scientifically proven and that there isn’t enough data. “We’ll need to wait hundreds of years” (46) for that. What is even more alarming is how humans were actually treated like radioactive objects to be kept at an arm’s length. Lyudmila Ignatenko was specifically told these words when she refused to move away from her dying husband,

You mustn’t forget this isn’t your husband, it isn’t the man you love, it’s a highly contaminated radioactive object. You are not a suicide case. Pull yourself together. (Alexievich 16)

None of the nurses would dare to go near him; if they needed anything, they would ask Lyudmila to get it done. Lyudmila faced a similar drudge when her daughter died just four hours after giving birth to her. A completely healthy child on the outside, and yet she suffered from cirrhosis and congenital heart disease from birth. Lyudmila wasn’t even comforted with a last glance of her daughter; the doctors said she couldn’t have her. They wanted to take her away for science. It was science that took her away from the world in the first place.

¹Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev initiated a program of perestroika—restructuring—that decreased the role of the Soviet military, reduced its resources, constrained the offensive aspects of its doctrine, actively promoted arms control, and unilaterally cut force levels (Corcoran 1).

An article in *Foreign Affairs*, “Lessons of Chernobyl: The Cultural Causes of Meltdown”, traces the fundamental cause behind Chernobyl. It also records that those slave labourers of Gulag who were involved in the construction of the most secret installations of the power plant were later on sent to isolated camps for life as described in the memoirs by Andre Sakharov. In addition to this, the personnel that ran the plant were overly ambitious and determined with no regard for human life (Kapitza 7). Experts were chosen on the basis of their political loyalty rather than for their technical knowledge and scientific excellence. Chernobyl, hence, asserts itself as a failure of Ukrainian morals and ideology (9).

For a country that was obsessed with not being humiliated, Chernobyl meant a serious blow to its pride; perhaps the reason behind all its denial and deception. Sagal and Mazin, in *The Chernobyl Podcast*, talk about how the Soviets

refused to tell anyone how bad the situation was. Even then, months later, after the world was aware of Chernobyl and what it meant, they were soft pedaling just how bad it was...and what blows my mind is the Soviet power system thought that that’s okay... It’s the same kind of attitude that leads to Chernobyl in the first place. (“Happiness of All Mankind”)

Mazin’s remark seems to be pointing towards the crucial measures that were neglected during the disaster – the new design for rods was never implemented, the void coefficient wasn’t lowered, and fast-acting emergency protection wasn’t installed. Although new designs were commissioned, not a single flaw with the nuclear reactor was rectified (Leatherbarrow 21). And yet, the government had the audacity to solely blame the operators during the trial, whilst completely concealing the flawed reactor designs. “...although the Soviet delegation’s report was highly detailed and accurate in most regards, it was also misleading. It had been written in line with the official cause of the accident - that the operators were responsible - and, as such, it deliberately obfuscated vital details about the reactor” (Leatherbarrow 102).

The Soviets lived in a state of denial, for admitting the truth would mean admitting a mistake. But when a mistake was as grave as Chernobyl and about to spark an international outcry, the stakes were much higher. Forgotten vocabulary of Stalinism was revived and everything was blamed onto “foreign spies” and “western intelligence” and “arch enemies of Socialism” (Alexievich 137). Tons of evidence was buried and destroyed. Taking pictures anywhere near the reactor was forbidden and cameras were confiscated. Soldiers were searched before they left the Zone in order to make sure no photos could be passed on. VasilyNesterenko, former director of the Institute of Atomic Energy, Belarus Academy of Sciences, recounts how an ongoing research by Professor Cherkasova into the effect of small doses, internal radiation was shut down halfway and her laboratory sealed off. ‘We are never going to have nuclear disasters in the Soviet Unions. Soviet atomic power plants are advanced, the best in the world’ (Alexievich 263). Five years later, thyroid cancer index amongst children increased and so did congenital malformations, renal and cardiac disease, and pediatric diabetes. And five more years later, the life expectancy of a Belarusian fell to sixty years.

The moral morbidity became glaringly evident with the entire phase of coping with the situation. Perhaps a way of turning the unbearable into slightly bearable,

people would often joke about the graveness of the Chernobyl's fate. An adult listening to such jests would make sense but when the jokes are aired on children's radio programme, that is when things seem morally blotted. Radio Yerevan, a popular Soviet radio programme for children, aired a joke: 'What is a Radio Nanny?' 'A grandmother from Chernobyl' (Alexievich 52). The dark undertones to the joke maybe elude children but its greater implications are unnegotiable. Chernobyl impacted children's' psyche to the extent where they would rarely smile or laugh and would play make-believe games surrounding Chernobyl. The air that reeked of death caught on the little kids who would talk about birthing 'freaks' for children and still wanting to love them. Death was what they talked about. Yet another ongoing joke of the time was about a woman paddling her apples as 'Apples from Chernobyl' whilst a man questions how she manages to sell even one apple with that phrase. The response being an almost sadist one: "People buy them for their mother-in-law or their boss"!(Alexievich 56). Another furtive joke was about how an American robot lasts for five minutes on the roof and dies out followed by a Japanese robot that last for nine minutes. And in comparison, the Russian robot works for two hours and gets a call 'Okay, Private Ivanov, you can come down now for a cigarette break.' To think that in a radiated zone where even technology fails to survive, humans are sent unprotected to clean up the roof is chilling enough. One almost fails to laugh considering the serious implications of a disastrous event. Flippancy can hardly penetrate the psyche at a time when death undoes so many, as what Eliot would like to say.

Spiritual Degeneration

Ethical levity prevalent during the time of Chernobyl was heightened furthermore by a rising manipulation of the people at the hands of that which is occult. People began to pose as psychics who could cure the environment of radiation. Parasaka, one particular witch claimed she could lower the background gamma radiation over the course of the summer. The witch had already signed contracts with several farms and had been handsomely paid for the aforesaid accomplishment (Alexievich 159).

"Thousands, millions of people glued to their television sets, and sorcerers...Chumak and Kashpirovsky, "energizing" water...people with degrees in sciences, were filling up three-litre jars of water and moving them close to their screens. They drank it, they washed with it. *It was supposed to have healing properties*" (Alexievich 159; emphasis applied). Stadiums would fill up with thousands of people who believed in the powers of such fads. The belief in the mystic and occult overpowered a firm belief in reason and faith. People with degrees in sciences entertaining such behavior is a testimony to what frailty of thoughts can do to a man of reason and logic. The exasperation and the desperation of the situation had forced man towards that which can hardly redeem him. Only the Divine can propel him out of the darkness that has encompassed him but man fails to recognize the power of God.

Notice how Chronobyl'sParasaka hardly seems any different from Eliot's famous clairvoyante, Madame Sostrosis; apparently "the wisest woman in Europe/with a wicked pack of cards" (*Collected Poems* 54). Brandishing a title of a foreseer, both the self-professed witches work towards making man elude his common senses. However, Madame Sostrosis warns Eliot to "fear death by water" (54) which deeply reverberates with the fear residing amongst the Soviets concerning

the radioactive water. Eliot's deliberate inclusion of the mystic in *The Waste Land* is but an evidence of the spiritual decay that has crept amidst the modern civilizations throughout.

The spiritual sterility that Eliot foresees paints itself inside the Zone. The Soviets had developed a love for science and a scientific attitude that left little space for faith. Craig Mazin manages to trace down this crucial facet while saying "...in a Soviet state that had no religion and that had kind of turned science into a bit of religion..." ("VichnayaPamyat"). A scientific attitude of the kind in a way did over empower its scientists who turned arrogant in their approach towards it. Anatoly Dyatlov embodies the very spirit of such scientists as is evident in HBO's miniseries *Chernobyl* produced by Sanne Wolhenberg. Moreover, people had begun to question the existence of God having been caught up in a whirlwind of pain and suffering. Whatever little faith remained began to dwindle with the painful death of their loved ones. Justice was too difficult to come by in a situation where people hardly knew who was to blame. A returnee, Zinaida Kovalenka, laments,

...but not much justice has come my way. God must have been doling out everyone's share, and when my turn came the pot was empty.
(Alexievich 37)

Thus man has become a barren land, a wasteland, in his rejection of faith and religion. Just as St. Augustine exclaims in his *Confessions* as to how wandering away from *Him* has actually turned him into a barren land. Hopes for a better future have been shattered and there is no God to look up to. People desired, or rather, begged for death but it does not come easy. Only death is an escape from these physical and moral maladies. It is terribly hopeless and helpless of man to seek solace in death rather than God. "The only righteous thing on the face of the earth is death. No one has ever bribed their way out of death...dying might not be difficult, but it's scary. There's no church and the priest doesn't come to these parts" (Alexievich 37-38). There's hardly any relief even in dying. People experienced a death-in-life; it was a limbo-like state in which they lived. To deflect between a real and an unreal world in such a manner is pitiful as is the unbearable process of waiting, which can only be ended by death as their existence kind of turned into a death-in-life, observed by several characters in Eliot's "The Waste Land" (Sabbar 96). Be it Alexievich's Lyudmila Ignatenko, Zinaida Kobalenka and thousands of others unnamed, or Eliot's Sibyl, who gains immortality upon asking but turns old, death seems like a sweet release from the pain that their respective worlds has accosted them with. The characters in both Eliot's and Alexievich's works are thus bound to their deplorable state of death-in-life from which they desire redemption.

Conclusion

If Eliot identifies himself with the blind Tiresias, the seer and helpless visionary, so does Alexievich [cite](#) who presents her rendition of the pain and suffering all around through her *Chernobyl Prayer*. It goes without saying that Eliot's craft is a watershed experience of the prevalent conditions of the time as much as it is a threshold of the life to come: physical, moral, and spiritual. Truth does not tarry far away from what Eliot envisions; and more likely so, Alexievich records that envisioning thereby serving as a continuation to Eliot's purpose. The craft of both may vary in terms of its employment of considerable portions of fiction and truth, but the end goal remains the same. Alexievich seems to be putting into words and

perspective that which Eliot mysteriously projected. Alexievich's work, thus, can also be read as a justification of that which Eliot prophesized.

In Eliot's own words, we, the humankind, are

...destroying our ancient edifices to make ready the ground upon which the barbarian nomads of the future will encamp in their mechanical caravans! (Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* 319)

Eliot in his *After Strange Gods*, published in 1934, weaves out an inextricable relationship between a landscape and the human race. He suggests that a landscape that has been moulded by generations of race and a race that is consequently modified to its character by the landscape remain invariably connected. Putting it into the larger perspective of Chernobyl, an entire generation of race, and perhaps generations to come, was gravely affected by the landscape which in turn moulded its spiritual and ethical facets. The worst nuclear disaster ever, Chernobyl was a real test of man's moralities and comradery.

To conclude, the incident at Chernobyl can be viewed as a long extension of that which Eliot had already experienced and captured in his work as well as that which Eliot knew has not yet ended. History repeats itself with Chernobyl that has followed into the same old footsteps of mankind with little effort towards redeeming it spiritually and morally. This paper thus laid bare the various vignettes – physical, spiritual, and moral degeneration amongst many other - through which Eliot crafts his “The Waste Land” and juxtaposing it onto the disaster at Chernobyl as portrayed by Alexievich in her *Chernobyl Prayer*.

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