Landscapes of 'Missing History': Changing Topographic Imagination from War to Disaster

Shinjini Basu

To borrow a phrase from Michel de Certeau, the French historian of everyday life and practices, every narrative structure works in terms of 'spatial syntaxes'.[1] Rather than looking at stories merely in terms of their chronological ordering, they can be seen as a modality of organizing and regulating space between 'maps' and 'itineraries', 'marking boundaries' and 'focalization'.[2] In this context de Certeau makes a distinction between 'place' and 'space'. A place is the order in which "elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence" without the possibility of simultaneity of two things in the same location.[3] Space, on the other hand incorporates factors such as direction, velocity and time. Space is thus socially constructed, sustained through the practices of everyday life. Stories have the ability to unlock an event from its fixed place and spatialize it, restoring its mobile, vibrant contingency.

One of the most important factors in the social production of space is the endurance of 'architectonic determinants'[4]—remnants of an older social space into a newer form. No space is pre-social, even the ones considered natural or organic and no space completely disappears. They survive in the various representations of space—maps and plans, records and registers—as well as in the representational space—on the level of symbols. Knowledge faces a hurdle when it makes the representation of a space the object of investigation without taking into account how it is processed into the representational space. If there is a disruption on the biomorphic and anthropological level, what ramifications does it bear on the continuity of the two spheres of representation? For a long time war remained the most

obvious cause for such catastrophic disruption. But the twentieth century showed other possible ways in which the landscape of the physical, representable space is altered radically and permanently, resulting in an equally permanent rupture with the representational space. Svetlana Alexievich in her seminal work *Chernobyl Prayer* claims that for a long time our yardstick of horror used to be war. Then came the Holocaust—first Nazi, then nuclear. With the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear plant in 1986, "The history of disasters"[5] had begun. We had not yet acquired the vocabulary or the tools of representation for it. In this paper I would try to trace the transition of the imagination and representation of topography from one of war to disaster; especially in spaces where both have been equally intrusive and pervasive. I shall use two texts—Vasily Grossman's *Stalingrad* (1952, 2019) and Alexievich's *Chernobyl Prayer* (1997, 2016) to show both continuity and rupture in the topographic imagination. I would also try to explore the literary landscape not only as a mode of recording the changes of the physical landscape but rather as a mode of intervention—the loss and estrangement often erased from the physical landscape are re-inscribed into the literary one.

Both texts seem to be territorially fixed to places that have gained metonymic significance—Stalingrad as the representative of the ultimate military resistance against Nazi Germany and Chernobyl as that of nuclear devastation. Both texts try to unfix respective landscapes from the weight of their historical representation. But in the process they yield very different literary landscapes which I would argue result from an altered spatial sensibility.

The changes to a landscape brought in by war have been documented for a long time. Thucydides describes in great detail the alteration of the Athenian countryside due to the massive demographic displacement at the beginning of the Peloponnesian war. Athenians living for a long time in self regulated townships scattered all over Attica were forced to desert their houses and temples. The desolation of the countryside was coupled with the overpopulation of

the city of Athens. Unplanned temporary settlements came up even in sacred spaces which were hitherto prohibited from construction through oracles. Clearly there is a practical acceptance of the war affecting the inviolability of sacred spaces, infusing them with more imminent secular needs of survival. Thucydides quips, "And in my opinion, if the oracle proved true, it was in the opposite sense to what was expected. For the misfortunes of the state did not arise from the unlawful occupation, but the necessity of the occupation from the war; and though the god did not mention this, he foresaw that it would be an evil day for Athens in which the plot came to be inhabited".[6]

However, war may also inculcate a sacred geography within the space of the secular. The widespread devastating effect of war on the natural and demographic aspects of the landscape became an inevitable part of the modern historical consciousness after the First World War as it obliterated the spatial demarcation of civil and military engagement. The long trenches of the First World War have been etched in public memory as the most enduring images of the horrors of the war—human bodies huddling in the ravines stretching across miles. But the First World War installed new sacred sites within public spaces in the form of the graves of the fallen soldiers and war memorials. As soldiers died en masse their bodies were hurriedly buried in mass graves strewn across Europe. There were many instances when fallen soldiers did not receive any burial for months or years. Geoff Dyer mentions how Sir Edward Lutyens, during his visit to France in 1917 was moved by these hurriedly constructed graves. He later had a substantial role to play in constructing many of the cemeteries for the fallen soldiers.[7] It was perhaps for the first time that the aesthetic and architecture of public memorials for the dead became not just a matter of legislative debate but also of public discourse in England. One of the most significant outcomes was the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier—a monument that became the prototype for many later war memorials like the ones after the Second

World War, the Holocaust memorials, Vietnam War Memorial in Arlington or even the 9/11 memorial at Ground Zero.

The dual structure of space Lefevbre talks about, works in line with Roland Barthes' conceptualization of myths as secondary structures. Just like myths, here too physical spaces first find their way into two dimensional representations and then attain a secondary significance on a symbolic level. Lefevbre associates this movement with the transformative effects of capitalism as it tries to produce the 'abstract space' of capital in which

> Space as a whole enters into the modernized mode of capitalist production: it is utilized to produce surplus value. The ground, the underground, the air, and even the light enter into both the productive forces and the products. The urban fabric, with its multiple networks of communication and exchange, is part of the means of production. The city and its various installations (ports, train stations, etc.) are part of capital.[8]

While most wars of the twentieth and twenty first centuries are byproducts of capitalism's need for unimpeded expansion, they work as an interruption in its dual matrix of spatial representation. But *Stalingrad* records the effects of war on a very different topography. Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. Branded as 'Operation Barbarossa' the invasion made initial and rapid inroads. The siege of Leningrad started in September, 1941 and continued for 872 days before the city was finally liberated by the Red Army. In October, 1941 Moscow was attacked by a two million strong German army. Many cities and towns were captured. The military toll on both sides was devastating but the Soviets also had to incur grievous loss of civilian lives. The two forces fought in and around Stalingrad from August 1942 to February 1943. It is considered to be one of the most prolonged and brutal instances of urban warfare. Encirclement of cities with all their civilian population was one

of the key German strategies, turning the entire urban landscape into a battleground. As the summer offensive turned to winter and dragged on the German war machine lost steam. The Soviet resistance intensified, finally defeating the Germans, pushing them out of the Soviet territories and continued till the Red Army entered Berlin in 1945.

Set amid the invasion of Stalingrad the novel in its Tolstoyan length encapsulates various strata of the Soviet social life—Vavilov, a farmer and member of kolkhoz or collective farm and conscripted for the Red Army, the extended family and friends of Alexandra Shaposnikova, a chemist, the refugees of war, Soviet soldiers and officers engaged in the war efforts and so on. However, central to the structure of the text is not just the city of Stalingrad and the Soviet military resistance; rather it is the Soviet social and political landscape in the cusp of an unprecedented challenge.

It is a landscape that has already gone through a profound metamorphosis post the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. Lefevbre points out that every space is created by allocation of place for social relations of production as well as reproduction.[9] After 1917 the Soviet social space was created through radical redistribution of resources and restructuring of relations of production. When the novel unfolds in 1941, the period of post revolutionary reconstruction is almost complete through the introduction, implementation and then abandonment of Lenin's New Economic Policy, the era of Five Year Plans introduced by Stalin and massive push towards industrialization and scientific and technological progress. *Stalingrad* captures the friction of the Nazi blitzkrieg not just with a material but a radically opposite ideological landscape. The destruction of the so called 'Jewish Bolshevism' was a centre piece of the Nazi ideology. General Franz Halder had announced in advance—"the war against Red Russia will be such that it cannot be conducted in a knightly fashion. It is a war of ideology and racial differences; it will have to be conducted with unprecedented, unmerciful and unrelenting harshness...."[10]

Vasily Grossman, who was present at the Soviet frontlines between 1941 and 1945 as a special correspondent for the Red Army newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda or Red Star*, thus had firsthand knowledge of the military operations and witnessed the long drawn, painful retreat and eventual recapture of lost grounds. His war correspondence, published in *A Writer at War* (2013) provides a witness's account of both the debacles of the military leadership and the grit of the Soviet army in the Battle of Stalingrad. The novel, while preserving the precise observation of the journalist, erects a literary space for the ideological confrontation. In order to accentuate this ideological opposition the massive industrial and engineering plants form an integral part of the depiction of the Soviet landscape. The natural landscape is juxtaposed against the industrial landscape, not as adversary forces, rather as a shared matrix exuding a sense of collective ownership.

The war reconfigures this matrix creating its own cartography as the Red Army loses towns, cities and entire regions to Germans—Valuiki, Kupyansk, Millerovo, the whole of Ukraine. In the spring of 1942 the Southwestern Head Quarters of the Soviet Army is pushed back to the Volga. Grossman provides a detailed account of the rapidly changing landscape from a military point of view. In *Stalingrad* the first glimpse of the retreat of the Southwestern front from Valuiki to Stalingrad comes from Colonel Pyotr Novikov stationed in the Southwestern Front Head Quarters. Curiously, instead of a physical description the withdrawal finds representation through the shifting dots on military maps. On the air-force maps the symbols for Soviet bomber airfields are replaced by the symbols for front-line fighter and ground attack airfields.[11] All over the map there are small black numbers representing German tank divisions. This aerial view flattening the space into a two dimensional surface, draining it of its materiality prepares for the visceral physicality of both military and civilian movements to follow.

Landscape is an important aspect of the military strategy of any war, but the sheer vastness and complexity of the landscape of the

Soviet Union made it the most important factor in this war. However, in the literary landscape this two dimensional militarized view of space is only one component. Through various stages of military offensive and following the movement of troops or their individual members across the length and breadth of the country, the novel tries to structurally emulate the corporeality of the moving, fighting, dying bodies in close interaction with the material thickness of the landscape. But beyond its rigorous physicality, the literary space serves as a mobius strip of multiple social spaces. The novel is spread across Stalingrad and Moscow as well as the Urals where much of the Soviet industrial and engineering units were shifted during the war. The cities serve as interfaces of different social groups—the urban professionals, military establishment, internally displaced population. Each group navigates the cities in different ways. Individuals form varied relations and perceptions of the cities as their paths intersect with one another. Then there are open spaces navigated by soldiers or displaced people on the move.

The war suffuses the pristine beauty of the open space with an unforeseen ominosity, making it both strange and terrifying. Novikov observes, "Open steppe grants the attacker great freedom of manoeuvre, allowing him to concentrate his forces and make lightening strikes".[12] This space could otherwise be considered what Lefevbre calls 'the cradle of absolute space'—"...a fragment of agro-pastoral space, a set of places named and exploited by peasants, or by nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists".[13] While progressive urbanization sustains itself by using resources from this space, parts of it is assigned a new role—that of the sacred and mystical. It is this part that is transformed into a source of both danger and liberation, particularly as the urban space, shrinks exponentially in a military choke hold. Later in the novel when the Soviet commander Nikolay Krymov escapes from the encirclement and moves towards the Stalingrad front, this mystical side of the steppe reveals itself with all its enchantment.

> Not only is the evening steppe full of smells and colours; it also sings. The steppe's sounds cannot be perceived separately. Barely touching the ear, they go straight to the heart, bringing not only calm and peace but also sorrow and a sense of alarm.
>
> ...And over the steppe rises the evening sky, and the earth is reflected in it; or maybe it is the sky that is reflected in the earth, or may be earth and sky are two huge mirrors, each enriching the other with the miracle of the struggle between light and dark.[14]

These moments of solipsistic rumination, while enthralling, are also transient, unceremoniously interrupted by the ravages of the war. The rapid change of landscape, or rather our perception of it is shown through two distinctly different depictions of two iconic rivers. In one of the earlier chapters Alexandra Shaposnikova invites her family and friends in what they know to be one of the last peaceful dinners before an imminent attack. After the dinner Mostovskoy and Andreyev, two old comrades take a stroll by the side of the Volga. The Volga is the nerve and the heartbeat of the city of Stalingrad. As the war rages on the Don steppe and moves slowly but inevitably east towards Stalingrad, "everything in the city looked strangely solemn and full of meaning". The Volga was "barely visible in the twilight but it made its presence felt everywhere"[15]—from the hills and slopes to city streets and houses—everything danced to the tune of the river. As opposed to the Volga depicted as majestic and contemplative on the eve of the attack when Viktor, Akexandra's son-in-law travels to Moscow the river Don seems to him "grey, ugly and turbid"[16] as his train trudges through the decrepit and deserted villages and towns. The river is surrounded by long-barreled anti-aircraft guns mounted on the hillocks around it. Trenches have been dug and soldiers are moving along them without even glancing at the passing train. In the two instances the position of the viewer vis-à-vis the landscape

is different. While the viewing eye is placed along the Volga, its field of vision able to encapsulate the vast expansion of the river, the Don is viewed from above—from a half open window of the train as it crosses a bridge across the river. In this view from the top the Don becomes the threshold of an uncertain and unrecognizable future.

First published in 1952 the novel was written over a long time and had to go through many revisions mainly due to state censorship. After its first publication, the book was again reedited and republished in 1953, only a few months after the death of Stalin. There were many more drafts and portions that could not be published in Grossman's lifetime. In 2019 the present edition, compiling all the portions and retaining the title intended by Grossman was published. Initially published as a commemoration of what was termed 'The Great Patriotic War' in the Soviet Union, the 2019 text, published in a post-Soviet unipolar world, serves as a palimpsest, carrying traces of many layers of Soviet history erased and restored at different points. In the intervening years the Battle of Stalingrad had gone through extensive state memorialization in the post-Stalin Soviet Union. The memorial 'To the Heroes of the Stalingrad Battle' was unveiled in 1967. In erstwhile Stalingrad, now Volgograd stands the widely recognizable statue titled 'the Motherland Calls', standing atop an ancient burial ground supposedly named after a legendary Tatar commander.[17] The process of memorialization started as early as 1943 while the war was still ongoing.[18] Over the next two decades many plaques, obelisks and tombs dotted the Soviet landscape, closely aligning with and consolidating the state propaganda. Ironically much of it is now being repackaged by the avowed anti-communist regime of Vladimir Putin. Contrary to the state sponsored monumentalization of the Battle of Stalingrad Grossman's novel envisages Stalingrad not only as a land of memorials but rather as a landscape of memories. To go back to Michel de Certeau, there are two ways of telling a story—the first is through "objects that are ultimately reducible to the being-there of something dead, the law of a 'place'" and the

second is "through operations" of historical subjects conditioning the production of 'space' and correlating it with history.[19] While the state memorialization tells the first kind of story of Stalingrad, the eponymous novel tries to tell the second kind. From the rarified annals of 'The Great Patriotic War' it tries to restore the familiar, everyday life, its effervescence and warmth.

The familiarity of the space, so essential to the topographic imagination of *Stalingrad* is the central problem faced by Svetlana Alexievich in *Chernobyl Prayer* as she deals with a place completely defamiliarized by radiation. At the Nuclear Plant Lenin, located in Chernobyl, near Pripyat in Ukraine, in the erstwhile Soviet Union a series of explosions took place in the night of 26th April, 1986 in the reactor unit 4. The plant consisted of four reactors with the capacity of producing 4000 mega watts of power, all built in the 1970s and 80s and two additional reactors were built in 1986. The explosions occurred during a routine performance check, destroyed the reactor building and released a large quantity of radioactive material in the environment. The resulting radiation affected vast areas of Ukraine and Belarus. Several other parts of Eastern Europe including Poland, parts of Russia and even many countries of Western Europe recorded increased radiation levels. According to the report prepared by the Chernobyl Forum, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and World Health Organization, 56 deaths are directly attributed to the accident along with 4000 extra cancer deaths among 600,000 most highly exposed people.[20] This number is much contested. Many believe that this is a gross underestimation of the actual impact of the disaster mainly since it has not taken into account the long term, varied and complex outcomes of the exposure. Originally 116,000 people had to be evacuated. But the number of evacuees ultimately rose to around 350,000.

Alexievich considers Chernobyl a watershed moment in our historical consciousness—a break not only in the nature of a historical event but our perception of it. The 'history of disasters' as she calls

it is difficult to map since it cannot be measured and quantified only in terms of lives lost, properties and infrastructure damaged in the immediate impact of the event. In the chapter in which the author interviews herself Alexievich ruminates—"All our lives, we had been at war or preparing for war, we were so knowledgeable about it....[21]" But Chernobyl exposed the residents of areas far and wide to terror of a different kind—invisible, thus omnipresent. The term 'disaster' brings with it apocalyptic connotations—the French translation of the text has 'apocalypse' in its title[22]—precisely because it eludes evidentiary documentation. The aftermath is far reaching and much of it is imperceptible. After the accident it took several days to extinguish the fire, many more months to clean up the rubble and build a sarcophagus containment structure around the destroyed reactor. Even though evacuations went on over a long period of time, the remaining reactor units resumed normal operation in 1986 itself.

This assumption of 'normalcy' is in tune with the "interpretation of Chernobyl as a finished occurrence" which "stands in stark contrast to the interpretation of the accident as an ongoing event"[23] manifested in the diverse diseases reported in increasing numbers from the surrounding areas, death and deformation of unborn children, genetic alteration of not just local population but animals, plants and all living organisms.

The defamiliarization is nowhere more apparent than people's relation with the landscape that they had known and lived in for generations—every known patch of earth contaminated, turning into a source of potential death. After the rubble was cleaned up a 30 kilometre radius around the plant was declared a 'forbidden zone' which became just the 'Zone' in common parlance. The calculation of the area of the Zone was as arbitrary as the calculation of the number of the dead. Almost as a reversal of demarcating parts of the natural landscape as sacred a part of the landscape was being marked out as monstrous. It was done to bring a sense of boundary and with that (en)closure to something that seemed both trans-temporal and trans-

spatial. When the author travels to the Zone almost a decade later, she is still warned against picking flowers or sitting on the ground.

Alexievich observes how people try to grapple with this emerging, unfamiliar reality with the known tropes of war. And indeed there might be some overlapping—the landscape of Chernobyl post-disaster was dotted with markers inseparable from those of war—explosions, soldiers, abandoned homes, evacuations. The Zone was being guarded by the military. Even the new terminology put in place was not only militaristic but some of it was straight out of the science-fiction lexicon of the Cold War era. For example, more than 600,000 men and women were brought in from different regions of the Soviet Union to clean up the reactor site. They were called the 'Liquidators'. Yet there was a profound difference. One respondent comments, "Chernobyl. The war to end all wars. There's nowhere to hide. Not on land, in water or in the sky".[24] In such a situation how does the association of the habitants with the habitat change and how is that change recorded in memory and language? Alexievich believes that in order to capture this change a more spatial historical sensibility needs to be developed. Going by the definition of Michel de Certeau it would seem that she is trying to extrapolate a sense of 'space' out of the 'place' by turning a more intimate gaze into it. Alexievich claims that her book is not about the event of Chernobyl, but the world of Chernobyl—its "missing history, the invisible imprint of our stay on earth and in time".[25]

The text is arranged as a series of monologues of survivors of Chernobyl—mainly, but not exclusively from Belarus—families of the dead workers of the plant, sick patients, the Liquidators and their families, the evacuees and also those who came back. In their telling both the intimacy with and estrangement from the landscape are apparent. Zinaida Yevdokimovna Kovalenka, a returnee, says, "You get everything living here. The lot! There are lizards, the frogs croaking. Worms wriggling. And there are mice. Everything! It's good in the spring. I love it when the lilac is in flower. The smell of the

blood-cherry blossom."[26] She has returned to her village despite the fear of radiation because of her intimate knowledge of the space—"We weren't all that scared of the radiation. If we hadn't seen it or known about it, maybe we'd have been frightened, but once we'd had a look, it wasn't really so scary".[27] Many refused to evacuate since unlike the encirclement by an enemy army, the imperceptibility of radiation particles circling in the air makes it difficult to understand and accept. Yet there are more perceptible markers on the earth and in everything that grows on it. After the accident it rained for days; it was radioactive rain, laced in toxic material that mixed with the soil. Plots of land turned lumpy, there were patches of blue, the vegetables died, ones that did not were no longer edible.

The transformation of the natural habitat makes it stranger and alluring at the same time. In the 'Monologue on a Moonscape' Yevgeny Alexandrovich Brovkin, a lecturer at Gomel State University recollects a moonlit night in post-disaster Chernobyl—"On both sides of the road there was a genuine moonscape: fields covered in white dolomite, stretching out to the horizon. The top layer of the contaminated soil had been removed and buried, with this dolomite sand poured in its place. As if it wasn't earth; like we weren't on earth . . . .[28]"

Ironically the toxicity of the landscape permeates it with sentience; its texture and character changes; it starts to behave in unforeseen and unpredictable ways. Before human beings animals sense the changes. Alexievich opines—"In the land of Chernobyl, man's plight makes you sad, but the plight of the animals is even more pitiful".[29] Once villages were evacuated animals were left to fend for themselves. In the Zone soldiers came and shot the animals; buried them deep into the ground. But the ones that remained were the first to catch up to the new reality. Rats came out of their holes in the contaminated soil; birds would no longer eat the fruits. The abandoned domestic animals became the only living creatures occupying a land that itself was coming to an afterlife. They readjusted, marked their territories and kept life going while humans gradually came back. Both animals

and humans are united in that after life. One person calls the animals of the Zone 'walking ashes' and humans 'talking dust' [30]—the living dead of a necropolis.

It is interesting to note that the site of the Chernobyl power plant has never been completely abandoned. The last reactor was turned off in 2000. But thousands of workers are still employed to maintain and inspect the facilities on a regular basis. During the ongoing war in Ukraine the ghosts of Chernobyl came back to haunt after a Russian aerial offensive in the region. The persistence of life in Chernobyl and continued discussions around it makes it a "living site of memory."[31] In mapping 'the missing history' of disaster memory serves as an important tool. In *Realms of Memory* Pierre Nora talks about loci memoriae or 'memory places'—collective memory sediments in specific places and reconfigures them with new socio-political and cultural connotations.[32] Memory connects dots history forgot to wipe out. Many survivors of Chernobyl in Belarus had survived German occupation as well. While the physical spaces had been wiped clean of the signs of the occupation, it remained in memory spaces and could connect them to the present. Three hunters, entrusted with the task of killing abandoned animals look at the empty villages in the Zone and remember what the Nazis did to the village Khatyn during the occupation.[33] Zinaida Kovalenka recollects the trauma of evacuation—when the soldiers came to round up people an elderly couple got their cows and waited it out in the forest—"Just like in the war, when the Germans burned the villages down." [34]

Since creating memory places is ultimately a mnemonic device, the connotations are not ossified; they alter with each retelling. It is this memory place that Alexievich tries to resurrect through testimonials of survivors. The vividness of their memories is in sharp contrast to the official opacity maintained around Chernobyl and the denial of its lasting impact, not only by the then state machinery but the scientific establishment, particularly the proponents of nuclear power. Karena Kalmbach talks about the propagation of the concept of

'radiophobia' which claimed that the long term effect of the incident was mainly psychological—people were falling sick not because of the radioactive exposure but because of their fear of contamination.[35] The almost tactile immediacy with which the survivors remember and recollect the slow but irreversible mutation of their surrounding landscape as well as their own bodies and that of their loved ones is an act of resistance not just against forgetting but against erasure.

However, Nora problematizes the simple binary of history and memory—"what we call memory today is therefore not memory but already history. The so called rekindling of memory is actually its final flicker as it is consumed by history's flames. The need for memory is a need for history."[36] Verbalization of memory is already mediated, through language and thus through history. Kalmbach observes that "The emergence of Chernobyl as a site of memory is thus directly connected with its politicization."[37] The west has turned Chernobyl into a cipher for the life on the other side of the so-called iron curtain. Alexievich is acutely aware of the shifting geopolitical landscape on which Chernobyl took place. Two disasters were happening simultaneously, she says[38]—the explosions at the plant site and the implosion of the Soviet Union and along with it the fragmentation of the socialist landscape. In *Secondhand Time* (2013), a book recording the responses and memories of the Soviet people after the fall of the Soviet Union, Alexievich terms the latter event to be an 'apocalypse' as well. She collates snippets of conversations and whispers in both intimate and open spaces like kitchens and streets. Those conversations record both nostalgia and disillusionment about the USSR, the exaltation about the Gorbachev era—"Democracy was an exotic beast",[39] comments one respondent—and then the disillusionment with that as well. What is common to both apocalyptic events is the estrangement of the known world and familiar spaces, the loss of language to ascribe meaning to the unfathomable reality of emerging landscapes. Being instances of oral history both texts claim a certain undeniable truth value. Yet, standing at the crossroads of

history they are aware of the slipperiness of both history and truth. Played out in the domain of contested truths every monologue in *Chernobyl Prayer* is an attempt to re-engage with a deformed and mutating historical landscape. While doing so the monologues trade a porous line between history and literature finding new pathways of language, new tropes and tones.

In a novel like *Stalingrad* the literary space provides an opportunity to preserve the lived reality of everyday life during the war in the face of the onslaught of official, regimented history of the war. As one moves from the history of war to that of disasters, more than regimentation the attempt is to survive erasure and symbolization—the concerted efforts by the state as well as by supra-state entities to deny the survivors the materiality of their experience, turning it into an empty symbol of the failure or success of the state. Their act of telling the untellable is an act to reclaim their experience. In the process they curve out a literary landscape to recuperate from and resist the loss of historical meaning.

NOTES

1 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (California: University of California Press, 1984), 115.
2 Ibid. , 116.
3 Ibid., 117.
4 Henri Lefevbre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 230.
5 Svetlana Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer: A Chronicle of the Future* (1997), trans. Anna Gunin and Arch Tait (London: Penguin Books, 2016), 25.
6 Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1950), 112.
7 Geoff Dyer, *Missing of the Somme* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994), 12.
8 Henri Lefevbre, "Space: Social Product and Use Value" (1979), in *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, ed. Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, trans. Gerald Moore, Neil Brenner, and Stuart Elden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 187.

9 Lefevbre, *The Production of Space*, 230.
10 Frederic Clairmont, "Stalingrad: Hitler's Nemesis". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 38, No. 27 (Jul. 5-11, 2003): 2819.
11 Vasily Grossman, Stalingrad (1952), ed. Robert Chandler and Yury Bit-Yunan, trans. Robert Chandler and Elizabeth Chandler (London: Vintage, 2019), 120-21.
12 Ibid., 123.
13 Lefevbre, *The Production of Space,* 234.
14 Grossman, ibid., 734.
15 Ibid., 54.
16 Ibid., 179.
17 Scott W. Palmer, "How Memory Was Made: The Construction of the Memorial to the Heroes of the Battle of Stalingrad", *The Russian Review*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (Jul., 2009): 379.
18 Ibid., 380.
19 De Certeau, *The Practice*, 118.
20 Sonu Saini, "Revisiting the World of 'Chernobyl' after the Nuclear Disaster through 'Testimonials': An Analysis of "The Voices from Chernobyl: A Chronicle of the Future" by S. Alexievich," Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Vol. 73 (2012), 1094.
21 Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, 28.
22 Karena Kalmbach, "Radiation and Borders: Chernobyl as a National and Transnational Site of Memory", *Global Environment,* 2013, Vol. 6, No. 11, RCC Special Issue on Environment and Memory (2013), 144.
23 Ibid.
24 Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer,* 55.
25 Ibid., 24.
26 Ibid., 41.
27 Ibid., 38.
28 Ibid., 98.
29 Ibid., 30.
30 Ibid., 105.
31 Kalmbach, Ibid. 130.
32 Pierre Nora, "From Lieux de memoire to Realms of Memory", *The Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), xvi.
33 Alexievich, ibid. 109.
34 Ibid., 39.
35 Kalmbach, ibid., 136.
36 Pierre Nora, "General Introduction: Between Memory and History", *Realms of Memory*, 8.
37 Kalmbach, ibid., 138.

38 Alexievich, ibid., 30
39 Alexievich, *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets* (2013), trans. Bela Shayevich (New York: Random House, 2016), 29.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alexievich, Svetlana. Chernobyl Prayer: A Chronicle of the Future (1997). Translated by Anna Gunin and Arch Tait, London: Penguin Books, 2016.

Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets (2013). Translated by Bela Shayevich. New York: Random House, 2016.

Certeau, Michel de. The Practice of Everyday Life. Translated by Steven Rendall. California: University of California Press, 1984.

Clairmont, Frederic. F. "Stalingrad: Hitler's Nemesis". *Economic and Political Weekly.* Vol. 38, No. 27 (Jul. 5-11, 2003): 2019-2823.

Dyer, Geoff. *Missing of the Somme.* London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994.

Grossman, Vasily. *Stalingrad* (1952). Edited by Robert Chandler and Yury Bit-Yunan. Translated by Robert Chandler and Elizabeth Chandler. London: Vintage, 2019.

Kalmbach, Karena. "Radiation and Borders: Chernobyl as a National and Transnational Site of Memory", *Global Environment,* 2013, Vol. 6, No. 11, RCC Special Issue on Environment and Memory (2013), 130-159.

Lefevbre, Henri. "Space: Social Product and Use Value" (1979). In *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*. Edited by Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden. Translated by Gerald Moore, Neil Brenner, and Stuart Elden, 185-195, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

The Production of Space (1974, 1984). Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991.

Nora, Pierre. "From Lieux de memoire to Realms of Memory" and "General Introduction: Between Memory and History". In *The Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past.* Edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer, xv-xxiv & 1-20, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.

Palmer, Scott. W. "How Memory Was Made: The Construction of the Memorial to the Heroes of the Battle of Stalingrad", The Russian Review, Vol. 68, No. 3 (Jul., 2009), 373-407.

Saini, Sonu. "Revisiting the World of 'Chernobyl' after the Nuclear Disaster through 'Testimonials': An Analysis of "The Voices from Chernobyl: A Chronicle of the Future" by S. Alexievich," Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Vol. 73 (2012), 1092-1098.

Thucydides. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. Translated by Richard Crawley. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1950.