

## **The Problem of Catharsis in Svetlana Aleksievich's *Voices from Chernobyl***

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Due to the development of narrative memory-theory in recent decades, the witness and historian find themselves in an ethical and aesthetic dilemma. According to this theory, our memory of the past is undergoing a continuous process of change. As a person's life story progresses, and because the context of narration constantly changes, the actual memory of historical events will be exposed to continuous changes. From this theoretical standpoint, narrative not only becomes an act that prevents the past from sinking into oblivion, it can also have the opposite effect. To remember is to let the original experience fade into the past; it is a means to forgetting. Within psychotherapy, the narrative memory's tendency to wear out the original experience is perceived as an important method of healing a trauma. When the traumatic memory-fragments are integrated in the patient's life story, uncontrollable flashbacks stop haunting the patient, and the therapist can establish the cathartic effects of narrative.

In this paper, I want to illustrate a kind of fragmentation, not as a symptom of disease, but as a strategy for the witness and historian to question this inherent catharsis of narration. I will illustrate my hypothesis in an analysis of Svetlana Aleksievich's *Voices from Chernobyl*. I claim that the polyphonic representation of the witnesses' testimonies in the book is superior to the narrative structure, suggested by the book's division into chapters, genres, and chapter-respectively genre headings. My suggestion is that the polyphonic structure of the novel should be seen as Aleksievich's attempt to prevent a false catharsis from coming about.