

# Svetlana Alexievich: Voice of the Oppressed People

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## **Abstract:**

Svetlana Alexievich, the 2015 Nobel laureate for literature, has interviewed hundreds, if not thousands, of people for her books. When she talks about her mission as a writer, she roots herself in the lived experiences of her interviewees, and one gets the feeling that she truly recalls every one of them. An escape from history seems impossible for 2015 Nobel laureate Svetlana Alexievich. After chronicling the Soviet Union through her “documentary novels,” her own genre often mistaken for oral history, since 1985, she had begun working on two new books, one on love and another on aging and death. She saw these topics as an opportunity for something different, untethered to the history of what she calls the “Red Person” in the former Soviet Union. Alexievich called the war in Ukraine an indication that the former communist mentality among many people in Russia and Belarus has not been eradicated. As Alexievich said, "Now we see that we were so naive and romantic in times of 'perestroika,'" Alexievich said. "We thought and kept saying that people were disappointed with communism, that we managed to deal with it with a peaceful revolution. Now, it turns out that we did not overcome communism. We never prevailed." Alexievich has defined the main thrust of her life and her writings thusly: “I always aim to understand how much humanity is contained in each human being, and how I can protect this humanity in a person.”

**Keywords:** Belarus, Nobel Prize, Oral History, anti-communist, war crimes, Nuclear disaster, female soldiers, Minsk University, Narovl, Communist regime, ideological oppression.

## Objectives:

- To highlight the importance of ‘Oral History’ or Historical Novels
- To document the opinions/views of the lower layer of the society
- Use of Ideology as an instrument of oppression
- Impact of political ideology on war crimes

Svetlana Alexievich [ b. 31-05-1948] is a Belarusian journalist and prose writer who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2015 and Prize motivation quotes “for her polyphonic writings, a monument to suffering and courage in our time”. Announcing the prize in Stockholm, the chair of the Swedish Academy, Sara Danius, called Svetlana Alexievich’s writing "a monument to courage and suffering in our time". Alexievich called the award, presented to a living writer and worth 8m kronor (£691,000), "a great personal joy." French novelist Patrick Modiano won in 2014. Ms Danius said the author had spent nearly 40 years studying the people of the former Soviet Union, but that her work was not only about history but "something eternal, a glimpse of eternity". "By means of her extraordinary method - a carefully composed collage of human voices - Alexievich deepens our comprehension of an entire era," the Swedish Academy added. Alexievich was the Bookmakers' favourite to win the 2015 Nobel award, according to Ladbrokes. She beat other hot favourites Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami and Kenyan novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. She is the 14th woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in its history. It has been half a century since a writer working primarily in non-fiction won the Nobel - and Alexievich is the first journalist to win the award. "It's not an award for me but for our culture, for our small country, which has been caught in a grinder throughout history," she said at a press conference at a local newspaper's offices

in Minsk, Belarus. As a writer, Alexievich achieved international stature and garnered numerous literary awards, notably the Kurt Tucholsky Prize (1996), the Leipzig Book Award for European Understanding (1998), the Herder Prize (1999), the Sandro Onofri Prize (2002), the National Book Critics Circle Award (2005), the Oxfam Novib/PEN Award for Freedom of Expression (2007), and the Prix Médicis Essai (2013). Determined to capture and preserve the essence of humanity from the stories of those who lived through the events that shaped the history of the former Soviet Union and modern-day Belarus, Alexievich perceived her craft as a literary art that reflected the struggle for truth, dignity, and self-worth.

The 2015 Literature Nobel Prize was the first to be awarded to a writer who worked exclusively with living people. Her books dealt with historical crises—the Second World War, the Soviet war in Afghanistan, the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl, and the collapse of the Soviet Union—through the voices of ordinary individuals. This is oral history stripped down to segments so raw that it can stretch both credulity and the reader's tolerance for pain. At the beginning of "Voices from Chernobyl," published in Russia in 1997, a young woman describes watching her husband, a firefighter, die from radiation poisoning. "I've been searching for a genre that would be most adequate to my vision of the world to convey how my ear hears and my eyes see life. I tried this and that and finally I chose a genre where human voices speak for themselves. Real people speak in my books about the main events of the age such as the war, the Chernobyl disaster, and the downfall of a great empire. Together they record verbally the history of the country, their common history, while each person puts into words the story of his/her own life. Today when man and the world have become so multifaceted and diversified the document in art is becoming increasingly interesting while art as such often proves impotent. The document brings us closer to reality as it captures and preserves the originals. After 20 years of work with documentary material and having written five books on their basis I declare that art has failed to understand many things about people."

"But I don't just record a dry history of events and facts, I'm writing a history of human feelings. What people thought, understood and remembered during the event. What they believed in or mistrusted, what illusions, hopes and fears they experienced. This is impossible to imagine or invent, at any rate in such a multitude of real details. We quickly forget what we were like ten or twenty or fifty years ago. Sometimes we are ashamed of our past and refuse to believe in what actually happened to us. Art may lie but document never does. Although the document is also a product of someone's will and passion. I compose my books out of thousands of voices, destinies, fragments of our life and being. It took me three-four years to write each of my books. I meet and record my conversations with 500-700 persons for each book. My chronicle embraces several generations. It starts with the memories of people who witnessed the 1917 Revolution, through the wars and Stalinist gulags, and reaches the present times. This is a story of one Soviet-Russian soul." Her best-known works in English translation include 'Voices from Chernobyl', an oral history of the 1986 nuclear catastrophe; and 'Zinky Boys', a collection of first-hand accounts from the Soviet-Afghan war. The title refers to the zinc coffins in which the dead came home. Her most famous books have been translated into English, however, and the following is a sampling of works by the Ukrainian-Belarusian author, known for her "polyphonic" style and investigative approach to fiction writing.

"I heard about horrors from childhood. You probably know about the big famine in the Ukraine, a famine that Stalin started because the Ukrainian nation didn't obey him. And I remember there was a certain house on the field, and every time we passed that house, my grandma would tell me, "Shh. Quiet, quiet." And I was wondering why she is telling us to be quiet. Later, when I grew up, she told me the story. During the famine, people were eating everything. They were eating dung and waste from people and from animals. And this one woman who lived in the house, she ate her two children, and she was separated by the village — she lived alone. And I remember how scared I was to walk past that house. And this story of our nation, it has had a great influence on me, and I wanted to tell those stories."

The author was born in 1948 in the Ukrainian town of Ivano-Frankivsk, then known as Stanislav, to a Belarusian father and Ukrainian mother. The family moved to Belarus after her father completed his military service, and Alexievich studied journalism at the University of Minsk between 1967 and 1972.

After her father's demobilization from the army the family returned to his native Belarus and settled in a village where both her parents worked as school teachers. (Her father's grandfather was also a rural school teacher.) After finishing school, Alexievich worked as a reporter on the local newspaper in the town of Narovl, Gomel Region. As early as during her school days she wrote poetry and contributed articles to the school newspaper. At that time she needed a two-year work record (the rule in those days) in order to enroll in the Department of Journalism of Minsk University, entering it in 1967. During her university years she won several awards at the republican and all-Union competitions for scholarly and student papers. Having received her degree she was sent to the town of Beresa, Brest Region, to work at the local paper. At the same time Alexiyevich taught at the local school. She was torn between various career options: to continue the family tradition of school teaching, scholarly work, or journalism. But after a year she was invited to Minsk to work on the Rural Newspaper. Several years later she took the job of a correspondent for the literary magazine 'Neman' and was soon promoted to the head of the section for non-fiction. After graduation, she worked as a journalist for several years before publishing her first book, 'War's Unwomanly Face', in 1985. Based on interviews with hundreds of women who participated in World War Two, it set a template for her future works, constructing narratives from witnesses to some of the world's most devastating events. The book caused controversy and outrage when it was first published in Russia, where reviewers called it a "slandorous piece of fantasy" and part of a "hysterical chorus of malign attacks". She tried her voice in various genres, such as the short story, essay, and reportage. The famous Belarusian writer Ales Adamovich had a decisive influence on Svetlana's choice, particularly his books *I'm from the Fiery Village* and *The Book of the Siege*. He wrote them jointly with other authors but the idea behind them and its development were entirely his own, and it was a new genre for both Belarusian and Russian literature. Adamovich was looking for the right definition of the genre, calling it a "collective novel," "novel-oratorio," "novel- evidence," "people talking about themselves" and "epic chorus," to name a few of his appellations. Alexievich has always named Adamovich as her main teacher. He helped her to find a path of her own.

"War's Unwomanly Face": Published in 1985, this novel based on the true stories of women who fought against the Nazis during World War II was Alexievich's first work of fiction. It was also based on extensive interviews with the veterans. In the book, Alexievich offers an unusual account of the war, moving away from military narrative and telling the tales of Soviet women who took on male roles, fought on the front lines, killed and got killed, but still looked at the shattered world around them from a feminine perspective, focusing on human suffering and basic emotions free of any pathos. It's an investigative study that chronicled the lives of Soviet women during World War II, followed that same year by *Poslednie svideteli* (*Last Witnesses: An Oral History of the Children of World War II*), a collection of reminiscences of war as seen through the eyes of children. Based on detailed research and interviews with hundreds of women, it earned widespread critical recognition and established her reputation as an "oral historian" of collective identity. Alexievich designated the publication as the first volume of a literary cycle, *Voices of Utopia*, which was designed to depict life in the Soviet Union through what people "thought, understood, and remembered." When I was writing the book *The Unwomanly Face of War*, some doubted me. How could I write this book despite not living through the war? I don't think you have to have been there, whether you are old or young. You don't need to have experienced the event. It's more than age or the culture someone has grown up with. An Indian would experience Chernobyl differently from a European. I think that penetrating the nature of things — a very young person can do that as well. I think, or I hope, that a young director is growing up right now, who will come and make a completely different thing from what I have made out of my text. They will feed from another time, or perhaps from another kind of talent. In 1983 she completed her book *The Unwomanly Face of War*. For two years it was sitting at a publishing house but was not published. Alexievich was accused of pacifism, naturalism and de-glorification of the heroic Soviet woman. Such accusations could have quite serious consequences in those days. All the more so since already after her first book *I've Left My Village* (monologues of people who abandoned their native parts), she has already had a reputation of being a dissident journalist with anti-Soviet sentiments.

On order of the Belarusian Central Committee of the Communist Party Alexiyevich's already completed book was destroyed and she was accused of anti-Communist and anti-government views. She was threatened with losing her job. They told her: "How can you work on our magazine with such alien views? And why are you not yet a member of the Communist Party?"

"Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster": Alexievich's watershed 2005 book collected hundreds of interviews conducted with people who survived the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, which was the worst nuclear reactor incident in history. One of the things that they were doing — he would clap his hands, and that was his sign, asking her to come to his bed to make love to him. And during that time, he would not scream. But she asked me not to tell that in the stories, because she didn't want others to think that she is a perverted person. In the first edition, I actually changed her name. But when she read the book, she asked me why. And I told her, "Valentina, you asked me to change your name." And she said, "No, I suffered. My husband suffered. I don't want to disappear. I want people to know." "I think that Chornobyl will return for every generation, because after Chornobyl we entered a completely different world, a world that is beyond the familiar culture of war, whose violence, its limits, its possibilities, people were aware of. However cruel it was, it was not the same as Chornobyl. Many of the radioactive particles will exist for thousands of years, and now there's a lot of active material. For example, the villages in that closed, dead zone may burn. There are a lot of fires and storms. There are people who hide from the authorities out there. It's all very dangerous. That's beyond our imaginations. If we have a war, people return from war and start a new life. But as far as Chornobyl is concerned, we cannot return, because it will exist for hundreds of years in this active phase. I'm from Belarus, and in Belarus, we drink Chernobyl, we eat Chernobyl, we breathe Chernobyl. Chernobyl particles have penetrated our soil, our earth, our water. Everything is contaminated. Belarus is a huge Chornobyl laboratory, a laboratory of the future. But how can you imagine what Chernobyl is for younger generations today? That's difficult to say, although I think they should pull away from that technogenic world their minds are in. What they are watching, what they're interested in. I think they can imagine how dangerous this is and how intriguing it is, because they will have to live in this world, and humankind cannot contain it yet. After four days the Chernobyl clouds were already in Africa. Chornobyl destroyed the concepts of far and near."

"Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from the Afghanistan War": Alexievich has become known for her ability to document the most important events of Soviet history using a more intimate style. This book documented the lives of soldiers who fought in the Afghanistan War in the 1980s and drove the conflict home for many people who were unfamiliar with its gritty day-to-day life. There is a different story. It's called Zinky Boys, about the war in Afghanistan. And one of the officers who was there was telling stories about tortures that they did to people there. For example, they were cutting people's ears to take home as a souvenir, or how they raped women there. And I wrote everything, everything he told me. But later, when he was in Moscow, he gave me a call, and he said, "Why did you write that? Now I have problems with the KGB. Now my father, who is in the military, doesn't want to know me." So I discovered a new way to deal with it. I created a different chapter, with all the names who took part in the interviews, so that you couldn't tell who told what story. *vetlana Alexievich*: I think that the idea of socialism is actually a good idea. But what the Bolsheviks did to the country, it's a crime. When I was writing this book, I was actually studying a lot of memories of Bolsheviks; there are letters and other documents. And it's interesting to see, in their youth, they were actually beautiful people, and they wanted to create a paradise. I think it's an eternal Russian problem, the idealism. People were not ready for socialism yet, but they were forced into it. And Stalin actually was saying — one of his sayings was, in the camps where people were tortured — that "We need to force freedom on people." I would say my family was a common (typical) family. My father was the director of a school. He was a member of the Communist Party. He went to war. That was his generation and his idea. And it's difficult for that generation to say goodbye to all of those ideas. For example, when I was writing my book about Afghanistan, I told my father all of those stories, horror stories, about what was happening. I told him, "Those people, they are actually torturing people in Afghanistan." When I told my father, he did not believe me, and he was crying. Alexievich has also been

critical of her home country's government, leading to a period of persecution - in which her telephone was bugged and she was banned from making public appearances. She spent 10 years in exile from 2000, living in Italy, France, Germany and Sweden, among other places, before moving back to Minsk. "I love the Russian world, but the kind, humane Russian world," she added, talking of the country under President Vladimir Putin. "I do not love Beria, Stalin, Putin... how low they let Russia sink."

Alexievich's 'Boys in Zinc', comprised interviews with soldiers from the doomed Soviet war in Afghanistan – as well as their widows and mothers. The title refers to the zinc coffins used to bring home those killed doing "their international duty". It is a harrowing piece of work. Conscripts describe being duped into war; many were told they were going to Kazakhstan. Others naively volunteered. To research the book, Alexievich travelled to Soviet-occupied Kabul, meeting military advisers and nurses, some of them compelled to sleep with senior officers. She says that the politburo's justification for war was similar to that used by Putin in 2014 to explain his illegal seizure of Crimea: that the Americans were about to deploy, and his invasion was a pre-emptive move against "fascism". "I heard this from soldiers and officers.

"Enchanted with Death": Chronicling the many attempted suicides following the downfall of the Soviet Union, this 1993 book made waves in the former Soviet republics for taking a close look at a problem so few were willing to acknowledge. The year 1993 saw the publication of the book 'Enchanted with Death' by Svetlana Aleksievich. This is the story of those, who, unable to bear the sorrow of the disappearance of the socialist idea, the socialist matrix, either committed or attempted to commit suicide. These were the people who could not accept the 'new world', the 'new history' and the 'new country'. "It was a unique civilization, - says S. Aleksievich, "millions living on the huge territory were caught by the dream of constructing an ideal kingdom on Earth". Post 1991 hundreds of thousands of suicides were registered. People having lived under socialism could not adapt to the 'new' system. Aleksievich says that in recent times she has travelled to many Russian cities talking to hundreds of people. They do not reject the atrocities of Stalin, repressions, but they say that the Soviet regime was 'just' for common people and there existed a feeling of equality. More than 25 years ago in December 1991, the Soviet Union had de facto ceased to exist. For many people this sudden disappearance of the 'first ever socialist country' was very problematic. As the critic K. Matt says that the "contemporary Russian public discourse is dominated by two types of affective approaches to the Soviet past: modus trauma and modus nostalgia. In one case there is a lament about the traumas of Soviet history: repressions, concentration camps, executions, absence of freedoms. While the other discourse comprises nostalgia for the lost values, products, outfits, innocence, idealism". The paper would attempt to look into the dynamics of nostalgia borne out of the 'loss' of the erstwhile Soviet Union, while also analyzing the undercurrents of an emerging sense of the 'great power'. Svetlana Alexievich: If I tried to describe the stories that I heard, in my own words — there are thousands of stories. One of the books, it took me 40 years. And if I tried to describe it in my own words, it wouldn't be the same. If I described it in my own words, then there would be no power or diversity that was described in interviews. And life is art. That's what makes it different.

"Voices from Utopia" should be read as a testimony to her unique style of presentation. Although based on eyewitnesses interviewed by Aleksievich, the voices represented in the five books are interpreted as the creation of an implied author. In contrast to a theoretical standpoint defining fact in a dichotomous relation to fiction, this study identifies the historical value of Aleksievich's writing as intimately connected to the aesthetic composition. "The first is to describe how the monologues and choirs in Voices from Utopia are represented. Using Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the polyphonic novel, the internal focalization of the testimonies, in combination with a significant reduction of the external perspective, both on the level of dialogue and narration, are described as together constituting a polyphonic composition. The second aim is to demonstrate how this polyphony is interrelated to trauma theory and the psychological hardships experienced by the witnesses in the act of representing a traumatic experience. The hypothesis is that the polyphonic structure could be interpreted as an ethical representation of the interviews: first, it

reflects an empathy with the witnesses' ambivalence when confessing their traumatic past; secondly, because it contributes to ethically engaging the implied reader."

Her book, "Second-Hand Time," which was published in 2013 and is currently being translated into English, is her biggest and most ambitious — another work of oral history that draws on hundreds of interviews with Russians who lived through the fall of the Soviet Union, spanning from the early 1990s to 2012. "The scope and consistency of her project is unique — the sheer number of people whose stories she's been able to record," the writer Keith Gessen, who translated her book about Chernobyl into English, said in an email. "And as with a lot of truly ingenious literary projects, a reaction people can have is, 'That's not very hard! I could have done that!' Which is true. Except no one else did."

"It takes me a long time to write every book, about seven to ten years. For every book, I interview about 700 people, and I write thousands of pages, and sometimes an interview with one person can take a few days. So I need to create a picture. You can say it's like music, a symphony — out of the chaos of different stories — and that is an art in itself. You can say that every story is like a brick, and you can say that they're not really so unusual on their own. But when you put it all together, you build an amazing building. In one of the stories about Chernobyl, one of the women told a story about her husband. He was dying from cancer. It's a horrible story. Her husband was at the end of his life, and doctors had no hope for him. There was no pain relief, and he was sent home, and he would scream all day long. The only way his wife could handle it was to give him two liters of vodka a day, or she had to do even more terrible things. They really loved each other, but it was very difficult to live with him. He was a fireman, but he became a monster — the way he was behaving — and he looked very horrible. Even doctors didn't like visiting him because of that."

Alexievich says she understands the "very aggressive" response from the post-Soviet Union's twin strongmen. She has openly condemned the 2014 conflict in Ukraine, and describes it as "an occupation and war unleashed by Russia". Belarus under Lukashenko, she says, has become a "small totalitarian reservation" inside Europe. Putin and Lukashenko are classic despots, with Ozymandian tendencies. "Both think they are some kind of messiah," she observes. Is there, I wonder, hope that Russia and Belarus might one day reform? "It's a long journey," she replies. "You don't step out of the gulag and then immediately become free". She cites Varlam Shalamov, "my favourite great writer of the 20th century", who spent 17 years in Stalin's camps. "He said the system perverts the perpetrators and the victims. We now have a society where the two are mixed up." Alexievich adds that another cold war with the west has started. She says she is afraid someone more evil than Putin might emerge and take Russia to "de facto fascism".

"A new national leader has appeared in Belarus, she has more authority now than any politician-the president or a minister. And she's someone with normal European values" Belarusian playwright and screenwriter Andrey Kureychyk "It will go down in the history of the development of the Belarusian nation, society and state" Belarus foreign ministry "Alas, she was given the prize for her hatred towards Russia" Pro-Kremlin Russian journalist Dmitry Smirnov "She represents the Russian world without Putin: the world of Russian language and literature, which opposes the Russian government. The Nobel prize has given us a spiritual leader." Independent Russian journalist Oleg Kashin speaking on Ekho Moskvy radio. "A lot changed during the last 20, 30 years — music, art. Why shouldn't literature change as well? We cannot have the same literature as Tolstoy wrote. My parents were teachers in a village, and I spent my whole childhood in a village. And what I heard from simple women on the street, their stories were more amazing than any books I read. Their stories were horrifying, interesting, and very different. It made a big impression on me and had a great influence on what I wrote because some things were so much stronger and heavier than anything I read before. I feel very sad that many conversations between people on the street, between parents and children, they are disappearing. But I feel it's also part of literature." Alexievich's books trace the emotional history of the Soviet and post-Soviet individual through carefully constructed collages of interviews. According to Russian writer and critic Dmitry Bykov, her books owe much to the ideas of Belarusian writer Ales Adamovich, who felt that the best way to describe the horrors of the 20th century was not by creating fiction but through recording the testimonies of witnesses.

Belarusian poet Uladzimir Nyaklyayew called Adamovich "her literary godfather". He also named the documentary novel *I'm From Fire Village* by Ales Adamovich, Janka Bryl and Uladzimir Kalesnik, about the villages burned by the German troops during the occupation of Belarus, as the main single book that has influenced Alexievich's attitude to literature. Alexievich has confirmed the influence of Adamovich and Belarusian writer Vasil Bykaŭ, among others. She regards Varlam Shalamov as the best writer of the 20th century. Svetlana Aleksievich's approach to the representation of traumatic events highlights the importance of "voice" in the creation of what can be arguably considered a new literary genre, which Igor' Sukhikh calls "collective testimony." After examining the role of war and oral testimonies in shaping Aleksievich's poetics, focuses on another type of trauma, which involves an element that cannot be controlled: Nature. In this respect, particular attention devoted to the narrative is further dramatized by a key process active at a figurative level, here called "inversion of the perspective."

"What I've been writing for forty years is the story of the Red Person, of the Red Idea. I began with the very start of that idea. I met people who had seen Lenin and Stalin. The people who fought in Afghanistan. The people who died at Chernobyl. All those people. I eventually realized I was so careless to write my book *Secondhand Time* about the fall of the empire and to write about the end of the Red Person. As it turned out, it was very naïve of me. Back then, in the 90s, we thought communism was dead, that this idea would never be recreated in any form, not imperial, not anything else. It turned out it was wrong. The communist is not dead. The Red Person is changing forms again, transforming." Ms. Alexievich's work fits into a longstanding literary tradition of deeply reported narrative nonfiction written with the sweep and the style of a novel. Practitioners include luminaries like Truman Capote, Norman Mailer and Joan Didion and, more recently, writers like Katherine Boo and Adrian Nicole LeBlanc. Fans of Ms. Alexievich's books say their literary quality helps them to transcend the particular historical circumstances she is exploring, lending an element of universality to her stories. "If this were purely for literature, rather than this mix of nonfiction and fiction that she works so well, she would deserve to get the Nobel prize because she's so deeply rooted in a sense of humanity and suffering," said John O'Brien, the publisher of Dalkey Archive Press. Because of her criticism of the government in Belarus, a former Soviet republic, Ms. Alexievich has periodically lived abroad, in Italy, France, Germany and Sweden, among other places. For much of her adult life, though, she has lived in Minsk, the capital of Belarus. In a 2013 interview with German television, she said she hoped the international attention would give her "a degree of protection" in Belarus, where press freedom is under constant threat. Still, she said that she could write only in Belarus, "where I can hear what people are talking about on the streets, in cafes, or at the neighbor's place."

Of the five previous Nobel Prizes in Literature awarded to authors writing in Russian, only Mikhail Sholokhov was on good enough terms with the government to receive his award and remain a resident of the Soviet Union. The others — Ivan Bunin, Boris Pasternak, Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn and Joseph Brodsky — either received the award in exile, or were denied a visa to attend the Stockholm ceremony. Her motivation for doing difficult, truthful writing comes from her childhood, where she lived in a house surrounded by books, but "none of them told the truth". "Suddenly the stories I heard from real life were very different," she said. "Life was very mysterious, terrible and fascinating and books were flat, patriotic and boring." In one of her interviews she said: "I've been searching for a literary method that would allow the closest possible approximation to real life. Reality has always attracted me like a magnet, it tortured and hypnotized me, I wanted to capture it on paper. So I immediately appropriated this genre of actual human voices and confessions, witness evidence and documents. This is how I hear and see the world — as a chorus of individual voices and a collage of everyday details. This is how my eye and ear function. In this way all my mental and emotional potential is realized to the full. In this way I can simultaneously be a writer, reporter, sociologist, psychologist and preacher."

At present, this writer of international renown and dedicated critic of the dictatorial regime of her country is living in Minsk, Belarus. Her books have been translated into 45 languages and published in 47 countries so far, formed the basis for a dozen plays, and more than twenty of her scripts have been filmed as documentaries. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2015 Nobel Prize in Literature, the

2013 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, the 2013 French Prix Médicisessai; the 2013 Best Book of the Year Prize by the French literary magazine Lire for her book Time Second Hand; the 2011 Ryszard Kapuściński Award for literary reportage (Poland); the 2011 Angelus Central European Literature Award (Poland) ; the 2006 National Book Critics Circle nonfiction award for “Voices from Chernobyl (New York); the 2001 Erich Maria Remarque Peace Prize (Osnabrück); the 2000 Robert Geisendörfer Radio Play Prize of the German Academy of the Performing Arts (Berlin); the 1999 “Témoignage du Monde award (Paris); the 1998 Best Book on Politics of the Year award of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Bremen); the 1997 Andrei Sinyavsky Prize (Moscow); and the 1996 Kurt Tucholsky Prize of the Swedish PEN Club (Stockholm).

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