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The Ukrainian Modern Drama on The Chernobyl Catastrophe The case of plays by Pawlo Arje and Neda Nezdana

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Abstract:

In the article, Chernobyl is shown as a Ukrainian synonym for the apocalypse. The Chernobyl disaster disrupted the biological order. It is also the destruction of the social, political and cultural order. This event prompted the playwrights to point out the subject of the process of self-awareness and the place of man in the new reality, especially in the reality of the zone, which can be treated as a metaphor for the culture of danger and salvation. This paper is a study of contemporary Ukrainian drama, which focuses attention on the issue of the Chernobyl catastrophe. Contemporary Ukrainian playwrights attempt to answer the question about existence, and about the human condition after Chernobyl. Two dramas are interpreted: a piece by Pawlo Arje titled *at the beginning and at the end of the time* and a text by Neda Nezdana *Lost Fugitives*. The playwrights who stand between the witnesses and the second generation attempt to create their narrative about the catastrophe.

Keywords: Chernobyl, apocalypse, Ukrainian drama, zone

Introduction:

Nuclear consciousness connects humanity in a common sense of threat and the apocalyptic vision of the world that began in the twentieth century, which is called the nuclear age. Even though the global apocalypse did not take place, its vision was permanently inscribed in discourse. The history of Chernobyl, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Three Mile Island and the Trinity Site are the most known causes leading to the emission of radiation, which are certainly a turning point in the sense of global threat and a foretaste of the future. The appearance of traces of the past in the form of radioactive waste, various diseases, the Putin-Ukrainian war and other events have renewed the vision of the global defeat of humanity and the planet, as mankind knows it. From each reactor, radioactive material is constantly leaking into the biosphere. Leaks are recorded from places where such material is deposited. The threat of a nuclear disaster and the artistic or scientific discourse related to this is an important artifact of contemporary culture that speaks about our collective and individual fate.

However, it must be remembered that the nuclear threat remains primarily in the sphere of discourse. As Jacques Derrida rightly points out:

"American bombs in 1945 ended the 'classic' conventional war; they did not start a nuclear war. The terrifying reality of the nuclear conflict can only be the signified referent, never the real referent (present or past) of a discourse or a text." (Derrida& Porter& Lewis, 1984)

Nevertheless, nuclear weapons pose a threat and continue to appear in political discourse as an element of fear and political control of the enemy. After all, this weapon does exist, it is stored, and its firepower and possibility of destruction are commonly known. Nuclear weapons therefore remain on standby. A philosopher notes:

The anticipation of nuclear war (dreaded as the fantasy, or phantasm, of a remainder less destruction) installs humanity-and through all sorts of relays even defines the essence of modern humanity- in its rhetorical condition. (Derrida& Porter& Lewis, 1984)

Moreover, as Derrida, Porter and Lewis (1984) outline, making it difficult to disagree: what is so charismatic about the nuclear threat is that it is a phantasmatic projection of the irreversible, the apocalypse that will lead to destroy the world, its culture and memory. The nuclear age, as Derrida writes, is an era of deconstruction of what has been done so far, the thematisation of threats, uncertainty and the announcement of a catastrophe.

Chernobyl, a Ukrainian synonym for the apocalypse

Catastrophe and apocalypse are frequent themes in art; they bring – as Susan Sontag (2001) claims – both satisfaction and excitement. This is also the case with the topic of Chernobyl. Hundorova emphasizes that Chernobyl is a symbolic cultural event and, at the same time, an important apocalyptic text about "shifting the end of civilization, culture, and man to the post-nuclear era." (Derkaczova, 2017) Andrea Zink (2017) points out that, although the Chernobyl disaster started a discussion on politics and ecology, not much has been written about how art contributed to working through trauma.

Perhaps the reason for this is that few artists – as the Slavic Studies' expert writes – have undertaken a visual or textual representation of the catastrophe.

Perhaps, this is because all that can be written about after 1986 is the lack of events: "there is silence in the zone – very few people live here, and time seems to stand still." (Derkaczova, 2017) It is this silence and emptiness that has become the subject of contemporary Ukrainian and Belarusian dramas. In Ukraine, the crisis and catastrophe are even equated to Chernobyl. This can be seen to this day, when the topic of Chernobyl, the failure of a nuclear power plant (for example in Zaporozhe), and the specter of a nuclear war has returned like a boomerang during the war in Ukraine.

Throughout the twentieth century, nuclear imagery actualizes distinct narrative and psychological models in different pieces of literature. For example, the witnesses of Hiroshima associate their impressions after the bombing with childhood images of the end of the world, separation, helplessness, and disappearance. In German-language literature, the nuclear apocalypse is associated with genocide, the predecessor of which is the Holocaust with gas chambers and a crematorium. In Ukraine, the nuclear apocalypse has come to be identified with Chernobyl. (Hundorova, 2014)

Chernobyl is an unimaginable place in Ukrainian culture that requires reinterpretation and representation. Hence, there is a need to create a language to express what is inexpressible, unrepresentable, and what eludes the picture.

Aleksievich (2012) writes that the Chernobyl[1] disaster is a war that is not over. She compares the effects of the Chernobyl disaster to World War II. She indicates that the atom of war, the one from Nagasaki or Hiroshima, and the peace atom are twins, accomplices. And even the Chernobyl catastrophe was more dangerous: the number of radionuclides in importance (three hundred and fifty times) exceeded those generated by the bombs dropped on Hiroshima. The consequences of their explosion are comparable. She points out that the Nazis destroyed 619 Belarusian villages and Chernobyl destroyed 485 villages and settlements, 70 of which disappeared forever underground; during the war, every fourth Belarusian died, and today every fifth life is lost in the contaminated area. At the same time, she emphasizes that the effects of the disaster are not only local but also global. She recalls that high radiation was recorded successively in Poland, Germany, Austria, Romania, Switzerland, northern Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Great Britain, northern Greece, as well as in Israel, Kuwait, and Turkey. Additionally, gaseous substances were registered in Japan, China, India, the USA, and Canada.

She also notes that the catastrophe was not a temporary incident; despite the sarcophagus and its additional shield called the Ark, radioactive aerosols from numerous cracks and cracks still get into the atmosphere, and the blowing wind still increases the activity of ashes containing uranium, plutonium, and cesium. (Aleksievich, 2012) The Chernobyl disaster is therefore not only in the past but also in the present. The author emphasizes that for her it is the beginning of a new story in which man will have to verify the existing narrative about his image of the world and man's place in it. Hence, in the juxtaposition of Chernobyl with Auschwitz or Kolyma, the former seems more terrifying. “Chernobyl goes further than (…) the Holocaust. Because it touches the end. It is based on nothingness.” (Aleksievich, 2012) As one of Aleksievich's interlocutors said: “A man with an axe and a bow, even a man with a grenade launcher and gas chambers, could not kill everyone. But a man with an atom ... Now ... The whole Earth is under threat.”

[1] Chernobyl is certainly the most described and known nuclear disaster in the lands of the former USSR, but not the only one. Suffice to mention the Kystym catastrophe in 1957 when the Mayak nuclear plant in the Urals failed, and Semipalatinsk, a city in northern Kazakhstan, where from 1949 there was a Soviet nuclear testing ground, in which atomic and hydrogen bombs were detonated, which contaminated the area before the training ground was finally closed in 1991.

"Chernobyl", Aleksievich (2012) continues: “is primarily a catastrophe of time. The radionuclides scattered on the Earth will exist for fifty, one hundred, two hundred thousand years." Therefore, it is not only the past and the present but also the future. The future and the present are all the more terrible because they are unnoticed, although the traces of the catastrophe will still be present, the radiation is invisible, imperceptible, inaudible; hence, it is easy to forget about it. The past is helpless, for it only brought the knowledge of ignorance. What the past carries are memories of the catastrophe, an attempt to build a memory of what started on the day of the crash because it is still ongoing.

Therefore, the difficulty in creating a memory is because memory usually is connected to the past. It is difficult to commemorate what extends in time: from the past, through the present, and onto the future. When creating memorial sites following a nuclear catastrophe, the artists make an attempt to present what can be seen. They try to find and save or reproduce the visual traces of the disaster. Aleksievich's interlocutors also point to noticeable symptoms of the disaster, for example, colored lumps of stones or bright yellow puddles. They do it in order to make an attempt to understand what happened and how it influenced man and his world. As a journalist writes: "Chernobyl must be understood because we have to live with it," (Aleksievich, 2012) creating a culture after Chernobyl. Contemporary Ukrainian playwrights capture the reality after the catastrophe: the zone, the sites behind the zone, the people living in the zone, and their relationships with people who live in the non-zone. They attempt to define the individual who is called “Chernobylak”.

Chernobyl in Ukrainian drama

Reflecting on the Chernobyl tragedy force us to ask ourselves existential questions. We have to answer the question: Who are we? Without it, nothing has changed, and nothing will change. What is meaning of life? And what is the meaning of freedom? We can only dream about freedom. We could be free, but we are not free. It didn't work out, again. We have been building communism for seventy years; today, we are building capitalism. We used to pray to Marx, but now we worship to the dollar. We got lost in history. When we think about Chernobyl, we come back to this point: Who we are? What did we understand about ourselves and about our world? Which far outnumber military museums; we have more of them than art museums; we store old vending machines, bayonets, and grenades, and in the

courtyard, there are tanks and grenade launchers. There are school trips and shows; this is war. And it is different…. On April 26th, 1986, we had another war. Which is not over at all. (Aleksievich, 2012)

Contemporary Ukrainian playwrights attempt to answer the question about existence, and about the human condition after Chernobyl. They take up topics readily discussed up until now and interpret the events that changed the situation in Ukraine, both politically and socially. They show them in a different light, devoid of the socialist realist glow. Contemporary playwrights talk about the internal problems of the characters, the desire for happiness and freedom, and the right to self-determination of the individual. They note that the nuclear disaster led to many changes – not only ecological, and health-related, but also conscious, cultural, and philosophical. Similarly, Alexievich's interlocutors rightly point to the catastrophe as a cultural trauma. It led to the creation of the Chernobyl man. This man is a freak that nobody knows and interests everyone. (Aleksievich, 2012) And it is from this man's perspective that they tell the story of the reactor disaster and the rise of the zones.

In a text with the eloquent title *At the beginning and at the endow the time* Pawlo Arje talks about the catastrophe in the same way as Aleksievich presented it but transforms the journalist's monologues into dialogues. He just quotes certain passages.

Neda Nezdana does the same in her drama titled *Lost Fugitives*. Already in the introduction, she admits that in the text she uses documentary materials taken from the work of Aleksievich. This reference to the talks of the Belarusian journalist is dictated by two facts. Firstly, *The Chernobyl Prayer*, as Tamara Hudorova (2017), a Ukrainian literary scholar, rightly writes, is a "matrix of perception (...) [of a disaster at a power plant] in terms of testimony and memory" and probably it is the most frequently cited work treated as "Chernobyl oral history". The record of the interviews conducted by Aleksievich, as well as the interviews written by Iurii Shcherbak, show the way in which one can talk about tragedy and trauma. As Hundorova (2017) writes: "thanks to Aleksievich, [Chernobyl] became (...) a place of what is traumatic," and inexpressible "in culture, like other fundamental events of the 20th century: Auschwitz, Hiroshima or the Holocaust." It is therefore a canonical text commemorating a nuclear catastrophe.

A similar commentary can be written about the text *Chernobyl: A Documentary Story*. Its strength lies in two important elements. First, they are based on witness accounts that have

the power to overcome trauma. And it is precisely this testimony that was recognized in the post-traumatic twentieth century as the basic discursive model. Secondly, as Iwona Boruszowska (2017) recalls, "the first reaction of literature to the Chernobyl events were attempts at artistic documentary studies." Third, the authors created a model language for narrating the chronicle of the Chernobyl past and future. As Oksana Zabuzko (2022) writes, Aleksievich escapes from the classic stance of the narrator as an intermediary between the characters and the reader and introduces understatements, omissions, and ellipses. The same method of narration, as recalled by Andrea Zink (2017), was used by Shcherbak. Hundorov describes this language as the Chernobyl discourse "with graphically marked ellipses and pauses, recording breaks and places in the stories of witnesses who were not able to convey the impressions of what they experienced." (Hundorova, 2017, 60)

This form of speech is taken over by playwrights from the interlocutors Aleksievich and Shcherbak: in the texts of Arje and Nezdana there are stoppages, suspensions, and ellipsis. People's statements are interspersed with onomatopoeia, and pauses; they are torn, and shapeless. Dramas are a record of the stream of consciousness, they attempt to capture the voice of emotions, the process of remembering and witnessing the past. This language proves that it is difficult to verbally present what eludes representation, which seems impossible to express. Hence, the language cannot be too clear and fluent. It is fragmented like a traumatic experience and the memory of it.

The second reason the playwrights refer to Aleksievich's text may be due to Nezdana and Arya’s respective ages. Pawło Arje was born in 1975; he was eleven at the time of the explosion in the power plant, and Nezdana was fifteen (born in 1971). They are, therefore, young representations of the first generation. They were too young to create their own language of stories about the catastrophe, especially since the catastrophe itself was subject to censorship. Their memory of the event is an amalgamation of the teenager's memory and the memory of their parents. Hence, they needed to borrow the language from the witnesses. They preferred to refer to the completed model of the Chernobyl discourse. At the same time, their texts fit into two streams of stories: witnesses, or the so-called, first generation, and the second generation, consisting of the children of witnesses and very young witnesses, who were three or five years old at the time of the catastrophe.

Like the representatives of the second generation of the Holocaust, they emphasize that they grew up in the shadow of memories. Thus, it was the language of the witnesses that formed their way of talking about the catastrophe. The playwrights often assert that the catastrophe continues to this day, which can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, it appears constantly in their memory; it shaped their identity, and it influenced their lives. On the other hand, the effects of this catastrophe are still being felt. As is the nuclear discourse.

Nezdana and Arje's dramas tell or quote the nuclear texts whose important topic is the aftermath of the catastrophe and the zone, which is interpreted by playwrights in a literal way: as a specific place in space-time, a zone of contamination, alienation, but also symbolic as a homeland or patrimony, heritage or mother earth. It is a very ambiguous place: dangerous and giving a sense of security, isolation and asylum, full of death and life, exotic and native, paradise lost and recovered, non-place and place of memory, anti-utopia and heterotopia, *locus horridus* and *locus amoenus*. In both dramas, the action takes place in a zone of exclusion that has its own peculiarities.

The plot of Arje's drama takes place in the displacement zone around the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, near Pripyat. In the drama, the zone is seemingly the *locus amoenus*. In an old cottage Slava lives with his twenty-eight-year-old mentally disabled son, Wowczyk, and her mother called Baba Prysia. In Nezdana's drama, *Lost Fugitives*, the zone is apparently shown as *locus amoenus*, as an asylum. On the one hand, it is an asylum for security, a convenient hiding place from what is beyond the zone. On the other hand, in the zone, those who are the other are closed because they are tainted.

The protagonist of the drama, a twenty-two-year-old student of journalism and a defector goes to the zone. He decided to leave the army, not only because he did not want to kill people and was afraid of crossing the line between man and murderer, but also because in the army every soldier is treated as a slave deprived of his own will. And he wanted to be free, to decide for himself. Running away from the soldiers who were chasing him, he decides to take refuge in the zone. Initially, he was perceived as an outsider, a threat to a stable and secluded world. However, when it turns out that Lukash comes from this place, his grandmother lived here and his family home was here, he is accepted into the Chernobyl community.

The exclusion zone in both dramas is a separate world that is not appropriate to the world outside the zone. These worlds are different from each other and at the same time

incomprehensible to each other. They even differ in their understanding of time. While the zone lives in a circular, unchanging cycle, where everything has its day, hour, and time, with a beginning and an end, collide. The world outside of the zone lives in a simple, linear time, devoid of day and night, subordinated solely to work. In the zone, death dominates, and when a new life is to appear, another life must end. When Lukash's girlfriend (Zoryan) becomes pregnant and a new life appears, the eldest resident of the zone must leave. This is a place where rituals can be used to bring someone back to life. It is a place where the past meets the present and the future.

Zoryan is a Canadian biologist who conducts research in the zone. She came to Ukraine looking for her heritage: her parents came from here. She searched for a Ukraine known for legends, songs, and romances, and found it in the zone, not outside it. "This is Ukraine" - she says.

Ukraine, which is reborn, which is coming back. There was a scientist who said: mutation is good, all changes are mutations. And there were Ukrainians. This is Chernobyl; now people will be different, they will be Ukrainians.

The zone is therefore a place of dying and rebirth. Zoryana is in the zone because she considers it special. It is a place where nature adapts to the new reality. “Nature simplifies - it returns to the old genres, cleaner, stronger. It's a time machine, you know? You are becoming the past." It is a world in which man has lost his privileged position.

Chernobyl was the symbolic end of the Anthropocene and the belief in human superiority over other creatures. As one of the characters in Nezdana's drama says: "bees have a more developed intuition and a will to survive. When people walked around in the presence of radiation and they questioned it, bees hid to survive. Bees knew before people, turned out to be smarter and smarter than them. The world of the zone is a magical world in which "mermaids, talking catfish, and other freaks live", in which Lukash uses an instrument to lead rats out of the zone and where the dead people in the form of animals visit the living.

This is the place where miracles happen as a result of radiation, and sterile women like Zoryana get pregnant. It is a site without politics. "We live here - says Slava from the drama Arje - as with God behind the stove, and there, people have been possessed by hell for a long time." And further: "The disaster in the power plant has devastated us to dust."

She shows two different sides of the zone: on the one hand, there is a magical and safe place, on the other, it is a place of dying. The zone is treated by outsiders as a dead zone, and by

inhabitants as a safe zone, because it is secluded, far from the consumer world. This is how the inhabitants of the zone perceive their reality. The world is perceived by one of the interlocutors similarly, who says: “We are prisoners of materialism, and materialism imprisons us in the world of objects. Chernobyl is a way out to infinity.” Aleksievich (2012) Everyone sees the zone differently: it can be a memory, a radioactive place, an escape from everyday life or a terra incognita.

Living in a zone is like going back in time. Slava tries to respect the laws imposed in the zone, such as the prohibition of gathering and hunting, and eating what has grown or has lived in the exclusion zone. Meanwhile, Baba Prisia lives as if nothing had happened. She does not want to be ashamed or renounce her land and its fruits. She is not afraid of radiation. She has spent all her life in her village, she knows her very well: both her real world, as well as in the magical or fantastic world. She curses the world outside, which treats her world as a degeneration:

> Let black blood pour out of their eyes and ears, and let them choke on blood, and let no one bury them ... Let their wives give birth to ashes mixed with worms and poisonous monkeys, and the wives of their helpers, especially the wives of vendor cops (…) Let them give birth to biting, smelly, two-headed mutants with horns instead of eyes and ass on their heads.

There is no light or sewage system in the contamination zone, no shops, no neighbors, no health service, no harvesting, and no breeding or hunting of animals. It is a zone where people live like wild animals and are treated as entertainment or curiosity. But they themselves – like Wowczyk – want to be perceived as people. But unfortunately, their very origin makes them residents of Chernobyl, "dissenters"; therefore, they are nowhere safe –neither inside nor outside of it. It turns out that the zone is not a pleasant, safe, regenerating place (*locus amoenus*), but rather a polluted, terrible place (*locus horridus*), inhabited by personifications of human emotions or physical states. Therefore, the people who live in the zone are considering leaving the idealistic place.

Wowczyk, for example, dreams of leaving the zone. The area outside the zone seems to be a new place, adequate for an adult experience, freedom and self-determination. Although Slava calls Chernobyl her misfortune. She knows that she cannot live outside of the zone. Her attempts to leave her homeland ended in failure: the sole solution was to return to the zone.

In Nezdana's drama, the inhabitants of the zone are refugees – each of them had a similar reason to stay in the zone. Everyone wanted to hide in it - as Pavlo –Lukash's father, says – some from life, some from the past, others from people. Everyone wants to stay in this place until the end of their days. The zone in Nezdana's piece is seemingly just an idyll. It is inhabited by unhappy, lonely people who do not fit in with the other world. Everyone in the zone is dead: they literally die by radiation, they die of longing for the old world and their family, they die because they do not want to live, and they have come to terms with death. As grandmother Fedya, the zone's oldest resident, says: "after the explosion, they all stayed here – as if buried alive."

The protagonists of Arje manage to leave the zone solely after going on a posthumous journey to another world by a subway built by green men. Nezdana's characters are more fortunate and stronger: they decide to leave the zone and start over. Although Lukash's father is not ready to face the outside world yet, he needs time to make the decision to leave the zone; his son has decided to leave the past and focus on the present. He is ready to assume the responsibilities of a father and knows that he can only raise a child outside the realm of contamination. The child motivates him to take off the dark glasses through which he has seen the world so far and to believe in his strength. He no longer wants to be held hostage to the zone.

Another protagonist of the drama, Wasil, also decides to burn down the door that symbolized the past for him and linked him with the past; on this door, he carried the bodies of his family's deceased members for burial. He decides to have a new family. He wants to feel like a human being, not a piece of wood addicted to wood. Together with Karina and her son, Arsen, he decides to leave the zone. The protagonists of Nezdana do not want to live in the meantime, they also do not want to live in the past, and they do not want to feel like a victim. They want to take responsibility for their lives.

Conclusion

Contemporary Ukrainian playwrights attempt to describe and tame a zone of unspeakable experience in their dramas. Although the Chernobyl catastrophe was not the first experience of the end of the world in Ukraine, it has become synonymous with the apocalypse. Mychailo Kuryk called the catastrophe at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant an ecological catastrophe of Ukrainian souls (Radecka, 2017).

They present the experience of an apocalypse that destroys the existing order. On the one hand, the Chernobyl disaster disrupted the biological order: the earth and the house ceased to be a safe, idyllic place and became a place of danger, radiation, and lethal. It is also the destruction of the social order: people began to be divided into Chernobyl and non-Chernobyl inhabitants, residents of the zone and residents of areas outside the zone. It represented the destruction of the cultural order: from the atomic age to the post-atomic age, from modernism to postmodernism, and from the anthropocene to the necrocene. And finally, the destruction of the political order – from the Soviet Union to Ukraine – Chernobyl was interpreted as the beginning of Ukrainian independence. (Zabuzko, 2022)

The Chernobyl disaster is therefore the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. This event prompted the playwrights to point out the subject of the process of self-awareness and the place of man in the new reality, especially in the reality of the zone, which can be treated as a metaphor for the culture of danger and salvation. After all, negative experience has become the basis for the formation of a specific cultural identity: an identity anchored between the past and the future. Thus, playwrights describing the zone and life after the catastrophe build a bridge between what is real and fantastic, the past and the future, *locus horridus* and *locus amoenus*. They show there is no big difference between zone and non-zone. The way of perceiving them depends on the position whether in or out. Nowhere is *locus amoenus,* and nowhere is *locus horridus*. Both are created by people.

The playwrights represented the first and second generations and used both the statements of witnesses and all the ways of presenting the zone and its inhabitants known to them from childhood, starting with the experience of a separate social status, which became important in shaping the identity of Chernobyl residents who were treated as harmful because they were radioactive, but also privileged because they were entitled to help from the West. It was an experience of exile from fatherhood, compassion, and fear, through folkloric understanding of the effects of radiation on humans, which showed the electromagnetic effect as triggering the supernatural abilities of the zone's inhabitants, to science fiction stories, in which extraterrestrial life and UFOs were the dominant themes. These often-contradictory ways of explaining the causes and effects of the catastrophe led to antagonistic descriptions of the zone that appeared as both *locus horridus* and *locus amoenus*. At the same time, the playwrights showed that living between the real and the fantastic world, the safe and the dangerous zone, the past and the future is impossible.

Similarly, being in two worlds simultaneously, leads to confusion. Hence, the characters of their dramas had to decide which world is more important to them. And as might be assumed, the younger characters chose the future and the world outside of the zone, and the older ones preferred to stay in the zone of paternity, the zone of exclusion. Young people are more open to the new world, building a reality different from the one they know. They choose to have a new experience.

It remains to be answered how contemporary Ukrainian playwrights, who stand between the witnesses and the second generation, talk about the Chernobyl apocalypse. Their texts are a consequence of experiencing and also working through a traumatic experience. After Chernobyl, as after the Holocaust, there was a temptation to remain silent – all the greater because the catastrophe was censored. And although, as literary theorists claim, "it seems that the only honest literary consequence derived from the ontology of nothingness (...) would have to be a burnt piece of paper," (Ubertowska, 2004) in the case of Chernobyl, an exposed piece of paper, the authors decided after both tragedies to talk about traumatic events.

They decided to present their own experiences. For this purpose, they resorted to the author's assertion by witnesses: they cited and reported events and conversations with event

participants. They supplemented them with features of postmodern literature, such as *linguism*, i.e. the domination of language over the content. Where the language seemed insufficient, there were cracks: pauses, downtimes, understatements. The language of the characters symbolizes the unspeakable but also indicates a certain difficulty in talking about the world after the catastrophe. The playwrights also use a combination of facts and fiction, fantasy, and irony. They explain events that seem unreal, referring to the world of legends, fairy tales and science fiction.

However, this is not solely an artistic operation but a reconstruction of various ways of presenting the catastrophe and the people who were contaminated with the radiation of Chernobyl. They join the documental narration with fiction and magic to tell others about a traumatic experience –about life after a catastrophe in the irradiated zone. According to the fundamental principle of post-traumatic culture, which shows the experience of crisis as a universal experience and a factor which constitutes subjectivity and identity, they make the zone a metaphor for the world: this world, which still is full of division, challenges, resignation, and dealing with trauma.

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