【講演】

Post-Chornobyl:
From (Non)Representation to an Ecocritical Reading
of Nuclear Trauma

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The Chornobyl accident was a catastrophic event that occurred on the 26th of April 1986, attaining, almost immediately, a trans-temporal and transnational significance. It underwent an epic transformation, escalating from a local disaster to a global one, and from being a historical event to an apocalyptic one. As a result, the disaster took on a metaphysical shape - gaining ecological, existential, and apocalyptic meaning. As was observed by the French cultural theorist Paul Virilio, Chornobyl represents a new kind of history, a "catastrophic history" (Алексиевич 2004)[1] that involves the contemporary world to signify "a catastrophe of which the long-term drama of Chornobyl remains symbolic" (Virilio 2006)[2].

Our article aims to examine the Chernobyl catastrophe as it has become embodied in the models of the Chornobyl genre in Ukrainian literature, particularly in its response to the (non)representation of nuclear trauma.

1. Introduction

The Chornobyl disaster exerted a strong influence on the growth of a new type of nuclear consciousness that connects socio-cultural, geopolitical and environmental issues. Cultural experts emphasize that "the history of the current period – of this new era of nuclear culture – begins with the Chornobyl disaster of 1986" (Spencer 2010: 233)[3]. Broadly speaking, the symbolic nature of Chornobyl correlates with other catastrophic events of the twentieth century, particularly with Auschwitz and Hiroshima. According to Virilio, like Auschwitz and Hiroshima, Chornobyl is a catastrophe of consciousness. What happened, is simply beyond imagination! This means "that there can be no understanding of this event, in as much as it transcends possible consciousness" (Алексиевич 2004)[4].

The nuclear apocalypse has become a significant cultural metaphor and a powerful source of imagery in modern cultural history. In its essence, it is today applicable to such disparate areas of investigation as technological progress and sociocultural roles of intellectuals, to the nature of insanity and the formation of human beings, or to the perception

of the stranger and the place of horror in human history. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is directly related to the concept of historical catastrophes and futuristic visions. Throughout the 20th century, nuclear imagery represented various narratives and psychological models in different literatures. For example, Hiroshima witnesses associate their impressions of the nuclear bombing with childhood images of the end of the world, separation, helplessness, or disappearance (Weart 1988:107)[5]. German nuclear literature links the nuclear apocalypse to genocide, preceded by the Holocaust and its gas chambers and crematoria.

In Ukrainian literature of the 1980s, Chornobyl undermined the very means of totalitarian representation, providing a visible manifestation of a distrust in the grand Soviet narratives on scientific progress and social justice. The imagination of the nuclear holocaust was from its very beginnings associated with the national and humanitarian tragedy. In this way, the Chornobyl nuclear trauma (non)representation became for artists both an ethical and aesthetic challenge. This task was particularly problematic in the framework of socialist realism as it sought to comprehend and represent an objective or final "truth" of reality.

Reflecting on the new forms of representation generated by the writings on Chornobyl, Marko Pavlyshyn has suggested a new term – the "Chornobyl genre". In his view, three trigger points determine the attributes of this genre, – "the first one is stylistic ("colloquial language" vs. "elevated style"); the second one is moral and synchronous (criticism vs. apologetics); and the third one is moral and diachronic (evaluation of the same phenomena from the standpoint of the past vs. present)" (Павлишин 1997: 177)[6]. Revealing the meaning of these concepts, Pavlyshyn addresses the phenomenon of (non)representation as a refusal to expose a global event through first-hand experience. For this purpose, the authors select "the most objective modes of expression," such as authentic interviews or documents collections. While documentary literature in its essence "maintains respect toward the awe and grandeur of the topic," writes the scholar, "fiction does not do that by definition and is, therefore, often disappointing by creating the impression of inadequacy" (Павлишин 1997: 179)[7]. He concludes that the Chornobyl genre should be defined by a "constant reference to the specificity and the problematic nature of the author's position regarding the topic" (Павлишин 1997: 179)[8].

It is the models of the Chernobyl genre and their response to the nuclear catastrophe in Ukraine that we now turn to examine.

2. Discourse of the Chornobyl (Non)representation

Among the numerous works on Chornobyl, Ivan Drach's poem *Чорнобильська мадонна* [*The Chornobyl Madonna*] (1988) drew a wide response still in the Soviet period.

Here, the "(non)representation" is introduced through one of the main rhetorical modes. The very intention to associate the Chornobyl tragedy with the symbolic image of the Madonna sets a rhetorical trap. On the one hand, it makes it possible to write about the Chornobyl Madonna as a cultural topic. The author's position, in this case, is reduced to the role of an impartial spectator: "to portray her the way my quill is able to describe her" (Драч 1988: 43)[9]. On the other hand, there is another possibility, the realization that there is no author who can portray the majestic and the eternal sense of the sacral: "You try to write about Her, yet She guides your hand, / You are merely an incapable pen, a worthless dust, a pencil." (Драч 1988: 43)[10]. The poem thus turns to the description of the elevated and extraordinary phenomena that diminish the creative individual. As the consequence, the author experiences a lack of faith in his own words: ("And I am speechless. Executed up to the last word").

In *The Chornobyl Madonna* Drach appeals to fragments rather than to the whole, to the voices of "others" rather than to his own voice. These fragments, – e.g., such images as Vasyl Kurylyk (William Kurelek)'s painting and a postcard; the tale of a soldier in a construction battalion about the naked footprints of a stranger's mother; the remarks of an old woman with a cow in cellophane fleeing the city to her house in the zone; the voices of a Chornobyl female tractor driver; or the Khreshchatyk Madonna, – form and extend the image of the mythological Chornobyl icon. As a result, this image becomes vividly and boldly multifaceted and multi-personal.

The semantic scope of Drach's poem is intensely variable. The impersonations of the Madonna change from the abstract, sacral, and majestic to the lifelike and corporeal. The text is also to the highest degree eclectic and polyphonic. Not only does it project the voices of specific characters (such as those of Kurylyk, the soldier, or the old woman), it also encompasses in the form of epigraphs the voices of a multitude of living authors who have written about the Chornobyl tragedy (epigraphs from Svitlana Iovenko's *Вибух* [*The Explosion*]; Volodymyr Yavorivsky's *Марія з полином у кінці століття* [*Maria with Wormwood at the End of the Century*]; Yuriy Shcherbak's *Чорнобиль* [*Chornobyl*]; Borys Oliynyk's *Випробування Чорнобилем* [*The Chornobyl Trial*]).

Even though the composition of the work appears fragmented, the epigraphs from contemporaneous works on Chernobyl serve to create coherence, enrich various plot peripeteia, and shape the writing on Chornobyl into a "text of texts." On the other hand, epigraphs from the works of classical Ukrainian writers (Taras Shevchenko, Pavlo Tychyna, and Vasyl Symonenko) broaden the scope of comparisons and amplify the significance of to this "text of texts". They also maintain the work's dominant style, – the elevated and mournful tone of the lyrical narrative.

Manifold shifts of contrasting stylistic dimensions – realistic and symbolic, sacral and secular – define the structure of the poem. Poetry is combined with prose, free verses with rhymed verses, and irony with sarcasm and sorrow. In particular, the poet directs his anger against those people, who liked to speak of their love to the motherland, but left her to her own devices the moment "the black atom shrugged". This sarcasm and accusations weaken the pathos of the poem. However, the tension of the voices and the stylistic shifts gradually vanish. The poem draws to a conclusion with a direct rhetorical appeal to the politician, power engineer, and scientist - containing criminal accusation.   In this way, a rhetorical justification of the lyrical speaker takes place, – by redirecting the fault to others, he hides in the silence: "And I, I, an adulator, / … Have lost my depraved voice, /and remain without speech for ages" (Драч 1988: 62)[11].

Although the work shows us that it is impossible to represent Chornobyl directly, it unveils to us how it can be accomplished indirectly –e.g., through a system of fragmentary devices, symbols, signs, epigraphs, and variant poetic voices. However, since Socialist realism still dictates that all artistic expression must reveal an author's ideological position, the author projects at the end the multifaceted guilt into one voice of absolute condemnation.

Drach's poem represents the post-apocalyptical nuclear discourse. According to Jacques Derrida, the post-apocalyptical discourse that appears after a catastrophe represents "the remainders of a recently destroyed correspondence". Destroyed by fire or by that which figuratively takes its place, it leaves nothing behind, not even "the cinder of cinders" (Derrida 1987:3)[12]. After a catastrophe, such a discourse arises from unconventional modes of communication, conversational interruptions, vanished fragments of writing, missing names (signatures), the remaining postcards and letters with faded out words, phrases, and whole messages. On the nature of this writing, he observes: "[W]hat is not said here (so many white signs) will never get there.…". This is "a letter to the extent that nothing of it remains that is, or that holds. It destines the letter to its ruin" (Derrida 1987: 249)[13].

In the new post-catastrophic writing, Derrida proposes to abandon the conventional communicative form of a message because of its uncertainty: "Who is writing? To whom? And to send, to destine, to dispatch what? To what address?" (Derrida 1987:5)[14]. He proposes to depart from the communicative act itself, because all the contacts have been disrupted, the language destroyed, the people wiped out, and the author and addressee are no longer obligatory parties of such an act. Therefore, post-catastrophic writing presupposes "[t]hat the signers and the addressees are not always visibly and necessarily identical from one envoi to the other, that the signers are not inevitably to be confused with the senders, nor the addressees

with the receivers, that is with the readers (you for example)" (Derrida 1987:5)[15].

The Chornobyl post-catastrophic discourse produced its own witness and its own destroyed correspondence. In 1997, a decade after the Chornobyl disaster, Svetlana Alexievich had collected survivors' testimonies in a book *Чорнобиль: хроніка майбутнього* [*The Chornobyl Prayer (A Chronicle of the Future)*]. These personal evidences are endowed with a tone of apocalyptic catastrophism. In the Preface to the English translation of the book (entitled Voices from Chornobyl. The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster, 1997), Keith Gessen, the translator, notes that some of the materials collected in the book are "macabre", but one thing that makes these personal evidences unique is "the very mundane mediocrity of these testimonies" (Alexievich 1997: X)[16]. The title highlights the specific form of the oral testimonies of those who were dying of radiation poisoning. Those, who asked the author to write down everything they felt and saw, uttering: "I do not understand it, and you probably will not understand, but write it down" (Алексиевич 2004)[17]. Alexievich emphasizes that in the process of taking down the stories of these terminally ill people, she had the impression that everything which was said had to do with the future, rather than with the past.

Svetlana Alexievich also stresses that Chornobyl is a phenomenon that cannot be depicted mimetically. This is why it stipulated the need to find a new method of the "non-representable" representation. Oksana Zabuzhko, who translated Alexievich's *The Chornobyl Prayer* into Ukrainian, notes that the author tends to refrain from direct speech and from conventional situations in which the narrator mediates between characters and readers and is entitled to express evaluative judgment. Being honest, the author tries not to impose her "own truth" as it would misrepresent the "partial "truths" of the survivors. The traditional method of socialist realism would have "dictated that the ultimate goal of such interviews is to obtain a confirmation of the author's ideas (Забужко 1998: 188)[18]. This is here no longer the case.

In the book, the Chornobyl disaster arises from the narratives of witnesses. It exists as a collective record of the memories of an objective truth, rather than as a fictionalized story. What transpires is hardly possible to put into words. For example, Mykola Khomych Kalugin, a father who lost his daughter, testifies that Chornobyl exists as the pain in his consciousness, and its story is a story of a treason. "When I talk about this," he says, "I have this feeling as if my heart tells me "you're betraying them"; "I need to describe it like a stranger … to suffer like this"; "I want to bear witness: my daughter died from Chornobyl. And they want us to forget about it" (Alexievich 1997: 33)[19]. Thus, the narrative goes beyond the limits of conventionality and fictionality. It culminates in the silence or broken speech of a "Chornobyl person".

In Alexievich's book, one man waives his right to speak. His speech is inconsistent

and choppy, he is at a loss for words. He is aware that his testimony is fragmentary and impossible to articulate. As a result, he merely alludes to himself as a "Chornobyl person", incapable to relate the actual experience: "We lived in the town of Pripyat. In that town", and "I'm not a writer. I won't be able to describe it. My mind is incapable of understanding it. And neither is my university degree. There you are: a normal person. A little man. You're just like everyone else, you go to work, you return from work. You get an average salary. Once a year you go on vacation. You're a normal person! And then one day you're turned into a *Chornobyl person*!" (Alexievich 1997: 31)[20].

It is a known fact that witnesses of catastrophic events are mostly incapable of mediating between the traumatic exposure and post-traumatic objectivity. According to Giorgio Agamben, all "testimonies contain at their core an essential lacuna; in other words, that the "survivors bore witness to something that was impossible to bear witness to. As consequence, commenting on the survivors' testimony necessarily meant to interrogate this lacuna or, more precisely, attempting to listen to it" (Agamben 1999:13)[21].

3. Discourse of the Uncanny and Chornobyl catastrophism

The metaphorical transformation of Chornobyl into a global symbolic concept represents one of the forms of the interrogation of the lacuna created by the nuclear discourse. In the 1990s the notions of a "*national Chornobyl*", a "*spiritual Chornobyl*", an "*ecological Chornobyl*", and a "*linguistic Chornobyl*" were widely used in Ukrainian literature to describe the variant shapes of catastrophic crises. Chornobyl was seen "not only a disaster of the natural environment, but also as a disaster of the inner world, a catastrophe of our morality and spirituality", a tragedy, signifying "the extinction of the nation" (Курик 2009)[22].

The very notion of the "*spiritual Chornobyl*" was developed by Ukrainian dissident poets and intellectuals of the 1960s, the so-called *Sixtiers* (*Shestydesiatnyky*) who adhered to concept of 'the power line of the Spirit' (Дроздовський 2011)[23]. This generation of Soviet Ukrainian intellectuals considered Chornobyl not merely as a literary topic (Ivan Drach, Ievhen Sverstiuk, Lina Kostenko, and Borys Oliynyk commented immediately on the Chornobyl disaster), but rather as a sign of a global *post-Soviet* crisis.

One of the major poets of the sixties, Lina Kostenko, has used Chornobyl to convey its ecological and humanitarian devastation. Born in the Polissia region, close to Chornobyl, Kostenko participated in expeditions organized to preserve cultural monuments in the Chornobyl zone. She has sought to replace the technogenic connotations, associated with the Chornobyl disaster, with ethical and national ones. Kostenko wrote:

Leave the studies of the technogenic aspects of the disaster to the experts. Let us address the subject with the people at its core. The consequences of the disaster on that 4000 square kilometer 'patch' of land in the very heart of the Slavic world are to the present day not properly known even in Ukraine. The entire domain of the ancient Polishchuk culture is disappearing before our very eyes [...], a fatal explosion has destroyed (blown off) all that we have so often and so passionately called /our/ 'culture and spirituality' (Махун 2005)[24].

The closing of the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant provoked Kostenko's emotions to create a novel, entitled *Записки українського самашедшего* [*Notes of a Ukrainian Madman*] (2010). The writer's subsequent disastrous perception of Chornobyl as a global phenomenon (*Ukraine as victim and cause of the globalization of disasters*, 2003) was based on catastrophism as a distinctive model of humanitarian thinking. Kostenko asserts that "What is globalized are not only the economics, or universal conditionality of interests. The conflicts and premises for the environmental, anthropogenic, and moral disasters are globalized as well" (Костенко 2003)[25].

Kostenko's novel *Notes of a Ukrainian Madman* clarifies the function of nuclear catastrophism. The novel can be seen as an embodiment of the Chornobyl apocalypse projected on the early 21st century. Apart from the rather naive plot of a young thirty-five-year-old programmer who is a representative of the *Nineties* and lives in an absurd world at the beginning of the current millennium, the book comprises a list of disasters, meticulously compiled from television news reports, rumors, and newspapers. The novel's protagonist comments ironically on contemporary history: «We have greeted the year 2000 in a proper manner. One neighbor jumped from the eighth floor. One acquaintance drowned herself in a bathtub. A new president came to power in Russia and started a new Chechen war" (Костенко 2011: 10)[26].

However, the authoress presents the story from the perspective of the disasters. This perspective influences both the personal events and shared national history. The protagonist is merely a tool transmitting news and information, an embodiment of media. News and disasters overshadow the world and turn it into a kaleidoscope, – "you shake it, and there's a new picture to delight the sight. You shake it, and there's something new. But now, the pictures are getting more and more terrifying with each shake" (Костенко 2011: 13)[27]. In fact, such images are abundant. Gradually, they start to substitute reality, transforming it into a permanent performance:

It's a disaster here, a terrorist attack there, a methane explosion somewhere. A military plane was accidentally blown apart by a bomb. Some sort of maniac began shooting at the passers-by. An unknown infection broke out there. Children on the bus were hold as hostages. A cable car fell in the Alps. A sect poisoned people with the gas in the Tokyo subway (Костенко 2011: 13)[28].

Real and imagined disasters are repeated, over and over again forcing the reader, as a witness, into the sublime world of horror and dread. Repressed complexes come into play via a catastrophic vision of the world and undermine the rational perception of the events. It seems that the life is but one permanent spectacle, that draws in Kostenko's protagonist. In the late 20th century, the dread became one of the distinctive marks of post-Soviet aesthetics. According to Mikhail Epstein, "Perhaps, in the recent years, the whole country experienced this "return of the repressed". Suddenly it noticed its "unnaturally black" shadow. Thus, the uncanny had become almost the main category of post-Soviet aesthetics" (Эпштейн 2003)[29].

Kostenko's novel captures three fundamental factors of post-Soviet discourse, i.e., the narrowing down of history to dreadful and catastrophic issues; the role of the media in the production of "reality"; and the transformation of the post-Soviet individual-bystander into a machine for media news transmission. Such characters are alienated from history. They are locked in an infantile state by parents behind a looking glass of the dread. Their encounter with real history gets a melancholic tone.

At first glance, in Kostenko's novel catastrophism is born with a sense of loss for a dearly loved belonging of some sort; in this case, the full-blooded Ukrainian nation. The melancholy attitude of the whole novel stems from the fact that this loss has already occurred. It cannot be stopped. And no kind of compensation, even the Orange revolution on Maidan itself, can bring it back. It can be assumed that this loss (and disaster itself) taps into an ideal vision of Ukraine, formulated by Kostenko as a representative of the generation of the *Sixtiers*. Since we do not hear the actual voice of the hero himself (he is but a means to broadcast the author's ideas), the author's perspective, as a representative of a generation leaving the stage of history, is imposed on the fate of later generations of the *Ninetiers*. This, in fact, drags them behind their forebears into catastrophic oblivion. We can therefore say that this sense of melancholy loss applies to the hero himself. He is denied the right to speak on his own behalf. It is worth noting that Kostenko has repeatedly confessed to copying her main hero's character from her own son, who was also a programmer.

In general, Kostenko's novel confirms that the mechanisms by which reality is negotiated through the media are becoming important in post-Soviet discourse, where key

events are transformed into informational events, and even a high-temperature nuclear explosion becomes, with the help of television, a cold nuclear explosion. Like the Maidan, Chornobyl can be transformed into information, which neutralizes the meaning and energy of events. The nuclear catastrophism thus becomes a mass media tool for freezing events, transforming them from being domestic and human to sublime and uncanny. Thus, discourse surrounding Chornobyl, enriched by catastrophism, demonstrates how an actual traumatic event is transformed into a mass media event of hyper-reality.

In the mass media discourse the Chornobyl explosion has been associated with the Apocalypse, the source of all disasters. Here, in the post-Chornobyl nuclear imagination, the human tragedy experiences a tangible transformation. Even the tragic (and heroic, in fact) death of Chornobyl firefighters – those who were first to take on the atomic fire and prevented a possible atomic explosion – gradually fades away against the background of an *imagined* apocalyptic catastrophe. Thus, Chornobyl is transformed into a set of data, and, as Jean Baudrillard has commented, "the observer who sees the bomb as sublime requires distance from immediate effects and threats of the bomb […] and cultural inoculation […]" (Baudrillard 1994: 56)[30]. Baudrillard draws an analogy between the atomic explosion and the informational explosion, which accelerates multiple representations of hyperreal images. It does not liberate a consciousness from the uncanny, but rather multiplies it and gives it an aesthetically-pleasing package.

Protesting against this, a Chornobyl person, Mykola Kalugin, a witness who refuses to speak and becomes symbolically "dumb," resists the fictitious (the sham) Chornobyl and challenges it with his own "little narrative"—his own truth. His testimony is directed against Chornobyl kitsch—the sale of memories or souvenirs of the tragedy and replications of the apocalypse found in popular culture and the media. "They turned Chernobyl into a house of horrors, although actually they just turned it into a cartoon. I'm only going to tell about what's really mine. My own truth," says a witness of Chornobyl (Alexievich 1997: 32)[31].

The Chornobyl representation becomes a phenomenon of the nuclear sublime. As early as 1984, Frances Ferguson (Ferguson 1984: 4 –10)[32] pointed out that nuclear sublimation functions in the same way as the other types of sublimation. The nuclear sublime refers to the salvation of humanity and the earth for the sake of "the unborn generations". But in the age of a nuclear bomb, it resonates with an image of Frankenstein and "the Gothic reversal of the sublime dream of self-affirmation, the fear that the presence of other people is totally invasive and erosive of the self" (Ferguson 1984: 8)[33]. Indeed, when we are dealing with nuclear sublime, we are talking about how to stay alive and remove oneself from the action of horror and sublime objects (i.e., how not to die) and how to surpass our fear of the nuclear holocaust

going beyond the power of nuclear imagination that locks us in the dread.

4. From Hyper-reality Towards the Ecocritical Discourse

Atomic catastrophes like Chornobyl confront human perception of time and space and resist human understanding. Contemporary ecocritical studies propose to consider such things as hyper-objects, – "things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (Morton 2013: 1)[34]. Such hyper-objects resist representation, they are often fragmentary, concentrate on individual victims and goes beyond the limits of reality. However, interest in cartography sparked after the disaster; in particular, the maps of the radioactive pollution became a popular text. Most important was the shift from geographical mapping to mental and ecological cartography in the minds of people who experienced Chornobyl. Distant travel destinations lost their attractiveness over journeys to nearby haunts and undiscovered mental expansions. Soon, symbolic realities from cultural texts of various times and nations overshadowed both the impressions of the factual occurrence of the disaster and of the experienced suffering.

Eventually, a virtual version of the Chornobyl hyper-object has evolved. It undermines the faith in an observable, authentic reality. An all-pervasive, indiscernible, immense radiation continues to reach the most unexpected and remotest places, destroys geographical markers, integrates with consciousness, and generates nonorganic, artificially designed creatures. In the case of Chornobyl, the very understanding of corporeality has also changed. Even the body has been transformed, it has become deformed, hybrid, or even entirely artificial. In the hyperreality the Chornobyl's radiation is spreading arbitrarily and uncontrollably. Thus, it is impossible to project it on the map with established and clear-cut boundaries. On the contrary, it creates "zones" of pollution, defined as "stains." Therefore, it does correspond to a rhizomatic picture. The picture of space thus reminds us of a punched card with separate holes – dead zones.

The Chornobyl tragedy brought in a world of hyperreality and sharpened the perception of virtual dimensions. This transformation has been experienced in the most extreme manner because it contrasted with - and destroyed the adherence to the "absolute," "objective," and "positive" reality, which socialist realism had for so long propagated. It destroyed the foundations of the "truth" upon which the socialist system had built its worldview. At the same time, it revealed the possibility of a complete replacement of the real world with another one. What Chernobyl accomplished was to ruin the linearity of time and space, fragmented it into zones, and showed that the tactile senses might have been deceiving. It also instilled a distrust in nature. Invisible virtual rems and roentgens obliterated physical presence and trust in real

things, imposed virtual images, and brought forth phantasmic visions. Alongside the real Kyiv, there emerged *The Chornobyl zone* - the virtual place associated with monsters and mutants, and with stalkers, just like the ones depicted in the famous film *Stalker* by Andrei Tarkovsky. It loomed over Kyiv like an empty hole where time went backwards, releasing abnormal energy.

Meanwhile, the virtual hyper-objective Chornobyl has become a favorite location for science fiction films and was used in numerous videogames, e.g., *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* series (*Call of Prypiat*, *Wind of Change*, *Shadow of Chornobyl*, etc.). In the videogames, the photorealistic "zone of exclusion" is rendered according to its "real" prototype. The virtual reality is superimposed on the "real" map of the Prypiat city, the Ianiv train station, the Jupiter plant, the village of Kopachi, and so on. Games such as *Counter-Strike*. *Chornobyl* also gained popularity. These games depict the zone and set forth a whole series of wars where the virtual world defeats the real one.

The hyperreality of nuclear imagination relies on the aesthetics of the sublime. Carolyn Dekker points out that seeing the nuclear sublime as an aesthetic landscape requires both cultural inoculation and a certain estrangement from the natural world: "The observer who sees the bomb as sublime requires distance from the immediate effects and threats of the bomb […]" (Dekker 2014: 23)[35]. To overcome the fear of the nuclear holocaust means to go beyond the power of nuclear imagination and break out from the dread.

According to renown Longinus, "a well-timed flash of sublimity scatters everything before it and reveals the full power of the speaker in a single stroke" (Longinus 1960: 125)[36]. In modern times, the sublime is treated not only as the effect of an elevated object but a result of the speaker's distancing from the *terrible* (le grandeur), e.g., when a person is in a safe place and yet repeatedly imagines and feels danger. Actually, in such a case, the danger exists only in the imagination, while the individual, gripped by fear, seeks to overcome it - not physically, but rather internally and emotionally. In other words, the sublime experience provides for both cultural immersion and sufficient estrangement from the danger that allows us to view it as *the other*, as an aesthetic phenomenon rather than a real fact.

The position of a witness who must speak about the "frightful object" as an unspeakable hyper-object, differs. Oral testimonies are supposed to overcome the trauma of nuclear disaster and the sense of a bewitching fear of the nuclear sublime as something unspeakable but, as Dekker argues, "the nuclear-sublime attitude fetishizes sight and witness (imagined or actual) […]" (Dekker 2014:24)[37]. Post-apocalyptic ecocritical thinking pulls a witness out of the unique position of a nuclear holocaust survivor and changes the focus of their story. Usually, their purpose is to witness and document the events, that, in fact, cannot be witnessed. One can only say that it was "inevitable" and "uncontrolled."

These constraints of Chornobyl's (non)representation stipulated a new genre of Chornobyl writing, – the literature of stalkers. Recently, a new type of a Chornobyl witness has come to the fore. Representatives of a younger generation have started to talk about their sense of belonging to the Chornobyl disaster. It is mainly, those who were 4-5 years old children, when the catastrophe happened. These people claim that they were raised in an atmosphere of Chornobyl disaster reminiscences. In either case, the disaster has had a long-lasting impact on their lives and families. Thus, they want to visit Chornobyl as they feel they have a right to this place. Moreover, they want to be Chornobyl witnesses and strongly object to the idea of transforming Chornobyl into a hyperreal object.

It is this generation that established the new Chornobyl literature. In particular, Ukrainian writer Markiyan Kamysh and his novel *Оформляндія або Прогулянка в Зону* [*A Stroll to the Zone*] (2015) is a vivid example of the latter. The novelist calls his writing "a literature of first-hand experience". Kamysh was born in 1988, soon after the disaster. However, it left a mark on his family. His father's participation in the liquidation of the Chornobyl disaster led to his early death. In the novel, Markiyan Kamysh depicts the experience of an illegal stalker in the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone. In fact, the protagonist is exploring the Zone (or *Chornobylschyna* – Chornobyl region) as a newly discovered land. The novel is not just a mere series of short stories of Zone adventures, but a text of a peculiar immersion into an "alien" territory. One can view it as an exoticization of the Zone. Indeed, it is not a coincidence, that the word "alienation" is widely used in the text of the novel.

Kamysh's description of one day in the Zone is, in fact, a testimony:

"Spent a night on a bare concrete wrapped in an oilcloth. It was about 4°C. Got a flask of booze for breakfast. Burned a fire with a book. Paved my way to the North, into the thicket of the Belarus border, to the villages marked on the map. The villages that have never been photographed. The path led me through the thick fog, over broken bridges and frosted slippery logs threatening you with an inescapable fall unless you keep your balance. Tiredness, strands of hair covered in hoarfrost... Had left 40 kilometers behind and reached the warmest potbelly stove in the whole world in the village with an old imperial pavement. The border is a bottle's throw away from the village center. It's a genuine alienation that punches you with the fists of silence and blows out the candle of your tranquility. It is right here, where the touristic routes are not paved, where the excursion buses do not come. Some people come here once a year. To commemorate. Some do not..." (Камиш 2015)[38].

The novel about the Zone aims to depict its contemporary reality. However, the mental map is at the heart of the novel. As Kamysh admitted, he had drawn his own map of impressions, geography, locations and himself. To name any special features in "*A Stroll to the Zone*", I'll say it is the literature of the real experience, geopoetics. It is a piece where no human beings but places play a major role - the names of the towns and villages and the peculiar mapping of the landscape (Kamianka, Hornostaipil, Hubyn, Kopachi, Krasne, Olshanka, the railway station Vilcha, Buriakivka, the settlement "Rassokha", Dytiatky, a potbelly stove in Novoshepelychi). Here, the author concentrates on his personal impressions, e.g. "Each time I headed to the Zone I found another target. […] I wanted to poke my nose into every bit and chip of this wreckage of the past. And each time I solemnly promised myself that it was for the very last time" (Камиш 2016: 89)[39]. In a certain sense, it is an escapist view. Recollections about the people the author meets are on the margins of the story. The stalker expedition does not focus on communication with these people, on the establishment of contacts, or on the process of the Zone re-settlement. Here, the Zone of Alienation is filled with personal alienation.

Thus, the Zone is transformed into an object of the reality instead of the virtual topoi. The Zone serves as a parallel reality, a contrast to the city, civilization and mundane life. It is noteworthy, that another book about the Zone appeared just a year before *A Stroll to the Zone*. The documentary novel *A Chornobyl Illegal Alien's Notebook* by Kyrylo Stepanets was published in 2014. It describes the same places and presents similar stalker experiences as the Kamysh's book. Both authors appeal to the authentic experience and describe real places. They both share their attitude to the Zone as to the desired object. As Stepanets observes, "I was about to go on a date with the Zone" (Степанец 2014: 10)[40]. In fact, the stalker stories bring back the reality of Chornobyl that was repressed by the trauma. Stepanets and Kamysh restore the reality of the places, dates, and routes in the Chornobyl Zone that were lost or had vanished by the virtual phantasms. The writer records this reality thoroughly and objectively: "This book is a confession of an illegal stalker in Chornobyl. At the same time, it is a historical handbook on human settlements of the Ukrainian Polissia abandoned after the Chornobyl disaster. It is also a guidebook written by a person who had gone all around following hidden animal trails" (Степанец 2014: 5)[41].

The Kamysh *reality* is violent and melancholic, menacing and desired, exotic and native, life-giving and at the same time deadly dangerous. It manifests itself as a *second presence* in a post-presence world, a world after the catastrophe. The reality for the stalker-narrator consists in the repeated illegal expeditions to the Zone, i.e., it is a permanent recurrence of the path between life and death. It is a vicious circle of the City comebacks and

the new expeditions to the Zone. Thus, a posttraumatic reality in the Zone is created via repetitions and by leaving behind traces of presence. It is a process of circling the Zone routes, its embodiment, filling it with the details of the lost time, and obscene words of Zen meditations. The heart of the *reality* in the Kamysh's novel is an attempt to extrude the traumatic symbolic (social) issues connected to the Chornobyl disaster and the tragedy of his father's death.

5. Conclusion

It is undeniable that the (non)representation of Chornobyl has become a powerful imageable tool in the culture and literature of the 21st century. Still, Chornobyl is a topical sign of the present and can create new and perhaps yet unforeseen artistic forms. After all, atomic non-reality is an imaginary reality that is constructed within stylistic discourse and grows out of the creative imagination of those who are susceptible to the sublime. We agree with Susan Sontag that fantasy can normalize or neutralize that which is "psychologically unbearable:"

"For one job that fantasy can do is to lift us out of the unbearably humdrum and to distract us from terrors, real or anticipated-by an escape into exotic dangerous situations which have last-minute happy endings. But another one of the things that fantasy can do is to normalize what is psychologically unbearable, thereby inuring us to it. In the one case, fantasy beautifies the world. In the other, it neutralizes it" (Sontag 1965: 42)[42].

Clearly, nuclear images are not limited to the representation of the catastrophe and its consequences. They have, in our day and age, a direct and important therapeutical dimension. After all, as Christopher Norris writes, to seriously "think about the possibility of a nuclear war, a very real and present possibility, is to think beyond the limits of reason itself" (Norris 1995: 245)[43]. It is the ecocritical representation of Chornobyl that helps to avoid such a view on the atomic catastrophe.

In the case of an ecocritical approach, everyone who in some way still suffers from the nuclear explosion (and Chornobyl radiation) has a right to speak, and perhaps even an obligation to narrate their experience. Indeed, the field of nuclear literature is being significantly expanded, extending far beyond the boundaries of nuclear testimonies to such apocalyptic representations that predict total extinction, and therefore, the disappearance of human imagination itself.

Ecocritical writing about Chornobyl continue to incorporate environmental issues, as

well as the regeneration of nature, the fate of animals, the role of the ecosystem, the fate of those who live there and those who moved away, and the cultural, national, and gender transgressions that have been provoked by the Chornobyl disaster. In some sense, ecocritical thinking helps to define the boundaries of nuclear hyperreality. It places all aspects of the nuclear explosion: nuclear colonization, nuclear representation, the cross-cultural implications of atomic explosion, nuclear writing, as well as environmental, cultural, and informational aspects of atomic explosion at the core of its analysis.

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Пост-Чернобыль:
от (не)репрезентации к экокритическоему прочтению нуклеарной травмы

Тамара Гундорова

Статья посвящена анализу способов репрезентации нуклеарной травмы в так называемом «чернобыльском жанре» (Марко Павлишин). В частности, рассматриваются различные модели художественного отражения чернобыльской аварии в украинской литературе 1980-2010 годов. В центре внимания - эволюция чернобыльского нуклеарного нарратива: фиксация невозможности описать травматическое событие в формах фрагментированного письма (Иван Драч); погружение в ужасное национального катастрофизма (Лина Костенко); виртуальное превращение Чернобыля в гиперреальный объект (S.T.A.L.K.E.R.); переприсвоение травмированной реальности в сталкерской литературе (Маркиян Камиш). В статье обсуждается проблема нуклеарной сублимации, роль свидетеля, природа постапокалиптического письма. Особое внимание уделяется способам преодоления ускользающего от репрезентации опыта травмы. Одним из способов преодоления такого «(не)репрезентированного», как утверждается в статье, становится экокритическое письмо, направленное на картографирование экосреды и Зоны как территории свободы в сталкерской литературе.