

АКТУАЛЬНІ ПРОБЛЕМИ ТЕОРІЇ ЛІТЕРАТУРИ ТА ЛІТЕРАТУРНОЇ КРИТИКИ

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I. SUKHENKO,

*PhD in Philology, Associate Professor
of Mass Media and International Communication Studies Department,
Oles Honchar Dnipropetrovsk National University*

«NUCLEAR ENERGY» NARRATION WITHIN UKRAINIAN ECOCRITICAL CONTEXT

The thesis is focused on studying the concept of «nuclear energy» within Ukrainian ecocritical studies in the aspect of distinguishing «Chernobyl genre» as its implementation in the local formats of eco-critical writing as well as its common transnational model. This vision involves finding out the ways of eco-critical vision on concepts «nuclear energy» and «nuclear catastrophe» and even more – investigating the techniques of developing «nuclear energy» narration for about two decades. The phenomenon of stereotypes about «nuclear energy» narration in Ukrainian ecocritical writing practice and ecological policies in the context of studying the relation between human beings' activity and the natural world within the contemporary mass consciousness stereotypes is under study here with stressing the East-European visions of ecocritical ideas about «nuclear energy», where the images of the Chernobyl (as bright examples of «nuclear catastrophe») in environmental literature are under further discussion. This can create the situation under which the various local «East-European consciousness» features of eco-critical writing are to transmit into some global principles of «nuclear energy» narration, giving a chance to work out some new points of non-national principles of eco-critical writing in the contemporary mass information consciousness, which is of great importance for reconsidering mass stereotypes on «nuclear energy» in the post-nuclear-disaster period.

Key words: ecocriticism, ecocritical narration, «nuclear energy», eco-consciousness, ecocritical imperatives.

«Nuclear energy» narration in Ukrainian ecocritical studies is best represented with «Chernobyl genre» amalgamating the works related to the explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant on April 26, 1986 which was considered to be a watershed event in the Ukrainian ecological consciousness. But «nuclear energy» narration did not find prompt representation in Ukrainian literature about nature. That became some years later. But in the first year – only brief official information and plenty of gossip about «something has happened» and occasional meetings with people, evacuated from the Zone. It was later, when this accident became the most painful and evident symptom of what the Ukrainians call the «ill society». This nuclear catastrophe as well as other alarming factors made the Ukrainian society face the necessity of getting informed of the truth about itself and building all spheres of life on the basis of a viable moral structure. The literature of the post-Chernobyl period should be viewed through the lens of how the Chernobyl nuclear accident helps Ukrainian literature address questions of truth and human morality.

The accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant produced a peculiar surge of ecologically-directed publications as well as enabling the appearance of «ecological nonfiction/documentaries» (so-called «writings on ecological affairs») and «ecological memoirs» (representing the «writer's ecological approach»). Ukrainian writers' responses to the nuclear accident were extremely

dynamic; among them are documentary notes/nonfiction works such as *Yuriy Shcherbak, Reasons and Consequences* (1986), *Yuriy Shcherbak, Chernobyl* (1989), *Volodymyr Yavorivskiy, Maria with Mugwort at the End of the Century* (1988), *Ivan Druch, Chornobyl Madonna* (1988), *Borys Oliynyk, Seven* (1988), *Lidiya Viryna, At That Fire Night* (1989), *Vitaliy Mykulskiy, Fire Destructors* (1996) and others. But the critics' responses to these and other works were restrained and low-key. Sometimes a newly published work went by unnoticed.

The reasons for this are well known. In the first years after the Chernobyl tragedy reporting any information dealing with the accident was prohibited; journalists and literary authors were only allowed to repeat the only official – governmental – point of view on this catastrophe. There was a complete factual blackout on the actual event. But some time later, in spite of all obstacles and prohibitions, Ukrainian society became aware of Chernobyl as a technical accident that had global ecological effects, the lingering consequences of which will be experienced by future generations. This awareness of the real events that occurred at Chernobyl reached the mass media in part due to the publication of memoirs of the Chernobyl catastrophe by first-hand witnesses.

All these works – journalistic and literary – are obviously united through their common subject matter, though they differ in form. This diversity of narrative form in writings about Chernobyl gives critics the opportunity to study their common generic features and define «the Chernobyl genre», which was introduced in Ukrainian literature by Marko Pavlyshyn in a work titled *Chernobyl Theme and the Problem of Genre* (1992), which stresses various aspects of the social context of the Chernobyl accident and its aftermath [13, p. 46].

The stylistic tensions of this «Chernobyl genre» lie in the fact that on the one hand Chernobyl is a real historical event, which many people experienced, but on the other hand this catastrophe is an event which had a much more specific and individualized impact on each author's life. This gives rise to the question: Is it appropriate to cover this global catastrophe via a single person's point of view and consciousness? In response to this implicit question, Yuriy Shcherbak created a documentary novel containing actual interviews (*Yuriy Shcherbak, Chernobyl*, 1989), Volodymyr Yavorivskiy, along similar lines, wrote his novel *Maria with Mugwort at the End of the Century* (1988) by arranging real documents and photos. They represent their authorial perspectives as «honesty» and «humility»: these authors state that they did not create fictional texts based on the information about Chernobyl, instead allowing the facts to represent the real situation. Their works sometimes contain the phrase: «*After the accident I repeatedly managed to visit the Zone*» [14, p. 19]; [15, p. 16], which can represent a new authorial topos in the literature, a topos emphasizing the author's need to connect time and time again with the historical source of his or her literary topic. The documentary and multi-perspectival aspect of Ukrainian literary representations of the socio-ecological effects of Chernobyl are highly reminiscent of the Japanese author, Ishimure Michiko's classic work, *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow* (1990). By employing a multi-voiced technique merging fiction and journalism, this novel responds to the tragedy of Minamata Disease in the 1960s, another industry-caused contamination which negatively impacted both the natural environment and the human community.

One distinctive aspect of «the Chernobyl genre» deals with documentary literary notes which did not intend to be a journalistic coverage of the catastrophe. «Chernobyl must be a fact of the Ukrainian literature», says *Yuriy Shcherbak*. He framed his series of interviews (he wrote down the interviews with a number of people who were variously related with the Chernobyl accident) with professional author's «pathetic high style» [14, p. 19].

Even more, Chernobyl can be regarded as a sign of future within literary and artistic categories, because this contamination event inspired writers and artists from the region to apply their voices and imaginations to the meaning of the disaster, just as writers and artists are currently attempting, nearly thirty years later, to develop new aesthetic responses to the phenomenon of global warming. «The Chernobyl epic» was represented as a global tragedy. It needed new literary forms, as Ukrainian scholars have noted: «this form appeared – literary memoirs – they helped to cover the information what was under control by the government» [6, p. 211]. Literary memoirs not only shaped non-official information about the Chernobyl accident (which happened not once but significant disorders and breakages took place some days long before the main exposure of Reactor 4), but also gave the details of those days'

social reality. Written by the poets and writers, such literary memoirs depicted the Chernobyl catastrophe and post-Chernobyl events in the pathetic and tragic style.

There exists another answer to the question: «Is it appropriate to articulate this global catastrophe from the position of subjectivity?» Since the very beginning of its existence literature has always employed «high» genres and forms in the service of elevated themes. The poets of the Chernobyl period felt that it was the epic genre that best corresponded to the implications of such a global catastrophe. Borys Oliynyk in his narrative poem «Seven» assumed the responsibility to solve the traditional epic's tasks, such as myth-making, symbol-making and hero-creating.

Another significant aspect of «the Chernobyl genre» deals with the ambiguity at the synchronous level. While speaking about global relations between humanity and science, about morality within the technological progress, the authors, who write within «the Chernobyl genre», try to describe not the Universe and the macrocosmos, but depict the small details of the microcosmos – a contaminated flower, a cow covered with cellophane, mushroomers with respirators, etc., a mother with her dead child. And this situation can be easily explained – the authors, who immediately visited the nuclear station after the main exposure within journalists' groups, did not realize the size of the catastrophe and at that moment they were sure: the wise governing Communism party can arrange this chaos and put everything in the harmonious order. Only some years later they as well as others concerned managed to realize the real scale of the catastrophe.

Some western scientists considered the Chernobyl catastrophe to be the result of a complex combination of causes: government decisions about using the nuclear energy and building the nuclear power plant near Kiev, the significant technical changes in building and constructing the nuclear reactor, the lack of responsibility in managing it, the bureaucratic paralysis and even criminal withholding of information about the situation as the first reaction to the catastrophe – all these factors stemmed from the weaknesses of the whole system in its economic, political, social and ideological aspects.

The «Chernobyl genre» can also be characterized by the fact that its factional works are almost entirely devoid of apologists (defending the government and the nuclear authorities), yet they still do not express a critical attitude toward those who should be responsible for the accident. The critical vector is directed at the depravity of the contemporary society in general – but what society? – Ukrainian? Soviet? modern?

The next special feature of «the Chernobyl genre» touches upon the role of literature in this particular post-Chernobyl situation as well as in the contemporary transitional society in general. The authors of that time faced a paradoxical situation – being a tool of explicit political propaganda in the society of that time (as Ukraine was still part of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s), while responding to an implicit obligation to cover the real information and true facts about the Chernobyl accident. Under the condition of total information secrecy about the Chernobyl catastrophe, the writers and poets faced a profound challenge in their work – they could not adhere to the previous Soviet guidelines for covering public events, but their civic responsibility as the voice of the public did not allow them to keep silent. In this awkward position, most writers had to search for a compromise between their functions of «the writer as a spokesperson of the government» and «the writer as a responsible citizen». This difficult situation sometimes resulted in fictional works where authors publicly apologized and expressed regret for the previous glorification of the industrial objects leading to ecological catastrophes (see, for instance, *The Chernobyl Madonna* by Ivan Druch, which appeared in 1988).

Having made the whole world quake, the Chernobyl catastrophe was promptly represented in various literary genres: poems and ballads, narratives, stories and novellots in various languages. After paying a visit to the contamination zone, journalists and literary writers started to depict the tragedy through reportage and essays. They gathered facts and received permission to write about some aspects of the catastrophe. And Russian authors were the first to respond to the accident in their works. The 1987 play *The Sarcophagus* (*Саркофар*) by Russian journalist and writer *Volodymyr Gubarev* is generally thought to be the most famous Russian literary work about Chernobyl. He was among those journalists who arrived at the Chernobyl nuclear station within some hours after the accident. This play was staged in more than 100 theatres in the

world and only one in Ukraine (performed by a Russian theatre from Tambov in 1987). In 1989 in the UK this play was honored with Laurence Olivier Award.

One of the first Russian poems about Chernobyl was the 1988 work called «The Chestnut Silence» («Тишина каштанів») by *Oleksandr Tkachenko*. In depicting the Chernobyl catastrophe, he avoids answering the questions «Who is in charge?» and «What should be the punishment?» but is particularly concerned with how our descendants will evaluate Chernobyl. Without being a witness of or participant in the Chernobyl nuclear accident, the author calls for the world audience's attention to the catastrophe.

A similar approach to the tragedy in Ukrainian literature came from *Yuriy Shcherbak* with his documentary notes and memoir, titled *Chernobyl* (1989). As a doctor and a researcher, he reveals his observations, analyzes them, makes certain conclusions, searches for the causes, interrogates those in charge, and suggests an appropriate punishment. *Yuriy Shcherbak* charges some definite persons and calls their surnames pronounces a few to be guilty and even reveals their surnames. The paradox of the situation is that, like all other Ukrainian authors, who wrote about Chernobyl, *Yuriy Shcherbak* charges everybody, living there, everybody, keeping silence about the coming tragedy – «we, who consented and admitted Chernobyl, are in charge of it; I blame us» [14, p. 19] *Svitlana Yovenko*, a Ukrainian poetess, supports him: «Carelessness! Inactivity! Sloth! Our ignorance about Chernobyl – all these mean: suicide!» («Легкодумність! Інертність! Лінивість! Невігластво наше про Чернобиль – читай: самовбивство!») [7, p. 16].

Lina Kostenko is one of the most brilliant writers who describe the sequences of the Chernobyl nuclear accident. She was among the first visitors of the Chernobyl zone after the contamination and tried to inform the general public about the situation there in her documentary writings. Ten years later after the Chernobyl catastrophe she wrote her novel *The Zone of Estrangement* (*Зона відчуження*, 1996), where she described the transformations of the 30-km zone around Chernobyl – the wild, devastated, desolated, ruined, and deserted zone. In this novel *Lina Kostenko* raises an important question which the narrative tries to answer: «No, the Chernobyl accident is not the apocalypse, the real apocalypse will come when we forget the Bible and the Holy Word» [9, p. 5]. In her artistic interpretation of biblical images, motifs, and ideas, the author uses the God's Word «as a shield and as a weapon in the struggle of good and evil» in her fiction, as *Olena Stetsenko*, a researcher, mentions in her work titles «*The Biblical motives, images and stories in Lina Kostenko's works*» [11, p. 76].

The unique example of «the Chernobyl genre» can be represented by woman's writing. Of particular interest is the fiction of *Svitlana Yovenko*. The author depicts «the Chernobyl syndrome» through her distinctly female images and characterisation. Critics have emphasized distinctive features of her fiction such as female subjectivity, confessionality, sincerity, directness, autobiography implementation, psychology, style emotions, fragmentariness, female model of narration system [8, p. 175].

Ecological memoirs devoted to the nuclear accident in Chernobyl are a medium which not only reveal the reasons for the Chernobyl accident to the common people but also comprehend the consequences of that catastrophe. These works of nonfiction provide readers with facts and reports and represent witnesses' recollections while also emphasizing the writers' own interpretation of the facts. In unveiling «the Dead Zone» matters, memoir and nonfiction writers confessed that they did not know at that point in time and perhaps even today, the whole truth about the Chernobyl accident. Even in the twenty-first century, there exist some works that the government prevents from being published, such as *Soothsayer from Future* and *Farewell to Chernobyl* by *M. Malakhuta* (*Віщун з майбутнього* and *Прощання з Чернобилем* *М. Малахуту*). (*M. Malakhuta* is a journalist and was an editor of a regional journal in eastern Ukraine in the Soviet period; small number of his friends sometimes mention about these memoir works but the author still avoids speaking about them because of negative consequences after the attempt to publish them) [6, p. 213].

The post-Chernobyl decade's writers tried to focus on the commonly accepted opinions about the accident's consequences, although the ecological problems they depicted allowed the writers to emphasize dangers faced by their human characters. As a result of covering the Chernobyl nuclear accident and its aftermath, most Ukrainian writers of that post-Chernobyl period came to the understanding that every patch of land in the Chernobyl region is dead and

inappropriate to live on. Post-Chernobyl nonfiction by Ukrainian writers presents facts and memories reconsidered by the authors and passed through the writers' and eye-witnesses' imagination. However, Ukrainian fiction has not managed to cover the tragedy of the Chernobyl catastrophe to the same extent.

Ukrainian literature – both of the post-Chernobyl period and the contemporary one – is characterized by its ecological-spiritual direction, where ecological and spiritual problems are regarded as an integral whole. This has launched a new paradigm in Ukrainian literary studies that integrates and interrogates the representation of environmental problems in cultural spaces. All of these problems are regarded by Ukrainian literary critics as a typical phenomenon of industrial society, while the emphasis on representing the moral aspects of ecological-spiritual problems of Ukrainian society is evidently based on the «cultural memory» theory of Ian Assman. He states that the combination of time and identity shapes the cultural memory of any nation. Due to his words, 40-year period is enough for any event to disappear or become a landmark in a nation's memory [3, p. 21]. Chernobyl accident with its post-Chernobyl literature, mainly memoirs, became a so-called landmark of the Ukrainian ethnic consciousness. All of these factors have created the background for today's dominant tendency to examine human-nature relations in contemporary Ukrainian literature.

The Chernobyl theme in Ukrainian literature is one of the acute sites where the fight for the Truth in literature is taking place in this society. This fight enables the Ukrainian literature to demonstrate its civic inclination, its ability to analyze society, and its intellectual honesty. This body of writing about Chernobyl serves to refresh and energize the ethnic and social consciousness of Ukrainian readers and urges citizens to take steps that will avoid «future Chernobyls» and shape a new cultural consciousness based on the strong principles of human morality.

The ethnic peculiarities – uniquely Ukrainian – deal with the dual vision of Chernobyl accident: on one hand, the Chernobyl genre highlights heroic behavior of firefighters at the nuclear station as well as journalists who consciously risked their lives in order to film documentaries about the Chernobyl for their descendants as well as civil people who demonstrated their highly moral and heroic features as well as their sacrifice under such circumstances. But it was the function of mass media – at that times they depicted vivid pictures of heroic actions in Chernobyl without having opportunity to write the entire truth about the accident. On the other hand – Chernobyl genre reveals thriflessness of building a nuclear station in the densely-populated region near the capital of Ukraine and mismanagement of its functioning and naive nonchalance of concealing the truth about the premises, background and the first stages of the catastrophe [10, p. 113]. Chernobyl genre has a unique feature – the authors in the poetic forms and memoirs tried to reveal the truth under circumstances of the total secrecy and gossips about the Chernobyl accidents.

The specific tendencies of the Ukrainian way of thinking should be taken into consideration in order to work out Ukraine's own model of stable economic development. Neglecting these peculiarities will certainly undermine the effectiveness of ecological cultural development and the formation of new ecological consciousness [12, p. 39].

The analysis of Ukrainian ecological consciousness shows that it is characterized with the lack of trust to governmental and administrative authorities and the low level of social activity, which is based on the lack of information policy in the environmental protection sphere. But the deep ties with the surrounding nature encourage the further development of eco-friendly paradigm within the Ukrainian *mentality* [4, p. 98].

In order to overcome the gap between the irrational consumer society and the alternative civilization type, Ukraine should implement ecological behavior and develop ecological culture and discussion of current ecological problems in fiction/nonfiction texts [4, p. 99].

Chernobyl literature is closely connected with historical, cultural as well we philosophical contexts in Ukraine. Chernobyl literature reminds about this fact and calls for further humans' actions to avoid the similar situations. Chernobyl literature commemorates those who died immediately in the accident, those, who slowly and grievously died after the accident, and those, who are dying now – about 30 years after the nuclear catastrophe. Cancer deaths are increasing every year, which comes as no surprise. Inevitability/imminence of coming death becomes a common feature of contemporary ecological consciousness of people who live in the contaminated territory (which is much wider than 30-kilometer Chernobyl zone).

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Досліджуються передумови формування екокритичного нарративу з акцентом на тематичному компоненті «ядерна енергія», який охоплює творчі напрацювання митців кінця ХХІ ст., які стали відгуком на аварію на Чорнобильській АС (1986) та викликали неоднозначну реакцію у тогочасному суспільстві. Окреслюються національні особливості екокритичної візії концепту «ядерна катастрофа» у контексті формування екокритичних імперативів української літератури кінця ХХІ ст. в аспекті їх впливу на формування екологічної свідомості українського етносу. Така візія проблеми обумовлена провідними ідеями екокритичного доробку сучасних українських літературознавців, які і репрезентують сферу та стан функціонування «екокритики» у сучасному українському літературному контексті.

Ключові слова: екокритика, екокритичний нарратив, «ядерна енергія», екосвідомість, екокритичні імперативи.

Исследуются предпосылки формирования экокритического нарратива с акцентом на тематическом компоненте «ядерная энергия», который охватывает произведения украинских авторов конца ХХ в., которые стали реакцией на аварию на Чернобыльской АС (1986) и вызвали неоднозначную реакцию общества в то время. Представлены национальные особенности экокритической визии концепта «ядерная катастрофа» в контексте формирования экокритических императивов украинской литературы конца ХХ в. в аспекте их влияния на формирование экологического сознания украинского этноса. Такая визия проблемы обусловлена идеями экокритических работ современных украинских литературоведов, которые и представляют сферу функционирования «экокритики» в современном украинском литературном контексте.

Ключевые слова: экокритика, экокритический нарратив, «ядерная энергия», экосознание, экологическая этика, экокритические императивы.

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