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ON THE “FEMALE” MOTIVE IN THE UKRAINIAN POST-CHORNOBYL «NUCLEAR» FICTION: THE ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE MYTH

To commemorate the anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster a memorial service was held at the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Manchester and an icon of the “Chernobyl Madonna” was rested on the anaglyph.

Трагічні події на **Чорнобильській атомній електростанції (26 квітня 1986 р.)** не тільки позначають нову епоху українського нуклеарного дискурсу, але й уможливають переосмислення архетипів української художньої свідомості у аспекті формування нуклеарного наративу. Екокритичний підхід до вивчення трансформацій образу Мадонни (Богородиці) в літературно-критичному осмисленні Чорнобильської катастрофи визначає певної мірою перехід до локальних, навіть провінційних, вимірів екокритичних студій у аспекті дослідження локальних нуклеарних наративів в загальному контексті сучасних викликів екокритичних досліджень.

Образ Богородиці в нуклеарному наративі окреслено тут як один з ключових жіночих образів в українській нуклеарній художній літературі, репрезентований вимірами колективної свідомості українського народу. У **постчорнобильському художньому тексті Мадонна (Богородиця) представлена** як багатогранний образ слов'янської жінки, що поєднує в собі декілька жіночих реінкарнацій, що дозволяє інтегрувати даний образ в історичній та соціальній перспективах. Звернення до біблійного персонажу Богородиці у контексті українського нуклеарного наративу уможливорює екокритичну рецепцію локальних та глобальних вимірів особливостей художньої імплементації результатів техногенної діяльності людства щодо ініціативи «мирний атом». Такий аспект дослідження апелює до екокритичної візії використання художніх засобів формування «нуклеарної ідентичності» в нуклеарній літературі відповідно до викликів посттравматичного суспільства.

Ключові слова: Чорнобиль, Мадонна, Богородиця, нуклеарний наратив, постчорнобильська література, екокритичні дослідження.

Трагические события на Чернобыльской атомной электростанции (26 апреля 1986 г.) не только отметили новую эпоху украинского нуклеарного дискурса, но и способствовали переосмыслению архетипов украинского художественного сознания в аспекте формирования нуклеарного нарратива. Экокритический подход к изучению трансформации образа Мадонны (Богородицы) в литературно-критическом осмыслении Чернобыльской катастрофы определяет в какой-то мере переход к локальным, даже провинциальным, параметрам экокритических студий в аспекте исследования локальных нуклеарных нарративов в общем контексте современных вызовов экокритических исследований.

Образ Богородицы в нуклеарном нарративе представлен здесь как один из ключевых женских образов в украинской нуклеарной художественной литературе, сформированный в коллективном сознании украинского народа. В постчернобыльском художественном тексте Мадонна (Богородица) представлена как многогранный образ славянской женщины, который объединяет в себе несколько женских реинкарнаций, что позволяет интегрировать данный образ в исторической и соци-

альной перспективах. Обращение к библейскому персонажу Богородицы в контексте украинского нуклеарного нарратива обуславливает экокритическую рецепцию локальных и глобальных измерений особенностей художественной имплементации результатов техногенной деятельности человечества в рамках инициативы «мирный атом». Такой аспект исследования апеллирует к экокритической перспективе использования художественных средств формирования «нуклеарной идентичности» в нуклеарной литературе с соответствии с вызовами посттравматического общества.

Ключевые слова: Чернобыль, Мадонна, Богородица, нуклеарный нарратив, постчернобыльская художественная литература, экокритические исследования.

The contemporary multidisciplinary approaches to the ways of studying eco-narratives, as well as nuclear fiction in particular, not only provide the new theories, methods and tools within environmental humanities but also encourage the contemporary academia to reconsider stable myths, motives and even stereotypes. The paper is an attempt to reconsider the well known image of Madonna in the nuclear fiction, devoted to the literary implementation of the Chornobyl nuclear power plant explosion, within the help of ecocritical studies. The initial stage of such reconsideration was previously done by the author in her papers on researching the ecocritical premises in the Ukrainian nuclear literary studies [1]. This ecocritical perspective on reconsidering some aspects of nuclear fiction's functioning in its Ukrainian version is shaped by the works by T. Hundorova [2], Kh. Kramarchuk [3], A. Korzeniowska-Bihun [4], S. Lindsay [5]. The special gratitude for providing ideas and support is expressed to S. Yovenko, the Ukrainian writer [6], sharing her vivid witness's impressions on the issues under study in the paper. These and other works on literary dimensions of the Chornobyl disaster outline the vision of the problem in the paper.

Every nation has its Madonna whose image reflects the world perception and times, when this image was shaped. This image usually represents an amalgamation of dangers to come and measures to protect. Madonna's image has the same connotations in literature, art, music – even in the earlier times as well as nowadays, however every Madonna is a symbol of praying for help and protection from evil which can be represented in a various way. The “Madonna” concept is constructed in stereotypes, using the archetype outlines, crystallized through thousands of centuries. Due to Kh. Kramarchuk, the Madonna as an archetype represents a woman, a mother, pure in thoughts, with biblical features, which is the object of worship and love [3, p. 20].

Madonna is regarded as one of the core images of world literature as well as culture and depicted by poets, writers and artists of various epochs. According to A. Niamtsu, world literature usually appeals to the image of Madonna as a canon in its symbolic context with no space for transformations in interpreting this image. Madonna is not an image that provokes new plots, conflicts and collisions [7, p. 103].

Kh. Kramarchuk says that “the archetype of Madonna appeared in the territory of Ukraine as a figurine in the Trypillian era (5000–3000 BC). This goddess – the Trypillian Madonna – with her special long hair, tied back – was holding an infant by her left breast”. Also this scholar mentions says about the Etruscan Madonna – one more ancient image with relation to Ukrainian-Rusyns, known as Mater Matuta, depicted on the throne with an infant and a sad, lyric, forlorn facial expression. This image comes back to the Italian matutinum meaning of “early dawn” [3, p. 17].

Ancient portrayals of Madonna are characterized with certain symbolism: a full moon corresponds to Madonna as the Mother according to lunar symbolism, and new moon corresponds to Madonna as the Virgin.

In Ukrainian culture traditions the image of Madonna was widespread within the Slavic pagan beliefs, basing on its fundamental love and adoration towards Mother the Earth, who included the components of fertility, birth-giving, the force of natural phenomena as well as the spiritual core of the environment. It was Christianity adoption by the Kyivan Rus (988 AD) that launched so-called “Madonna's cult” as the Mother of the God whose image was laid on the already existing pagan Mother the Earth and became a multilayered one in various contexts. It is a well-known fact that the four Gospels provide the brief information about Madonna herself [8]. However, through the further development of church and apocryphal traditions Madonna's image was enriched with the meaning of “an ideal woman” who is an example of spiritual purity

and moral values [9, p. 235]. In the Renaissance times the word “Madonna” was enriched with connotations “woman-mother”, “woman with a baby”, while the Catholic traditions considered Madonna to be mainly Christ’s mother. Thus, Madonna is an amalgamated image of “Woman-Mother”, filled with sacral features of maternity in order to support immortality of humanity in two ways: physically (giving birth) and spiritually (maintaining moral values).

Ukrainian culture tradition appeals to the variety of the Madonna’s images – Scythian Madonna, Baturyn Madonna, Oranta-Voyevodine (Old Rus’ prince times); “Saint Pokrova” (Cossaks’ times), Chumack Madonna, Catherine as the Madonna by T. Shevchenko, Striletska Madonna, Gutsul Madonna, Holodomor Madonna etc [3, p. 17].

Madonna is a kind of archetype of human’s recognition appealing to the image of Madonna as the Mother of God, who is the embodiment of embracing love, life-asserting origin, liberation from the sins through light, enlightenment and transformation. In Ukrainian culture tradition this archetype is a milestone of the collective unconsciousness of the Ukrainian people as well as a source of shaping new images and archetype which makes this “female” motive as a central one in Ukrainian literature.

The Chernobyl Madonna’s Emission

It is already three decades since the explosion at Chernobyl nuclear power plant happened (26 April, 1986) which is one of the most tragic events in humanity and the most tragic event of Ukraine’s history. And the **whole world saw the power and ruthlessness of “Atom for Peace”** initiative which can go out of human’s control and destroy not only the mankind but also incinerate the world.

The explosion at Chernobyl nuclear power plant became an impetus to create literary works that profoundly reconsider the scientific discoveries and achievements. “Chernobyl” as a subject of new literary works immediately inspired such poets as B. Oliynyk, Y. Shcherbak, V. Yavorivsky, S. Yovenko, I. Drach, L. Kostenko to devote their works to this disaster.

T. Hundorova in her monograph *“Post-Chernobyl Library. Ukrainian Postmodern”* notes that Chernobyl disaster gave birth to a new era in Ukraine – a new postmodernism consciousness and postmodernism literature [2, p. 12].

All Ukrainian literary works on Chernobyl – journalistic and literary ones – are obviously united through their common subject matter, though they differ in the form. This diversity of narrative forms 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 his 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 [10, p. 46].

Some of these works are the bright demonstration. For example, *«Maria with Wormwood at the End of the Century»* (1987) by Yavorivskiy Volodymyr (Яворівський Володимир «Марія з полином наприкінці століття») [11, p. 16], depicting the notorious events at the Chernobyl nuclear plant which are represented in the vision of the Myrovych family (Mykola, the eldest brother, one of the engineers who built the plant and was at work in the moment of the nuclear disaster, while his youngest brother was one of the first victims who died in the result of the nuclear explosion). As a prediction his son creates his own wild nature world – he draws apocalyptic open-eyed flowers, crying trees and chimera animals. The story of this family is depicted in the vision of the mother of this family – Maria – she accuses herself in the nuclear catastrophe and makes herself responsible for ruining the Earth and the earth that became the Zone after the nuclear explosion. Like the biblical Maria, she sees her sons die but thinks about rescuing the humanity. Even Mother’s love can not help her children survive. With Maria’s long inner speech, the author stresses the person’s responsibility for every action and step and the collective responsibility of the humanity for the Chernobyl catastrophe.

The brightest representation of the Chernobyl tragedy was implemented in the narrative poem *“The Chernobyl Madonna”* 1988 by Ivan Drach (Драч Іван. Чорнобильська Мадонна) [12, p. 43], whose son was among those who participated in the rescue operations after the accident. The awareness of the author’s tragedy about his own son’s post-Chernobyl medical

condition makes this poem especially poignant. After the Chernobyl accident the works by I. Drach launched the new words about the new content of the Madonna's image, about what the humanity had not known before. It was exactly in June 1986 at the Writers' Congress when he publicly represented the words of truth and anger about the tragedy. His «*Chornobyl Madonna*» – a poem, a tragedy, a sorrowful song – was a response to the terrible event. This «*Chornobyl Madonna*» has enough power to endure pain, suffer, help and distract misfortune from the Earth's children. This «*Chornobyl Madonna*» is the representation of the Ukraine's national will power. The author shows how disaster at the nuclear plant results in «inward mental Chernobyl» – a long-lasting destructive disaster both in everybody's soul and the nation's consciousness.

Drach's previous set of poems, titled *The Breath of the Nuclear Power Plant* (Подих атомної) (1978), expressed the author's faith in the "Atom for Peace", a peace-devoted use of nuclear power. Although the author lauds the efforts of scientists, engineers, builders who were involved in the project by casting them in the heroic mode in his works such as *The Ditch* (Комляван) and *The Reactor* (Реактор), he issues an early warning about the fact of building a nuclear power plant in the most populated part of Europe. The poet represents not only the ecological situation after the explosion when radiation covered everything around – plants, animals, water, air but also he manages to depict how humans' souls are contaminated. The poet stresses primarily the humans' problems, their moral and physical sufferings.

The author emphasizes the specificity of his own position in describing Chernobyl with the help of a specific poetic toolkit: namely, the topos of humility ("Aren't you afraid to step on the cosmic road having only your sketchbook in your hand?" – "Чи не лячно тобі виходити із етюдником на цю космічну дорогу...?"), the topos of calling for Muse ("She [the Muse] comes and take you a poetic pen" – "Вона приходить і робить з тебе перо"), the topos of silence ("I am out of the words" – "Немає в мене слів") [12].

In the title of the poem the author manages to combine these so-called incompatible concepts – the Chernobyl and the Madonna – which forms the lamenting song about the terrible drama of Pripyat, the small town providing the functioning of the nuclear power plant. The poet does not intend to describe the progress of the terrible events after the explosion, but he highlights the human's misery while depicting the crossroads of a human's life and the world history.

"*Chornobyl Madonna*" not only emphasizes the philosophical depth of the sufferings after the explosion, but also stresses the ethical issues which lie beyond the causes and consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. This poem is a kind of cry made by the author himself, by the suffering environment, Ukraine, each human, humanity. This poem is a warning for people, this poem calls to be vigilant, humane, true and nature-oriented. The specificity of the poem by Ivan Drach results from the multifaceted image of Madonna, which combines several female characters with the aim of equalizing the Jesus Christ's Mother and the contemporary Chernobyl Madonna. The image of the mother in this poem is not only polyphonic, but has several reincarnations which allows the integrated image of Mother to split into some components.

In his poem "*Chornobyl Madonna*" the poet creates a joint image of Madonna the Mother, whose image combined the Holy Mary, mother and wife of the XX century. The main character – the Mother – is depicted in multi-faced images: the soldier's mother, the old village woman, the God's Mother, the martyress, the Scythian's mother, the Earth Mother, the Mother of the Apocalypse. Each chapter represents the image of the mother, gradually making it the image of Madonna greater but revolves the image of Madonna into the tragic interpretation. In his poem "*Chornobyl Madonna*" I. Drach states that none of the people has the right to destroy the environment, shorten human's life, deprive the people of their future. He emphasizes that we all together should be responsible for this terrible catastrophe to prevent it from happening again, Chernobyl's bells from ringing sadly again, to prevent mothers from getting insane.

"*Chornobyl Madonna*" is a polysemantic narration, where a number of plots are amalgamated which shapes various images of Madonna in order to subordinate the narration to the main idea of the poem – a human will definitely atone for this sin before their children, mothers, people, environment and the Earth. Appealing to the biblical images the poet reveals the moral issues related to the Chernobyl tragedy.

Within the narrative of “Chornobyl Madonna” the Bible time transforms into the present time: again at the Calvary of the technological chaos a human’s son dies for bringing salvation to millions of suffering people.

Tkachenko A., who studies I. Drach’s works, emphasizes the mosaic manner of the poem’s narration where we trace the multifunctional amalgamation of sensitive, objective reality of the details and metaphorical, symbolic generalization» [13, p. 21].

“*Chornobyl Madonna*» sounds with pain and despair. The poet states that he lacks for words to describe the disaster, his mind is torn into pieces, which is reflected in the composition of the poem – fragmented, mosaic, with verbal pieces – like atom disintegration. “*Chornobyl Madonna*” by Ivan Drach has two layers of representation. The first layer is a realistic one, involving the set of realistic portraits – the old woman wearing a cellophane dress who secretly walks her cellophane-covered cow in the contamination zone. The intergrated image of Chornobyl Madonna by I. Drach is depicted not only as a suffering woman who wants to protect surrounding nature from radiation by covering all living things with cellophane, but also as a naïve but strong mother who intends to protect the whole world – the direct appeal to Saint Pokrova, protecting the Cossaks’ army and the Ukrainian nation in the ancient times, which is still the strongest image of Madonna in Ukraine’s religious tradition.

This episode inspires both humour and fear by stressing the human vulnerability in the period of ruining the relations between the Earth and the Human. Having affected by her contact with the contaminated zone, she tried to kiss a contaminated flower – even the deadly danger cannot prevent her from trying to keep good connections with the Earth. In spite of being affected through her association with the Zone, she tries to kiss a contaminated flower. Even the awareness of the deadly consequences of her act cannot prevent her from breaking her ties with the Earth. And all of the characters – a soldier, an atomic scientist, an executive director, a builder, an engineer, and others – are depicted separately, without any ties within the plot, but the readers realize that they all are related to the Reactor and the Zone.

The other layer deals with the poet’s lyrical style and philosophical reflections. He personally suffers from his speculations about the role of the Chornobyl tragedy in the further development of the world. The poet reconsiders how the biblical, folkloric, and literary traditions might help prevent the seemingly unavoidable calamity facing humanity today. Being considered as the spirits (manitos) of the ancient Slavs usually inconspicuous but appearing under dangerous circumstances to protect the Slavonic people in Ukrainian folklore, the Scythian numens appear and erect from the burial places in order to protect not only the Slavs but the Earth and the Humanity from the nuclear radiation, as the poet shows. His poem is a multilayered mosaic structure, combining the tragic, bitter, and confessional points of the narration based on real facts and the poet’s moral way of reconsidering the catastrophe.

Thus, Madonna embodies the constants of human’s life, she is constant and immutable, while trying to keep people’s living on balance, when they tend to break out this balanced life. Her image goes through some transformations over time but never leaves humanity. Madonna is regarded as a keeper of the suffering world. People are spiritually blind – “they know not what they do” which enhances their sufferings. The poet appeals to humanity: “Honor your father and mother” – the eternal commandment to be caved on the heart of every person who is decent to be named as a human.

Baba the Earth in the Zone

One of the recent and most widespread fiction works on the contemporary Chornobyl is “At the End and the Beginning of Times”, 2013 («*На початку і наприкінці часів*») by P. Arie [14], which can be defined as a “modern Ukrainian folk play”. This tragic play features a family – grandmother Prisia (baba Prisia), her desperate daughter Slava (her name is a dramatic allusion to the Slavic people, who used to live in the area of the Chornobyl Zone, and to the slogan “Glory to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union!”) and her odd grandson Vovchik (a 28-year old mentally different boy, behaving as if he is 8 but sometimes making naïve but though-provoking statements). They illegally live in the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone, where baba Prisia lives all the time but her daughter did not manage to survive in a new place after leaving her home in the re-

sult of the Chernobyl disaster but had to come back to the Exclusion Zone illegally after her husband's death. This family had to survive, they ceaselessly continue to fight for their existence – not with the radiation contaminated environment (“*Oh, I knows how to negotiate with nature*” – said Baba Prisia). The family get accustomed to living in the middle of wildlife, without electricity and other benefits of civilization (“stalkers”), they have to protect their world from the big society which regular interfere into their world – a policeman, making them leave the restricted zone (“*You are not allowed to live here! You are out of law! You do not exist!*”), or Chernobyl tourists, or “hunters” who shoot animals for entertainment (who killed the grandson instead of wandering animals by mistake or not – nobody knows).

It is baba Prisia, a 86-year old (“*very, very, very old...*”) woman, who rejected any chance to leave her home after the Chernobyl explosion and chose for the life in the contaminated with radiation but her house deep in the wood. Even more – she eagerly welcomed her daughter and grandson who could not get used to living in the urban place (“*We are always others! Offcast ones! We are from the Zone!*”) She has to protect her family from the regular strokes, coming from the extremely aggressive and cruel “Non-Zone”.

Baba Prisia is not just a rural grandmother. She is the amalgamation of the Earth's wisdom and the Human's life experience. Her artistic world is a collection of stories about mystical creatures. She is considered to be a witch who speaks with mermaids and unknown inhabitants of other worlds, knows the secrets of herbs and berries, eats contaminated mushrooms (“*Radiation is very useful for grandmothers!*”). Despite the everyday survival, she is full of faith, enthusiasm and indomitable energy [15].

Baba Prisia is an intergenerational link who unites not only the three generations on the stage but also the memory about the mystical traditions of old Slavs (the great number of folklore elements in her speech), the Christianity traditions (praying before the icons we can see her reflection there instead of Madonna), the World War the Second events (she managed to kill 12 enemy soldiers who had broken into her house), the times before the Chernobyl disaster (her specially careful attitude and even talks to the old radio receiver broadcasting Soviet songs) and the times after (her happy survival in the Exclusion Zone).

With presenting baba Prisia as a unique combination of the wise pagan Mother the Earth and the all-forgiving Mother of God, the author finds the way to demonstrate the overwhelming power of a Ukrainian woman who focuses on her family's survival despite the trouble, hunger, radiation and war [4].

The author manages to portray the tragic coalescence – the all-protecting Madonna, caring about the Earth as her suffering and dying child, and Mother the Earth, dying from the wounds but intending to survive, are united into a single character. All these features result in reconsidering the image of Chernobyl Madonna in the contemporary situation.

In the most tragic and horrific moments of Ukraine's history the Ukrainian people call for the Mother of God and appeal to the image of Madonna in various narrative. The image of Chernobyl Madonna is the one of the Apocalypse, an image of the world sorrow. Being depicted in many characters throughout the whole narrative, the Chernobyl Madonna emits, like an atom, into some components, which highlights the tragedy of the situation. Each of these female characters – having pain, worries, impressibility, sufferings in their eyes – represents great mother's love that can overcome all the misfortunes, evils and obstacles for their child – an unborn baby, a dead child, a soldier (who is a rescuer at the explosion site), a physics scientist, an abandoned village. All these mothers have to pay off for their children's mistakes. All these characters are united in the integrated image of suffering Mother, represented by the Chernobyl Madonna.

Chernobyl Madonna embodies the image of Mother the Earth, when people “*tear her braids*” [9, p. 243] while enjoying all the benefits of nature without getting ashamed for their consuming attitude to nature and breaking ties with it again and again.

Stressing the national as well as human tragedy in the light of the Gospel legends and contemporary social and economic problems, such perspective on the image of Mary the Saint in Ukrainian nuclear fiction not only challenges the humanity for checking its power but also encourage the global features of a nuclear disaster in its literary dimensions in the aspect of current ecocritical parameters. The image of Madonna is very symbolic in its connotations of salvation, sacrifice and hope. The image of the Chernobyl Madonna embodies Ukraine as the soul of Ukrainian people, devoted to faith, hope and love, but at the same time this image is related to the global tendencies of depicting a nuclear disaster in the post-Chernobyl fiction, under the influence of ecocritical studies, nuclear criticism and environmental humanities.

The explosion at Chornobyl nuclear plant is not only an awful tragedy of the Ukraine's history but also the factor which defines the ecological identity of the Ukrainian nations. Nowadays – three decades after the largest technological disaster of humanity – the Ukrainian nation as well as people beyond the country remember the nuclear catastrophe. And Ukrainian “nuclear narrative” does its best to keep the memories about the cause and aftermath of the Chornobyl nuclear power plant explosion, represented within nuclear fiction.

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ON THE “FEMALE” MOTIVE IN THE UKRAINIAN POST-CHORNOBYL «NUCLEAR» FICTION: THE ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE MYTH

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The explosion at Chernobyl nuclear power plant (26 April, 1986) in the literary perspective not only launched a new significant epoch of the Ukrainian nuclear discourse but also reconsidered the archetypes within the Ukrainian nuclear narrative. The transformations of Madonna's image in the Chernobyl literary responses to the disaster are under study here in the "provincializing" ecocritical aspects of researching "nuclear narrative" within nuclear environmental humanities.

In Ukrainian culture tradition this archetype is a milestone of the collective unconsciousness of the Ukrainian people as well as a source of shaping new images which makes this "female" motive as a central one in the Ukrainian literature. In the Chernobyl narrative Madonna, the Mother of God is represented as a multifaceted image of a Slavic woman, which combines several female reincarnations which allows the integrated image of Madonna to split into some components in the historical and social perspectives.

Appealing to the biblical character – Madonna, the Mother of God – within the Ukrainian nuclear narrative allows distinguishing the local/global dimensions of writing practices in the context of studying the correlations between human beings' activity within "Atom for Peace" initiative and the tools of shaping "nuclear identity" within the ecocritical vision to ecological memory and ecological consciousness formation under the global/national/regional social needs in the post-trauma societies.

Stressing the national as well as global nuclear tragedy in the light of reconsidering the Gospel legends and under the contemporary social and economic energy-related issues, such perspective on the image of Mary the Saint in Ukrainian nuclear fiction not only challenges the humanity for checking its power but also encourage the global features of a nuclear disaster in its literary dimensions in the aspect of current ecocritical parameters. The image of Madonna is very symbolic in its connotations of salvation, sacrifice and hope. The image of the Chernobyl Madonna embodies Ukraine as the soul of Ukrainian people, devoted to faith, hope and love, but at the same time this image is related to the global tendencies of depicting a nuclear disaster in the post-Chernobyl fiction, under the influence of ecocritical studies, nuclear criticism and environmental humanities.

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