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O. M. Pavlova

Leading philologist at the Institute of Philology
of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

The Myth of Chornobyl in Contemporary Ukrainian Drama Plots

In the article the author considers the process of creating the modern myth – the exclusion zone – in the plays "Third Prayer" by Ya. Vereshchak, "Lost Fugitives" by Neda Nezhdana, "At the Beginning and at the End of Time" by P. Arie. Major attention has been focused on identifying modern aspects of the reception of the Chornobyl technogenic catastrophe: the overlapping and convergence of archaic and social myths, model of initiation; the correlation of the concept "Us"/"Them"; the peculiarities of the "memory" and "recollections" of those events; the artistic representation of the archetypal images of Land/Home; the decoding of the mental code of nation in the post-apocalyptic period.

Key words: *memory, plot, archetype, initiation, cosmogony.*

Statement of the research problem and its significance. The focus of literary studies on the existence of mythology in the contemporary artistic and cultural space is quite reasonable, as it is determined by socio-political transformations, globalization effects, actualization of multicultural factors, expansion of communication field and change of ideological dominance.

People have a desire to return to their original state; they strive to once again experience the feelings that accompanied them at the beginning of their lives at the moments of gaining experience, perception and endless discoveries, and to subconsciously feel the euphoria of the beginning (according to M. Eliade) [4].

The poetics of myth, archetypes and plots in the contemporary Ukrainian drama and the issues of intertextuality were investigated in the works by O. Bondarieva, Yu. Vyshnytska, O. Kogut, M. Shapoval. The tragedy of Chornobyl predominates in literary studies by T. Hundorova. The topicality of this research is determined by the necessity to identify modern aspects of the reception of the Chornobyl catastrophe: the overlapping and convergence of archaic and social myths, model of initiation; the correlation of the concept "Us"/"Them"; the peculiarities of the "memory" and "recollections" of those events; the artistic

representation of the archetypal images of Land/Home; decoding of the mental code of nation in the post-apocalyptic period. The research also outlines the directions of literary and sociological vision of the technogenic catastrophe (Chornobyl) and its reception by contemporaries.

The purpose of the article is to describe the process of creating the modern myth of Chornobyl in contemporary Ukrainian drama plots.

Statement of basic material and substantiation of the obtained results. Reflecting on the nature of modern myth-making, C. G. Yung noted that "myths are created by means of the same universal socio-psychological mechanism used in ancient times; by interacting with the deep, archetypal structures of the collective unconscious, assimilating and actualizing them, the consciousness generates mythological representations, 'tied' to the respective time and place" [8]. In fact, such generation mechanism can be traced in the modern myth about the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone, represented in contemporary Ukrainian drama plots. The apocalyptic and eschatological discourse, which had been dominant in this topic for a long time, gave way to the archetypal decoding of plots and images and social reception of myth.

In the drama "Third Prayer" by Ya. Vereshchak, the exclusion zone is identified with Paradise. From now on, this is the place, which has passed through the purifying fire and recovered in its original beauty. The playwright emphasizes on its peculiar features, as there live the people who are "Different" from those who left the radiation damage zone. They are let into the secrets of the land which has changed their worldview. A modern researcher L. Bondar highlights that the text of the drama under study includes the formation of new aesthetics – transsentimentalism, which in the play "is primarily concerned with the attempt to reconstruct the apocalyptic world by creating a utopian alternative to the 'earthly paradise' – the Zone. The Chornobyl site, which has survived the catastrophe, is associated in the text with another new existence, free from destructive rules of the modern age. The idea of 'existence from scratch' makes it possible to create the new religiosity which is connected in the play with neo-paganism as a religion of equality of all living beings" [2, p.13].

Zahadkova (the simultaneous incarnation of the Actress/Wife/Goddess) mocks at the protagonist, Matviy Holopupenko, and allows him "to think about the Incomprehensible and to see and hear the mundane" [3, p. 84]. The man's prayer sounds from the Otherworld and resembles a confession. He begs to forgive him all the harm he caused to nature and asks for the spiritual enlightenment for his descendants – his son and grandson. He worships the Goddess Land, because she

has been purged by thousands of small suns that covered her. The fields with sunflowers have regenerated the Zone, its "has become the Paradise of the Lord, and the radiation has been scared and yielded to this beauty! ... I felt with my heart that sooner or later I would merge with You, Our All-Merciful Lady. You are in every flower and in every tree, and in birds, and in these ants, and in all creatures" [3, p. 85].

In the first prayer Matviy asks for the reversion of his son (after all, Holopupenko became Shushvalkin) and his grandson Andriyko to their roots, to their kindred, as they have turned into walking stomachs, that don't care about anything except material goods and have only slogans and phrases of Russian propaganda in their heads. The second prayer is the address of the flip-flopper son who wants to change his queer father's mind who discredits him with his businessmen friends and because of whom his political career was close to going awry. The metaphor of the wall, with which the son fenced himself off from ordinary people/grey mass/electorate is money/business mandate of the deputy. The only thing that spoils his cloudless life is the eccentricities of his father who lives in the epicenter of the Chornobyl zone and exposes state officials that make a profit from the Chornobyl tragedy. The third prayer is son's plea for the salvation of his father, who had a heart attack from his son's creative work. Unexpectedly Andriy started writing poems in the Ukrainian language. It was a real nightmare for his family, as they so carefully tried to hide their origin and completely merge with the Soviet-Russian population of Sevastopol. Only the grandmother spoke and prayed in her native language. So, his poetic talent revealed itself on the subconscious level, but he could not write a word in Russian. In this way, the playwright actualizes the archetypal images of the Home/Mother/Language in the plot. The author of this article supports the reflection of L. Bondar that "the ancient culture, realized in the authentic spiritual code, is articulated in the system of postmodern narrative, relative to the concept of post-apocalypse, the symbol of which is the life in post-Chornobyl conditions. Besides, the transmitter of the post-historical code is Actress's annexation consciousness that points to another component of postmodernism – pluralism" [2, p. 13].

In the play "Lost Fugitives" Neda Nezhdana represents the radiation exclusion zone around the ChNPP as the last resort for all those who were not able to withstand life realities. The plot of the play consists of separate life stories of each settler of the Zone. They have common mental pain and desire to hide from the realities of the time, even under the wings of death. The plot is deprived of melodrama, but there are a

vivid theme of atonement and the general parabolic nature of each story. Hence, small narratives create a great story – the myth of Chornobyl.

Here settled the people whose lives were ruined not only by "peaceful atom". Karina and her son Artem hid here too, fleeing from the civil war. The woman lost her faith in God after seeing her husband being humiliated and killed right in front of her eyes. However, she is still afraid that he will return from the otherworld and take away her son. Karina believes in the reincarnation of her husband's soul and that he has turned into a wolf and keeps a close eye on them.

N. Fraye states that "the cycle, which controls "Mother Land", *natura naturans*, is, in the words of Plato, the cycle of differences: the life that is born is always different from the life that gave birth to it. From this come the insistence on the recovery and rubbing out of the past" [9, p.114]. In the play "Lost Fugitives" by Neda Nezhdana, Vasyl eventually agrees to burn the doors from his previous house. In such a way he can let go the fear of life and realize in himself the ability to love again and be loved. The man has passed the initiation tests, because as the holy Job he lost everything – his daughter, wife, home, work, health. His only link with the world of people is the generic memory – his land. That's why, he conducts the burial ceremony of his daughter so fanatically, as he is sure that at least in such way he will protect her from the invisible death and unite her with her ancestors in the otherworld. "These doors are a talisman, a family relic. Our father lay on them the night before the coffin was brought and before he was buried. Maybe other people have different traditions. But we are different: the doors are removed – and put... And here are the marks – this is my height, and this is my sister's height, and this – this is my daughter, Vasa, Vasylina, named after me... This was her height when she was two years old, three years old..." [6].

The doors/threshold is the symbol and liminal topos at the same time. They stand on the border between the worlds of the living and the dead. In the play "At the Beginning and at the End of Time" by P. Arie there are those who open the Gate to the otherworld. And when the protagonist, Baba Prisia, calls death to save her grandson Vovchyk and is ready sacrifice her life, Vasyl tries to commit suicide for fear of new pain, because of the loss of those to whom he does not even dare say about his feelings. In the mystical world, he is saved by bees (a bee is the symbol of harmony and world order – the power of the Absolute spirit). As he returns from the world of the dead, Vasyl completes his initiation – he leaves the exclusion zone with his new family, Karina and Artem.

According to N. Fraye "'Mother Land', which is the most comprehensible image of *natura naturans*, is ambiguous in terms of aesthetics. As a womb of all manifestations of life it is a kind feeder, as a grave of all forms of life it is sinister and terrible, and, finally, as an embodiment of the infinite cycle of life and death it is incomprehensible and intangible. That is why, it is often depicted as *diva triformis* (triple goddess); most often it is the personification of birth, death and rebirth in time, or paradise, earth and hell – in space" [9, p. 113–114]. Actually, the image of the Land is represented in such incarnation in the plots of the analyzed plays.

The image of Mariia – the mother of Lukash – passes through the whole plot of the play. Her voice tells her story to her son: "How should I explain? And what should I start from – death or love? For me, they are one sole thing..." The woman's monologues express the sense of fate for her husband and son. For both of them, the exclusion zone is the place of initiation, where the main thing is the way to self-discovery. "The whole diversity of human collisions comes down to the history of the couple – Man and Woman. The Woman, by virtue of her kinship, is represented both as Mother and Wife of the Man. However, the Man cyclically dies in the act of conception and revives in the act of birth, and turns out to be the son to himself" [5, p. 37]. The twin myth can be also traced in the plot of the play by Neda Nezhdana. The playwright transforms it in the cyclical repetition of the fates of the father (artist) and son (deserter). The son actually gets through the same life scenario as his father – Pavlo.

Felix Lukashyn appears in the exclusion zone because of the conflict he had with soldiers when he was performing active military service. He is a double deserter, as he tried to hide in the army from social and domestic problems; instead, he got into a much worse mess. The only thing he has is the weapon, an assault rifle, but he cannot keep it in the zone. As in ancient initiation, he has to learn to survive under new conditions. The boy passes the initiation tests and even changes his name – now he is Lukash. However, the most difficult was testing by love/faith/forgiveness. Like his father, he is afraid of his feelings and does not want to take responsibility for the birth of his child that may be born sick. Zoriana is disappointed: "You are a hare, a coward ... I thought you were different – courageous, not tolerating injustice and independent... And you are like everyone, you live in the past and whimper: Oh, please, sympathize with me, I am the victim – everything is evil: country, government, nature, God..." After talking with his father the boy is able to overcome his beast of hatred and despair and let

Pavlo into his life and strive to defend the right to his own happiness. Lukash breaks the cyclicity of men's fates and leaves the exclusion zone. He is psychologically ready to take responsibility for his own choice.

O. Stavychna proposes to define social myth in terms of literary studies as "a generalized, holistic, relatively stable symbolic system of society values, which exist in literature in the form of artistic models of author's reception, and also contains the general, figurative principles according to which the culture can identify, organize itself and interpret reality" [7, p. 28]. Lukash is convinced that "in our country one can live somehow until nothing happens, but as soon as something happens – everything turns into an endless whirlwind of humiliation and rage from powerlessness."

The social myth of Chornobyl destroys the imperial myth of peaceful atom and the most powerful and advanced Soviet Union technologies in the field of nuclear power. As it turned out, most people who, in fact, suffered from the explosion at the ChNPP, were not even properly informed about the basic safety measures. At the same time, it was impossible to avoid the fact of socio-political transformations experienced by the Ukrainian society in this historical period. Total capitalization of all spheres of state economy caused mass impoverishment of the population in the early 1990s and actually left to the fate the people and territories, affected by the Chornobyl technogenic catastrophe.

At the finale of the play Pavlo remains face to face with his mission in life – "to send people on the trip". Now in the exclusion zone where "everyone is hiding: someone from life, someone from the past, and someone from people" – he is the Lord and the Warden to all lost fugitives in this liminal space (an intertextual link with the myth of Charon, the ferryman of the dead, that does not allow the living to enter the underworld).

In the plot of the play by Neda Nezhdana Chornobyl is the biblical metaphor of the 40-year trip of Moses through the desert for the spiritual liberation of God's chosen people.

A miracle is also present in the plot of the play. The Canadian biologist Zoriana believes that this land is the beginning of a new world that will bring true values to the Ukrainian nation – love for their native land and themselves, it will destroy fear of the outside world, strengthen the sense of dignity and revive the singing soul. In the exclusion zone the woman also gets rid of ghosts from the past and overcomes the fear of new relationships. Her pregnancy is blessed by the Nature of this land, because the child's soul comes from the upper world, at the mercy

of the Absolute spirit. "Thus, the new religious mythology is connected with Chernobyl as an image of national apocalypse, which initiates a new time frame and therefore makes it possible to state the revival of the ancient religious worldview with its inclusion in the new conditions of the present time and consequently the creation of neo-paganism by consolidating not only the sacred space of the individual, but also by creating an ethno-national ideology," – states L. Bondar [2, p. 11].

In the plot of the play "At the Beginning and at the End of Time" by P. Arie the metatext is the Slavic myth. In the exclusion zone Baba Prisia lives together with her daughter Slava and her grandson Vovchyk. They not only hide here from the outside world (the grandson is mentally ill), but also keep the memory of the deceased. The old woman is the only one (of those still alive), who is let into the secrets of the Polissia region. Baba Prisia feels here quite comfortable, because everything that is needed can be grown in the vegetable garden, and the rest can be found in the forest, marsh or slough. And for greater safety, she can consult Mavka, Rusalka or ask the catfish for advice.

Her only trouble is the District Police Officer, who constantly threatens to evict them from the zone, in spite of the old woman's help (Prisia is a well-known healer). The family has long lived beyond civilization. The motive of expectation, which indicates the drama's typological similarity with the play "Waiting for Godot" by S. Beckett, passes through the whole plot of the drama. The family is also waiting for God, because they cannot hide the whole life from people like animals in the wide forests of Chernobyl. Rusalka (the messenger of death according to the Proto-Slavic beliefs) warns Baba Prisia and Vovchyk about the trouble brewing from the outside. However, those are not the mythical evil spirits that shoot the boy. Such special kind of hunting entertains the deputy, his son and their friends, who ignore Vovchyk's cries: "Don't shoot! Don't shoot! I am a man!"

Baba Prisia tries to cure her grandson and demands from the District Police Officer to punish those bandits who have committed the crime. Instead she gets a tough response that beyond the zone bandits are the authorities, and her family simply does not exist here for them, it is beyond the law. The woman administers justice in her own way. There remains the open question of "important people" in "Jeep" that disappeared on the way to her hut, but it was she who killed the District Police Officer by saying "God will forgive you, but I won't". In this way she actualizes the laws of the Old Testament "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth".

In the analysis of the mythological consciousness Yu. Lotman points to the predominance of the "universal law" – "Autumn – evening –

old age; conception – sowing grains in the fields – every entry into the dark and closed space – burial of the deceased – eating. So, "the deceased – family – grain", and death is just as necessary for the resurrection as sowing is for harvest; a similar way of thinking is explained by the belief that tortures, cutting the body into pieces and scattering them on the ground – or tearing to pieces and eating – are the same as sowing, and therefore they contribute to the resurrection and revival" [5, p. 36].

Baba Prisia lost the battle with death. Slava, after returning from Kyiv (where she went to buy medicine for Vovchyk), finds her mother and her son dead in the middle of the yard. The psychological type of Svala is rather interesting, as it proves the social myth of a special subspecies – "Soviet people" who are not adapted to living outside the system/zone. The woman makes a decision to commit suicide. So, all characters of the play appear in the mysterious metro coach, where they receive a revelation about the sense of their lives.

Thus, the modern myth of Chornobyl decodes the archetypal images of the Mother/Home Land and expresses the mental codes of the nation. Therefore, the initiation model as a representation of transition and the establishment of post-apocalyptic/vitalistic value paradigms in can be clearly traced in the plots of the analyzed plays.

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О. М. Павлова

Провідний філолог Інституту філології
Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка

Міф Чорнобиля у сюжетах сучасної української драматургії

У цій статті автор розглядає процес творення сучасного міфу – зони відчуження – у п'єсах Я. Верещака "Третя молитва", Неди Нежданой "Заблукані втікачі", П. Ар'є "На початку і наприкінці віків". Зосереджено увагу на виявленні новітніх аспектів рецепції техногенної катастрофи Чорнобиля: накладанні та взаємопроникненні архаїчного та соціального міфів, моделі ініціації; співвідношенні концепту "Свій" / "Чужий"; особливості "пам'яті" та "спогадів" про ті події; художнього втілення архетипних образів Землі / Дому; декодифікації ментального коду нації в постапокаліптичний період.

Ключові слова: пам'ять, сюжет, архетип, ініціація, космогонія.

О. Н. Павлова

Ведущий филолог Института филологии
Киевского национального университета имени Тараса Шевченко

Миф Чернобыля в сюжетах современной украинской драматургии

В этой статье автор рассматривает процесс создания современного мифа – зоны отчуждения в пьесах Я. Верещака "Третья Молитва", Неды Нежданой "Заблудившиеся ...", П. Арье "В начале и в конце веков". Внимание сконцентрировано на исследовании новых аспектов рецепции техногенной катастрофы Чернобыля: наложение и взаимопроникновение архаического и социального мифов, модели инициации; соотношении концепта "Свой" / "Чужой"; особенности "памяти" и "воспоминаний" о тех событиях; художественного воплощения архетипных образов Земли / Дома; декодификация ментального кода нации в постапокалиптический период.

Ключевые слова: память, сюжет, инициация, космогония.