A Terrible Kaleidoscope: The Anthropocene Lyric in Chornobyl Poetry

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The development of nuclear power in the Soviet Union reached its apex in the 1970s and 1980s, when Soviet science was at the forefront of nuclear technology. Model cities, called *atomogrady*,[1] were constructed as visions of a techno-scientific utopia promising a bright future. The explosion at Chornobyl in 1986 exposed not only the fallibility of the Soviet nuclear project, but also the fallacy that humankind controls nuclear power.[2] Chornobyl became not just a local but a global catastrophe, underscoring the precarity of a shared future on this planet. Although countries such as Ukraine have experienced the consequences of nuclear disaster most acutely, the "millennial futures" of radioactive waste affect us all (Hecht 2018, 111). The Anthropocenic dimensions of nuclear disaster found vivid expression in Ukrainian Chornobyl poetry, the authors of which discovered "creative and instructive ways of placing the human at the scene of ecological breakdown" to expose uncomfortable truths about nuclear power (Bristow 2015, 108). In anticipating an apocalyptic future, these poets locate nuclear disaster within a larger context of man-made ecological destruction. Chornobyl poetry "conjures the peculiarly wrought (and fraught) intimacies of the Anthropocene" through an awareness of deep time in which "teleological temporality" becomes "more pliable and open," and where personal and geologic

1 atomic cities

2 The Ukrainian spelling of "Chornobyl" is used predominantly in keeping with requests by the Ukrainian government to restore original spellings upon gaining independence. References may still use the Russian spelling of "Chernobyl." The same applies for "Kyiv" and "Prypiat."

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memory collapse and thicken temporal experience (Farrier 2019, 8, 25). This article examines the poetry of Ivan Drach, Lina Kostenko, and Oksana Zabuzhko to show how their representations of Chornobyl engage with the Anthropocene *avant la lettre* to describe humanity's precarity in this epoch.

Anthropocene Debates

The "Anthropocene," a term coined by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, refers to the current geological epoch marked by distinct man-made changes (Crutzen & Stoermer 2000, 17–18). The Anthropocene is presented as an apocalypse of intensifying environmental devastation. Anthropocene time and space are vast and thick, and its catastrophes are entangled and immense, embodying what Rob Nixon calls the "slow violence" of invisible and gradual environmental crises (Nixon 2011, 2). While the beginnings of the epoch are still debated, several scholars trace the Anthropocene to the Atomic Age due to the planetary impact of radiation (Waters et al. 2016).[3] Soviet versions of the concept circulated in scientific circles but had limited influence given the "hyperbolic Promethean (and utopian) tradition in Russian and Soviet science" (Brookes & Fratto 2020, 9).[4] What the precursors demonstrate is that the Soviet Union (and imperial Russia before it) was a place where "thinking on the Anthropocene was done," where thoughts about the long-term effects of human activity were conceived (Brookes & Fratto 2020, 12). It is important to note, as Clive Hamilton and Jacques Grinevald explain, that what differentiates the Anthropocene is its urgency and alarm—it is a rupture, and previous scientists could never have anticipated the extreme scale of environmental harm that we now face (Hamilton & Grinevald 2015, 61–62). Yet the term "Anthropocene" has not penetrated Slavic culture as thoroughly as it has the West. Vladimir Vuletić and Eni Buljubasić note that even two decades after its introduction, the term does not circulate widely in academic communities in

3 For the context of this discussion, I consider the Anthropocene to begin in the Atomic Age and the development of the atomic bomb.

4 Aleksei Pavlov used the term *antropogen* in 1922 to describe the dominance of human activity on earth, and his colleague Vladimir Vernadskii proposed the idea of the *biosfera* (later altered to *noosfera*), to denote the geological impact of humankind on earth (Brookes & Fratto 2020). However, as Hamilton and Grinevald point out, the scientific foundations of pre-Anthropocene thought on this subject expanded toward an optimistic metaphysics whereas the Anthropocene is concerned with abrupt and irrevocable change (Hamilton & Grinevald 2015, 66).

Eastern Europe. They also report that coverage of the Anthropocene in the media, with few exceptions, is largely neutral due to a "lack of interest" in issues that may potentially impede economic and industrial development (Vuletić and Buljubašić 2021, 141). Many of these countries are still navigating old and new traumas and conflicts in the post-Soviet world.

Detractors of the "Anthropocene" take issue with the imprecision of the term. For historian T.J. Demos, the term "makes us all complicit" and erroneously negates the contributions of military, corporate, and state enterprises to ecological crises (Demos 2017, 17). Eileen Crist warns that the Anthropocene recreates a narcissistic narrative of progress in its projections of a utopian techno-scientific future in which we forge ahead bravely to solve all climate change woes (Crist 2013, 140). Similarly, environmental historian Jason W. Moore argues for the term "Capitalocene" as a means of accounting for the transformation of the environment into "Cheap Natures" for exploitation under capitalism (Moore 2017, 611). Gabrielle Hecht acknowledges that although these perspectives animate the conversation, alternative terms are unlikely to displace "Anthropocene" in any authoritative way (Hecht 2018, 111). For Hecht, the term "offers a way of signaling human responsibility" rather than control (Hecht 111). There is a need to address the Anthropocene from multiple perspectives in order to temper some of its narcissistic excess, but the term is malleable enough to accommodate the "many stories to tell, and many ways of telling them," necessary to adequately articulate the challenges we face as a global community (Hecht 112). The poets in this article envision the disaster not only as an accident but, as Kate Brown suggests, "as an acceleration on a time [*sic*] line of destruction or an explanation point in a chain of toxic exposures that restructured the landscape, bodies, and politics" (Brown 2019, 142).

In the poetry of Drach, Kostenko, and Zabuzhko, the nuclear imaginary unleashes a new Anthropocenic one. All three belong to a strong tradition of state criticism within Ukrainian poetry and are united in their resistance to the power of the Soviet state: "They were innovators practicing pure poetics, searching to discover new artistic values in the context of the national theme in particular" (Kharkhun 2019, 175). All three poets recognized Chornobyl's significance for Ukrainian independence, and as observers of life and witnesses to the misuse of state power, they were acutely aware of the catastrophic consequences. Given

the popularity of poetry in Ukraine, Drach, Kostenko, and Zabuzhko use their cultural status to articulate painful revelations about our ecological future.

Ivan Drach and the Nuclear Ode

The development of nuclear power in the Soviet Union was neither linear nor monolithic, but much of the debate and anxiety around the Soviet nuclear project was not fully elucidated for the public as it was considered a state secret. Instead, Soviet citizens were inundated with visions of a Soviet technological utopia centered around the idea of *mirnyi atom*.[5] Art and literature projected these utopian fantasies under the direction of socialist realism, a state-mandated mode of cultural production. Profiles of Soviet physicists and histories of Soviet science circulated in the media, and "the cult of the atom had resulted in songs, poems, novels, cartoons, and films with nuclear science as a theme" (Fraser 2019, 135). In an interview with Svetlana Aleksievich, Valentin Borisevich, the former head of the Belarusian Laboratory of the Institute of Nuclear Energy, recalls that Физики-ядерщики… Элита… Все в восторге перед будущим (Aleksievich 2013, 111).[6] In the 1970s, the censorship and cultural repression of the post-Khrushchev era helped to ensure that the "cult of the atom" and its promise of utopia was not compromised.

The poetry of Ivan Drach offers a compelling example of the shift that occurred between Soviet and post-Soviet attitudes toward nuclear power in poetry. Drach was a well-known poet and screenwriter who rose to prominence during the Khrushchev era and was at the forefront of the dissident writers movement, the *shistesiatniki*.[7] He was an outspoken critic of repressive cultural mandates that limited individual

5 "the peaceful atom." Promotion of the peaceful atom elided a long history of Soviet nuclear accidents, atomic bomb testing, and lax public health monitoring in contaminated areas, all of which would be uncovered in the years after the Chornobyl disaster.

6 "Nuclear physicists… Elites… Everyone is excited about the future." (All translations are my own.)

7 "sixtiers." This was an informal dissident group of anti-totalitarian Ukrainian writers who emerged in the Thaw period. Many of them had their works banned or were themselves imprisoned or killed. Drach was outspoken about the arrests of his fellow poets and colleagues. After Chornobyl, the criticism leveled at the state echoed similar struggles of the 1960s. However, the sixtiers' relationship to Soviet power is more complicated (Onyshkevych 1993, 365).

expression and lyric experimentation. His poetry is intense and complex: "The whole universe takes up its abode in the poet's heart. He tries to understand the tragic contradictions of the epoch that gave birth to great hopes, great accomplishments and, at the same time, spawned fascism and the atomic bomb's threat of destruction" (Kolinko 1977, 58). Drach's 1974 collection, *The Root and the Crown* (*Korin' i krona*), featured a cycle of poems entitled "Breath of the Atomic Power Station" ("Podikh atomnoi") dedicated to the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant, its builders, and communities around Prypiat. Ironically, these rural communities became by default "expendable places that can be forfeited for the sake of sustaining developed-world lifestyles" (Farrier 2019, 11). The villages around Prypiat unwittingly shouldered the risks inherent to life next to a nuclear power plant. After being persuaded that nuclear development would benefit them, these communities—where families had been tending the land for generations—lost everything. The infallibility of the atomic-powered future presented in Drach's poetry precluded the possibility of catastrophe. Chornobyl undermined the promises of a bright, atomic-powered Communist future.

Drach's cycle of poems reconciles technology and nature in a familiar socialist realist style.[8] "The Legend of Polisia" ("Poliska Lehenda") personifies the relationship between nuclear power and the environment in a marriage between the anthropomorphized Prypiat River and Atom. Young Prypiat figures as a nature sprite of history, born from Де все стугонить історією, де кожна билинка—пече нам (Drach 1974, 26).[9] The ріка-наречена turns all other suitors away except Atom.[10] However, she must also calm the worries of the birds and fish (Nature) who fear the power of the Atom (Drach 1974, 26). Atom, promising prosperity, is a Promethean figure, recalling both the hubris embodied in the original Greek myth and the ambitions of Soviet science. Prypiat tells them not to worry, that Atom's love for her will ensure that their concerns will not have been in vain, for his reactors are secure, where нього мільйон замків[11] are testament to the power of his непохитні атомні трони

8 Drach's relationship with socialist realism is complicated. At times he was criticized for departing from official tenets, so this cycle of poems, which won him the coveted Shevchenko National Prize in 1976, may be more representative of his conformity in the face of pressure from the state.

9 "Where everything groans with history, where every epic spurns us"

10 "river-bride"

11 "his million locks"

(Drach 1974, 27).[12] The young river-bride will give herself in marriage to Atom to serve her people: Хай Дніпрові й Донбасові Атом мій допомагає! (Drach 1974, 27).[13] Her sacrifice resembles the duty expected of all Soviet citizens working to build a bright Communist future. These poems are not particularly memorable, but they do demonstrate how poetry helped to construct the Soviet nuclear imaginary. The fact that Soviet citizens had to be persuaded to accept the intrusion of dangerous technologies indicates that there was an ecological, pre-Anthropocene awareness that had to be overcome. The vanity of this cycle eventually gave way to pointed antagonism against the Soviet state and its nuclear legacy after Drach's son was exposed to high levels of radiation while treating the first Chornobyl patients in Kyiv. Drach later acknowledged that the disaster demonstrated that all along "we were on the edge of a precipice, an abyss, and that all our cultural efforts were a vanity of vanities, a waste of effort, a rose under a bulldozer" (Plokhy 2018, 293).

Drach's regrets are expressed most ominously in his post-Chornobyl narrative poem "The Madonna of Chornobyl" ("Chornobil'ska madonna," 1988). In Ukraine, the Madonna encompasses both the pagan adoration of fecund Mother Earth and the religious solemnity linked to her role as the Mother of God. Through the different incarnations of Madonna as mother, the poem presents a multilayered moral and philosophical reflection on the disaster. Except, as Sarah Phillips explains, Drach "inverts the archetypal representation of 'mother with child,' substituting it with a 'mother with no-child,'" underscoring the generational devastation in Ukrainian society (Drach 2004, 169). Similarly, for Inna Sukhenko, Drach's poem is a "cry made by the author himself, by the suffering environment, Ukraine, each human, humanity" (Sukhenko 2018, 239). The appeals to nature and descriptions of flora and fauna interwoven throughout the poem, invoke strong ties to nature and a "pre-Soviet tradition of environmental respect" that resonate deeply through Ukrainian cultural memory (Sukhenko 2014, 127).[14] The close relationship to the land that had been so crucial to

12 "steadfast atomic thrones"

13 "Let my Atom help the Dnieper and Donbas."

14 Sukhenko explains that the pre-Christian "fundamental love and adoration toward nature is a central feature of the Ukrainian mentality," one that was perverted somewhat with the anthropocentric perspective of Christianity but is detectable in a wide body of Ukrainian literature. For Ukrainians, the earth has always been about life (Sukhenko 2014, 122).

Ukrainian experience was fractured by technological and industrial progress. Mykola Tkachuk confirms that a deep connection with nature unites Ukrainian writers of Chornobyl literature and poetry: їх об'єднує трагічний образ природи, яка, як жива істота, волає про допомогу, застерігаючи майбутні покоління від нерозважливості, будить громадську свідомість (Tkachuk 2011, 56).[15] Tkachuk's assessment naturally gestures toward the Anthropocene. The radiation from Chornobyl penetrated bodies and spread into unintended spaces, proving that our man-made temporal and spatial boundaries are artificial and porous.

The fragmented, episodic structure of the poem reflects the traumatic shattering of reality, as well as the impossibility of fully explicating the disaster's unwieldy dimensions. At several points, Drach's lyric subject laments this lack of words: Я заздрю всім, у кого є слова. Немає в мене слів.[16] As is custom, the poet does find the words, but Drach's invocation of the topos of silence speaks to the inadequacy of language for expressing trauma. Poets felt themselves without the language to fully articulate this new post-Chornobyl reality and its Anthropocenic horrors. In Drach's poem, guilt suffuses the tragic presentation of the various Madonnas, where each is a "suffering victim" and yet also guilty, according to Larissa Zaleska Onyshkevych (Onyshkevych 1990, 283). Onyshkevych identifies a pronounced "need to blame oneself and one's own people for the disaster" in early Ukrainian Chornobyl poetry that is not found in the poetry of non-Ukrainian writers (Onyshkevych 284). Through epithets of other Chornobyl poems and the voices and other incarnations that constitute "The Madonna of Chornobyl," Drach presents a kaleidoscopically refracted portrait of guilt and blame that is leveled at scientists, sons, and the Ukrainian nation.

The compulsion to speak combined with the religious context invites a reading of the poem in terms of Walter Brueggemann's definition of lament. Brueggemann defines lament in opposition to a genre of praise that "legitimates present power arrangements" and marginalizes those struggling against that power (Brueggemann 2008, 223). He highlights the political and social dimensions of lament, which "in its very utterance, is an act of resistance" against "officially legitimated truth

15 "they are united by a tragic image of nature, which, like a living being, cries for help, protecting future generations from recklessness, to awaken public consciousness."

16 "I envy those who have words. There are no words in me."

claims" (Brueggemann 2008, 223). More than an expression of grief, the pain and anger felt by those who experience nuclear disaster offers a powerful critique of the teleological pursuit of progress marked by environmental exploitation. Drach is no stranger to resistance, having been a member of the *shistdesiatniki*, but his poetic resistance became explicitly political in the post-Chornobyl era. In 1989, he helped found "Rukh," the People's Movement of Ukraine, which demanded Ukrainian independence, the total divestment from nuclear power, and health monitoring for Chornobyl's victims (Plokhy 2018, 304). The need to chronicle Chornobyl's devastation and speak its uncomfortable truths incited meaningful civic action as the legacy of Soviet exploitation became apparent. This impulse finds nuanced expression in the Chornobyl poetry of Lina Kostenko and Oksana Zabuzhko.

Lina Kostenko's Poetic Activism

Lina Kostenko is one of the most renowned and beloved Ukrainian poets and a fellow member of the *shistdesiatniki* alongside Drach. She values lyric freedom and individual experience in opposition to the repressive constraints of Soviet ideology, a perspective reflected in her poetry, which Michael Naydan describes as "the poetry of natural language, free from pretensions" and that "reveal[s] the deeper personal level of experience" (Naydan 1977, 139). She was banned from publishing until 1977 because of her anti-totalitarian opinions. In her Chornobyl poetry, Kostenko's civic and lyric mission are united, much like in Drach's poetry. Unlike Drach, Kostenko emphasizes the global dimensions of environmental disaster. Tetiana Filat explains that тема Чорнобиля у творах поетеси іноді становить основу й центр ліричного переживання (Filat 2018, 186).[17] Kostenko's poetry employs images of nature and Ukrainian folklore alongside her personal experiences, emotions, and memories. She writes widely on Chornobyl, from whole poems dedicated to the disaster to explosive fragments scattered through larger works. Kostenko began visiting the Zone in the years after the disaster as part of a cultural preservation initiative. Her Chornobyl poetry serves as a record of those impressions, meetings, and observations, all of which further strengthened the poet's resolve to chart the devastation of the Anthropocene.

17 "the theme of Chornobyl in the works of the poetess sometimes constitutes the foundation and center of the lyrical experience."

We can see this concern explicitly referenced in Kostenko's poem "Flying Quatrains" ("Letiuchi katreny," 1989). The poem reflects on the spiritual, historical, and symbolic impacts that humans have had on the environment, while also questioning the role of the poet. In the opening lines, the lyric subject asks, Що за поет як піввіку лякався? / Звикли до правди мої вуста (Kostenko 1989a, 260).[18] A truth-teller by profession, she asks if she has any right to speak the truth given that so many poets and artists, including Kostenko, were silenced during the repressive cultural environment of the Soviet era. Her hesitancy to speak reflects the guilt over her own, albeit imposed, complicity. However, she does find a voice, and her criticism of nuclear power is unambiguous and striking:

Ми—атомні заложники прогресу,
вже в нас нема ні лісу,
ні небес.
Так і живем—
од стресу і до стресу.
Абетку смерті маємо—
А Е С. (Kostenko 1989a, 260)[19]

The use of the word *zalozhniki*[20] emphasizes the lack of agency people and communities had over energy decisions, as well as the power differential involved in the growth and expansion of the nuclear industry, where big decisions decide the fate of entire populations. In this stanza, atomic progress is also associated with the disappearance of forests and of heaven, an apocalyptic image that is particularly evocative in the Ukrainian context where a respect for nature is culturally ingrained. When we forsake the responsibility given to us to respect the environment, local and global communities become vulnerable and will be unable to shoulder the burdens of nuclear risk and further environmental degradation. The "AEC" in the last line focuses the blame directly on the creation of the nuclear power plant.

Kostenko approaches Chornobyl with a new understanding ini-

18 "What kind of poet is frightened for half a century? / My lips are used to the truth."

19 "We are the atomic hostages of progress, / no longer have we forests, / nor heaven. / So we live—/ from stress to stress. / We have the alphabet of death—/ N P P."

20 "hostages"

tiated by the apocalyptic repercussions and fractured precarity of the Anthropocene epoch. The next quatrain poses several questions: Куди йдемо? Який лишаем слід? Хто пам'ять змив як дощик акварельку? (Kostenko 1989a, 260).[21] This rhetorical questioning demands that we remember the past to reenvision the future in the face of increasing existential uncertainty. The poet, as a chronicler of the age, writes using the perception offered by the soul: Тривожними уважними очима моя душа подивиться на все, including the фатальні наслідки й причини[22] associated with events such as Chornobyl (Kostenko 1989a, 262). The perspective of the soul is in opposition to other intellectualized modes of perception and explanation, against Всілякі «ізми» і всілякі «нео»,[23] that are not only unhelpful in their abstraction but also suspect for their advancement of many policies and practices that have accelerated and intensified the human impacts on the environment (Kostenko 1989a, 263). In Kostenko's poem, the poet is charged with an impossible task of serving as a "biographer of the people," with a difficult biography of her own: Поети—це біографи народу / а в нього біографія тяжка (Kostenko 1989a, 268).[24] This comment echoes an earlier statement about the possibility of speaking from a place of trauma: Поети чи зґвалтована душа / спроможна вільно вимовити слово? (Kostenko 1989a, 261).[25] "Flying Quatrains," then, lays out Kostenko's conception of a poet's responsibility in the Anthropocene while grappling with her own personal emotions, exhibiting a "humility in relationships with both human and nonhuman nature" that is often associated with ecopoetry (Bryson 2002, 6).

In "Flying Quatrains," Kostenko consistently condemns history for its role in heralding the arrival of the Anthropocene. History figures as a plow tearing up the land, implicitly recalling the destruction wrought by the Soviet industrialization of agriculture: Як страшно оре історичний плуг! (Kostenko 1989a, 263).[26] The poem's engagement with postmodernism "manifests as a disappointment with the great im-

21 "Where are we going? What trace do we leave? Who washed away memory like watercolors?"

22 "With anxious attentive eyes my soul will look at everything"; "fatal consequences and reasons"

23 "all sorts of 'isms' and all sorts of 'neo'"

24 "Poets—biographers of the people / but he has a difficult biography"

25 "Are poets or a raped soul / capable of uttering a word freely?"

26 "How terribly the historical plough plows!"

perial and totalitarian narratives of history along with a romantic mythologizing of the national history" (Hundorova 2019, 75). The destruction of earth is akin to the elision of not only the recent past, but also the deep past from where we came. The riches contained there have been lost, possibly irrevocably: Які скарби були були і зникли! (Kostenko 1989a, 264).[27] Blame is leveled on the scientists and institutions of power for loving progress над усе (Kostenko 1989a, 264).[28] The lyric subject also laments, Уроків історії не вчимо, and wonders, Це снилось людству чи таки було? (Kostenko 1989a, 264).[29] The guilt is implicit, but the irony is clear, because humankind did indeed dream of grand scientific and technological advancements while failing to account for its consequences. Irony is also used to point out the nightmarish inversion of those grand dreams. For Kostenko, irony—це блискавка ума / котра освітить всі глибини смислу and provokes deep contemplation (Kostenko 1989a, 267).[30] The image of lightning recalls the flash of light associated with the atomic bomb but also with notions of vision and revelation. Referencing air pollution, Kostenko comments ironically on spiritual contamination: Душа—єдина на землі держава / де є свобода чиста як озон (Kostenko 1989a, 261).[31] Like radiation, air pollution also permeates space without prejudice and causes illness, cancer, and genetic damage.

In "Flying Quatrains," Kostenko maps environmental and cultural breakdown throughout the poem as she details what Tamara Hundorova identifies as a "profound uncertainty and distrust" of the recent totalitarian past (Hundorova 2019, 75). Using humility and irony, Kostenko challenges the teleological narratives promoted by the Soviet regime through the "de-heroization of its heroic narrative" (Hundorova 2019, 66). For Kostenko, there are no heroes. Her presentation of a post-apocalyptic landscape undercuts any ideas of victory surrounding Chornobyl, because any victory of containment is not only misleading, but also contaminated with "something unconscious, sensuous, and primordially frightening" brought on by the failure of modernity and its catastrophic "after" (Hundorova 2019, 75). In Kostenko's poem, it is

27 "What treasures were there and vanished!"

28 "above everything"

29 "We don't teach history"; "Is this mankind's dream?"

30 "lightning of the mind which illuminates all the depths of thought"

31 "The soul is the only state on earth where freedom is as pure as ozone."

the Anthropocene that is "primordially frightening" in its refusal to be contained either geologically or semantically.

The memory of Chornobyl and other disasters prompts us to engage with a constellation of violence and catastrophe inflicted by humankind's drive for progress. At one point, Kostenko, comments sardonically, Мені б курінь на острові Борнео, implying a kind of naive escape from impending ecological catastrophe away from states з поглядом Горгон (Kostenko 1989a, 263).[32] However, there is no escape, because the island is already a полігон, a testing ground or proving ground, often used for nuclear weapons testing (Kostenko 1989a, 263).[33] Such devastation is often concealed, as Kostenko notes ironically, Скільки років землі—/ і мільярд / і мільйон / а яка вона й досі ще гарна! (Kostenko 1989a, 266).[34] What makes Anthropocene disasters so threatening is how insidiously they infiltrate even the most private and remote spaces. Kostenko includes public health crises and chemical poisoning: І смог і СНІД і чорний дим Бхопала (Kostenko 1989a, 266).[35] A few lines later, she remarks: Не бійтеся ліси / іще не все пропало / Останній вільний зубр / ще ходить по землі (Kostenko 1989a, 266).[36] The "last free bison" reminds readers of the threat of mass species extinction. Kostenko also prompts readers to remember the generational trauma inflicted by Chornobyl: Летить лелека над Чорнобилем / нікому діток не несе (Kostenko 1989a, 266).[37] Future generations will inherit not only the increased burdens of environmental instability but also a fraught genetic legacy. Radiation carries its own genetic risks, but genetic memory is also affected by large-scale catastrophes, in the form of chemicals, pollutants, and toxic substances that disrupt both ecosystems and bodily systems. Kostenko's reading of Chornobyl recasts the Anthropocene as a moral and ethical imperative. The destruction of the

32 "I would have a hut on the island of Borneo"; "with a view of Gorgons" (a monstrous view)

33 The former Soviet nuclear testing site in Kazakhstan is commonly referred to as the "Polygon." During the Soviet period, nearby communities were purposefully kept ignorant of the nuclear tests taking place there and were exposed to radiation for decades.

34 "How many years of earth—/ a billion / a million / and how beautiful she still is!"

35 "And smog and AIDS and the black smoke of Bhopal"; Bhopal refers to a 1984 accident at the Union Carbide pesticide plant in India that released thirty tons of methyl isocyanate, a highly toxic gas, onto villages.

36 "Don't fear the forest / not all is gone / The last free bison still walks the earth."

37 "A stork flying over Chornobyl is not carrying a child to anyone."

earth is equated with the devastation of the soul and if we continue to rely on nuclear power, Kostenko writes that even Дозиметром не виміряєш дози / тотального спустошення душі (Kostenko 1989a, 263).[38]

Still, Kostenko's deep love of nature is apparent in the delicate images of her poetry. She finds beauty in the Zone's resurgence of wildlife, documented through her own ecological expeditions into the Zone. In the poem "The Rain Is like a Shower. This Day Is So Tender" ("Tsei doshch—iak dush. Tsei den' takyi laskavyi," 2015), she marvels at the rain, the wildlife, and wild gardens. We know the Zone is being described: Чорнобиль. Зона. Двадцять перший вік (Kostenko 2015, 259).[39] Filat reads the poem's layered descriptions as part of the Chornobyl chronotope in which time "thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (Bakhtin 1981, 84; Filat 191). The thickening of time and history in Kostenko's poetry captures the eerie contradictions of the Exclusion Zone as a radioactive space in which the flora and fauna are flourishing in the shadow of a nuclear disaster. The ruins of the past coexist with an apocalyptic landscape that projects a peopleless future; both intrude in our present moment to destabilize our experience of history. Kostenko describes the rhythms of the Zone, where lilacs bloom, проламують тини, and pike swim like submarines, немов підводний човен, and geese return every щовесни (Kostenko 2015, 259).[40] The routines of nature continue, deceiving us with their normalcy. Part of what the Chornobyl chronotope reveals is that this resurgence of nature is connected to the absence of people. The effects of low-level radiation do not manifest so acutely in animals, so for them, humans are the detrimental variable. Still, while the Earth is beautiful, Kostenko reminds readers that not all is "safe," particularly for humans: Жив-був народ над Прип'яттю—і зник. / В Рудому лісі виросли поганки, / і ходить Смерть, єдиний тут грибник (Kostenko 2015, 259).[41] Kostenko's "place-making" encompasses the non-human, making the Zone feel simultaneously familiar and alien as it morphs into a place unfit for man and with a life of its own. Tom Bristow explains that this

38 "With a dosimeter you cannot measure the total devastation of the soul."

39 "Chornobyl. Zone. Twenty-first century."

40 "break through the mud"; "like submarines"; "every spring"

41 "People once lived over Prypiat—and disappeared. / In the Red Forest, toadstools grew, / and Death, the only mushroom picker, walks here…"

is characteristic of the "place perception" of Anthropocene lyricism, where "place is felt as it is encountered as being lived out by others, by more than ourselves" (Kostenko 2015, 7).

The poem "There Are Lakes in a Handful of Valleys" ("Stoiat' ozera v prygorshchakh dolyn," 1989) continues this theme with a haunting image of invisible danger: Малина спіє… І на все, на все / Лягає пил чорнобильської траси / Роса—як смертний піт на травах, на горіхах (Kostenko 1989c, 544).[42] The houses—найбільше стронцію—у стріхах—are also contaminated (544).[43] Хто це казав, що стріхи—традиційні? she adds sarcastically (Kostenko 1989c, 544).[44] The next lines present a contrasting scene of idyllic paradise: Ріка. Палатка. Озеро. Курінь. / Аборигени острова Надії. / Босоніж дітки бігають малі (Kostenko 1989c, 545).[45] The distance between an irradiated village and carefree children playing in the sun feels safe, but any hope is undercut in the next lines: А де тепер не зона на землі? / І де межа між зоною й не зоною? (Kostenko 1989c, 545).[46] The barbed wire marking Chornobyl's Zone of Exclusion is a useless barrier that imparts a false sense of security. Our long experiment with nuclear power has meant that radiation from our nuclear legacy has already left its mark. We just do not always see it. Kostenko harnesses poetry's illustrative potential to make radiation visible. In the poem, human perception, so limited and conditioned to blindness, becomes sensitive to Anthropocene hazards. From this displaced position, we "best witness the fragility, beauty and indifference of flora and fauna, climate and season—the more-than-human world" (Bristow 2015, 7).

Kostenko frequently challenges the idea of containment in her poetry, in her refusal to compromise her poetic vision and in the presentation of the Anthropocene. In her poetry the various crises, often spatially and temporally separate, collide in creative montages that help us see a catastrophic expanse that we have been conditioned to ignore. "A Terrible Kaleidoscope" ("Strashnyi kaleidoskop," 1989), perhaps Ko-

42 "Raspberries sing… and on everything, on everything / the dust of Chornobyl's traces falls / like deadly sweat on the herbs and nuts."

43 "the most strontium is in the roofs"

44 "Who said the roofs are traditional?"

45 "River. Tent. Lake. Hut. / Aborigines of the island of Hope. / Small children run barefoot."

46 "And where isn't the zone on earth now? / Where is the boundary between the zone and not the zone?"

stenko's most Anthropocene-aware poem, encompasses a wide variety of catastrophic elements, creating a kaleidoscopic view of disaster. Kostenko mirrors different types of disaster against one another, reflecting on the varied forms of catastrophe that mark history and the planet, delineating an alarming pattern of Anthropocene violence.

> Страшний калейдоскоп:
> в цю мить десь хтось загинув.
> В цю мить. В цю саму мить. У кожну із хвилин.
> Розбився корабель. Горять Галапагоси.
> І сходить над Дніпром гірка зоря-полин.
> Десь вибух. (Kostenko 1989b, 7)[47]

Chornobyl is placed alongside volcanoes, ruins, the shooting of a weapon, and a flying comet. Many of these imagistic fragments are associated with explosion and light, confirming Naydan's claims of Kostenko's concern with illumination, mentioned earlier. While the world seems to be exploding, life goes on: Бавиться дитя. / Цвітуть обличчя, острахом не стерті (Kostenko 1989b 7).[48] Poetry, in its capacity to condense and expand time, reconceptualizes modes of perception to assist readers in understanding the scale of the Anthropocene, which "exceeds both personal experience and intergenerational memory" (Farrier 2019, 5). The disaster forced poets to confront not only the immediate consequences of nuclear power's fallibility, but also the far-reaching consequences of nuclear disaster that alert us to the impossibility of containment. Tracing the ecocritical themes in Kostenko's poetry makes it possible to see more clearly the unfolding catastrophes of the Anthropocene that Chornobyl revealed to be there all along.

Oksana Zabuzhko's Anthropocenic Intimacies

Oksana Zabuzhko is one of the most celebrated and widely translated Ukrainian writers of the post-Soviet era. Her work frequently dissects the many layers of Ukrainian historical memory and confronts the new complexities of human and environmental interactions revealed by

47 "A terrible kaleidoscope: / In this moment somewhere someone died. / In this moment. In this very moment. Every single minute. / A ship crashes. The Galapagos burns. / And over the Dnipro a bitter wormwood-star rises. / Somewhere an explosion."

48 "A child is having fun / Faces bloom, unerased by fear."

Chornobyl. Part of the *vos'midesiatniki*,[49] Zabuzhko belongs to a generation of Soviet writers who made their writing debuts "under its disintegrating system" and unlike Drach and Kostenko, with significantly more freedom (Wallo 2019, 4). Hundorova cites Zabuzhko's highly successful novella *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* (*Pol'ovy doslydzheniia z ukraïns'kogo seksu*, 2011) as an example of the "post-Chornobyl text" that confronts the carnivalesque instability of post-Soviet life. In an interview, Zabuzhko, echoing Hundorova, explains that 1986 is "the real fin de siècle":

> Враження було, що ми продовжуємо жити після Апокаліпсису. Світ посттехнологічної катастрофи обживає для себе реальність, непридатну до життя […] Чорнобильська катастрофа спричинила тектонічний зсув у свідомості й у сприйнятті часу, який несамовито прискорився. (Zabuzhko 2007)[50]

She chronicles this reality through a dissection of the macrocosm contained in the microcosm of everyday life, "where intimate locales register life and environmental change" (Bristow 2015, 7). Zabuzhko's poetry is located at the intersection of the apocalyptic and ecocritical, revealing the disruptions, occlusions, and realities accompanying the awareness of the scale and severity of the Anthropocene. Zabuzhko's poetry is more lyrical in its presentation and less accusatory than Kostenko's, focusing instead on the more personal and embodied experiences of disaster.

For her, Chornobyl is a lens through which an individual must reevaluate their relationship to state power; the ecological damage of radiation represents the intrusion of state power into intimate spaces (Russell 2020, 10). She consequently presents an image of the precarious conditions of life in perpetual crisis through the "making strange" of the spaces, relationships, and emotions that we might typically believe to be safe from contamination but are often the most vulnerable.

Zabuzhko's "Letter from the Dacha" ("List iz dachy," 1996a) is a disturbing poem that chronicles the happenings at the dacha in the form

49 "eightiers"

50 "The impression was that we continue living after the Apocalypse. The world of post-technological catastrophe inhabits a reality unfit for life. […] The Chornobyl catastrophe caused a tectonic shift in consciousness and the perception of time, which accelerated violently."

of a letter. The title and the epistolary form already set up certain expectations as to the subject matter of the poem, but if one were expecting a languorous lyrical poem about the idyllic Ukrainian countryside, they would be disappointed. Immediately, from the first lines of the poem, the reader is confronted with an apocalyptic image:

> Здрастуй, любий! У нас ізнову
> по кислотних дощах заіржавів город: почорнілі цурпалки гудиння
> над землею стирчать, як на згарищі спалений дріт.
> (Zabuzhko 1996a, 164)[51]

The epistolary delivery is unsettling. The idea of someone sitting down to languidly recount the horrors of the day is strange and concerning. Idyllic images are replaced with ones of acid rain, rust, and scorched wires common to the post-Chornobyl visual lexicon. The radiation released by the accident contaminated the soil and was absorbed by plants, which reacted to the radionuclides with weakened immunity, growth suppression, and an increased occurrence of mutations. From exposure, any plants became susceptible to the growth of a rust-like fungus on their stems, and the radiation turned a forest of pine trees near the nuclear power plant a reddish-amber color. The trees died very quickly, but the area has become infamously known as the "Chervonyi lis."[52] This rust is a visual marker of radiation damage, one that left its indelible mark on the nuclear post-apocalyptic imagination. In the decades since the disaster, metallic artifacts that were exposed to the elements and neglected from lack of maintenance, have accumulated rust. Rust has taken on a new symbolic connotation as a marker of decay in Chornobyl's modern ruins.

The poem's reference to acid rain alludes to greater fears of environmental pollution. Acid rain and nuclear contamination share several of the same properties, including their invisibility, threat to health, long-term effects, and connection to the energy industry structured from "an unbridled use of technology and a fundamental lack of concern about the long-term health of mankind and stability of the environment" (Park 1989, 2). Zabuzhko's reference to acid rain in this poem under-

51 "Hello dear. After the recent acid rains / the garden has turned rust colored again / the blackened cucumber vines / stick out of the ground, like scorched wire."

52 "Red Forest"

scores the reality of pollution and its effects on the environment and public health, while also underscoring the role of the energy industry and technological hubris in facilitating multiple ecological crises. Traditionally, rain is part of nature's cycle of growth and rebirth, nourishing the land and preparing it for crops. When rain becomes acidic, what was once beneficial and life-giving is now toxic and destructive, and if the rain is now dangerous, what other potential dangers await us and where are we truly safe? These are the kinds of questions that we must confront in a post-Chornobyl world.

As the poem continues, the writer mentions that she is not sure that the orchard will bear fruit and that the soil is "dirty," an image that rhymes with a "mutant" birth later in the poem. She is afraid of the trees and the earth, which conceals death nearby:

> як по правді, то я боюся ступати між ті дерева:
> щокрок усе дужчає відчуття, ніби я наближаюсь до місця,
> де у високій траві лежить піврозкладене стерво
> і масною червою кишить, мов сміється на сонці.
> (Zabuzhko 1996a, 164)[53]

Death is a defining feature of the landscape in "Letter from the Dacha." The image of a rotting carcass is visceral and unnerving. The writer fears nature, which reeks of death, not only because of the carcass in her backyard, but also because death is so close to home. There is real danger in the landscape. Sarah Phillips, in her article about post-Chornobyl food consumption practices, explains that Chornobyl altered how Ukrainians relate to food, and in turn, to their own health and body (2002). She explains that because radiation is almost undetectable by the senses, it is "everywhere yet nowhere, and its consumption in food products—especially for those living near Chornobyl—is practically unavoidable" (2002, 30). Mushrooms, berries, and milk, three staples of the rural diet, absorb higher levels of radionuclides than other food products. And while efforts were made to monitor radiation levels in the environment and regulate consumption of contaminated food, institutional corruption and a lack of resources have meant that those meas-

53 "to tell you the truth, I'm afraid to walk between the trees: / with every step I feel I'm closer to the spot / where a rotting carcass lies in the tall grass / swarming with worms, grinning in the sun."

ures were soon abandoned, leaving hundreds of thousands of people unaware of lurking health risks. The fear in this poem is palpable. Our epistoler is afraid of the potential dangers lurking outside, such as an ominous tree which looks like a giant scorched bone:

> Чи пам'ятаєш суху берестину, оту, що минулого літа
> вцілило громом,—гігантську обвуглену кістку
> Так от, мені часом здається, що це вона
> верховодить над садом, і свійські дерева помалу
> тратять природну тяму, мов заражені сказом пси.
> (Zabuzhko 1996a, 164)[54]

The Chornobyl disaster fundamentally altered the relationship between humans and the land: the garden, once a place of food, life, and beauty is now a threat. Literary scholar Vitaly Chernetsky explains, "The poem renders powerfully the disturbing feeling of the post-Chornobyl' environment that deceives the senses while turning the mind obstinately toward the apocalyptic" (Chernetsky 2007, 257). The dacha, traditionally a place of respite, is no longer a safe space. It is nightmarish, so much so that she keeps an ax nearby as protection from the trees. The disturbing descriptions offer evidence of the damage done to the earth, as well as the psychological damage of living in perilous conditions. There is no safe space anymore, and this uncertainty and vulnerability is Chornobyl's legacy.

The nuclear imaginary has given way to a new Anthropocenic one. At one point in the poem, the writer relates the news that a neighbor has given birth to a baby born with hair and teeth already, like some kind of mutant. The days-old baby speaks prophetically with a warning:

> […] можливо, й мутант, бо вчора,
> тобто маючи дев'ять днів, закричав:
> "Погасіть же ви врешті це небо!"—
> і замовк, і більше нічого не каже […] (Zabuzhko 1996a, 166)[55]

54 "Do you remember the withered birch, that last summer / survived the thunder—a giant burnt bone / that sometimes seems as though it / lords over the garden, and the trees we planted / are slowly losing their minds, like mad dogs."

55 "[…] maybe it's a mutant, because yesterday, / when he was only nine days old, he cried out: 'Extinguish the sky!'—/ then fell silent and has said nothing since […]"

Those exposed to radiation live with their own bodily uncertainty as well as the anxiety of how future generations will be affected. The child in the poem is born with the mark of trauma upon him. He cries out, "Extinguish the sky!" as though he remembers the burning reactor and its smoke. The fact that he is now silent is disquieting, and Zabuzhko's appraisal of this otherwise alarming occurrence with a так—цілком здоровенький is almost shocking (Zabuzhko 1996a, 166).[56] The last lines of the poem once again draw our attention back to the epistolary form and its characteristic intimacy, which "brings to the fore the personal dimension of the experience and effects of world destruction" (Dietrich 2010, 339). The tone shifts as the heroine implores her loved one to visit before nonchalantly signing off. The poisoned environment has become unexceptional. However, the final line betrays her underlying uneasiness:

> […] Якщо тобі вдасться
> вирватись і приїхать на ту неділю,
> привези мені щось до читання, найкраще—
> незнайомою мовою.
> Ті, що знаю, вже геть зужилися.
> (Zabuzhko 1996a, 166)[57]

Her request for books in a different language invites multiple readings. In her isolation, perhaps she is longing for something new. It could be that language has lost its power to adequately convey her loss, anxiety, and helplessness. Maybe her words have worn out because there is no one listening. Perhaps she no longer trusts the words she knows. There is hope in her search for a new language, just as there is hope that poetry and art can inspire the radical reflection needed to reckon with the planetary breakdown we have accelerated through events such as Chornobyl.

Zabuzhko's poem "Prypiat. Still Life" ("Pripiat'. Natiurmort," 1996b) sets up expectations by connecting poetic form to a style of painting. Reading the poem is akin to scanning a painting. The painterly quality

56 "otherwise, he's quite well"

57 "That's our news. If you find time / to get away for the weekend, / bring me something to read / in a language I haven't learned yet. / Those that I know are exhausted."

of light in a painting helps guide the viewer's eye to various textures and objects. There is a lot of light: Це, здається, світанок—/ і світло, немов простирадла, прим'яте (Zabuzhko 1996b, 64).[58] We can imagine the kind of light breaking over this scene: it is the soft, speckled first light of day that reveals and illuminates. The element of ambiguity introduced by "it seems" (*zdaiet'sia*) means that we, like the lyric subject, are not entirely certain. The poem leaves us guessing in other ways as well. Where is this place? Who lives here? Where did he or she or they go? Throughout the poem a motif of emptiness repeats as Zabuzhko "eulogises the absent body" (Russell 2020, 10) in phrases such as "порожня кімната," "нікого немає!", and "пронизливо-тихо" (Zabuzhko 1996b, 64).[59] Yet someone must live here, because the poem hints at recent habitation, even telling us, Тут хтось був! (64).[60] From these signs, someone's domestic life is reconstructed: "В попільничці—недокурки," and "Тільки в кріслі костюм, перед миттю / заповнений тілом," as well as "ще светр недоплетений пальці чиїсь пам'ятає, / І розгорнута книжка—в позначках од нігтів чиїхось!," and "надкушене яблуко, де надкус ще не взявся іржею" (Zabuzhko 1996b, 64).[61] The interplay of presence and absence reminds us of our own impermanence and contrasts humankind's transitory existence against the actions that have permanently impacted life on this planet. The figurative excision of humans in this instance further underscores "the inescapable reality of our shared destiny on a destitute planet" (Bristow 2015, 2). The descriptions of emptiness evoke Chornobyl's Exclusion Zone, a site that has flourished in the absence of humans despite the lingering radiation.

The role of time in this poem is unclear. We do not know how long ago this room housed a living person, as there is "no witness." Many details suggest that whoever is or was living here has merely stepped out for a moment: the present-tense verb usage, the phrase Ще хвилину тому,[62] as well as the curious detail of a still-ripe apple at the very end of the poem. The occupants have left in a hurry, chased out by the radi-

58 "It seems to be dawn. / The light is like a crumpled sheet."

59 "empty room"; "there's no one here!"; "piercing quiet"

60 "Someone was here!"

61 "In the ashtray—cigarette butts"; "In the chair lies a suit, occupied by a body before this moment"; "An unwoven sweater recalls someone's fingers"; "An open book, marked by someone's fingernails!"; "And a bitten apple, where the bite has not had time to redden"

62 "A minute ago"

ation that has breached our inadequate defenses. Russell interprets this intrusion and the absence it leaves behind as a testament to the "state's violation of this intimacy" (Russell 2020, 10). This room is suspended in time, caught between past and present, presence and absence. We, too, become intruders into this home, but perhaps, also witnesses: Увійдіть! Увійдіть, подивіться (Zabuzhko 1996b, 64).[63] The use of the imperative form commands us to enter as though we are being offered an unauthorized tour of someone's private space. The narrator's entreaty to come and explore seems inappropriate, and we feel uneasy, knowing that we are unwelcome. Our intrusion constitutes a form of unethical spectatorship, casting us as voyeurs to an intimate tableau. Tourists entering the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone replicate a similar act of looking when they walk through the Zone's abandoned buildings to see the decaying artifacts of Soviet life as though in a museum or an amusement park. Zabuzhko's poem urges us to interrogate the ethics that frame our practice of looking so that ecological crisis does not become a spectacle to consume and quickly forget. The poem also asks us to feel the absence marked in the poem as though it were our own imminent future, one in which we humans have only just left. "Prypiat. Still Life" serves as a warning to readers of what is to come.

The apocalyptic theme is elucidated further in Zabuzhko's poem "Love" ("Liubov," 1990), which consists of a series of vivid impressions that express an overarching narrative of nuclear apocalypse distilled through the image of lovers in their final moment. The beginning of the poem implies that they are already living in a post-apocalyptic world, even as another catastrophe is imminent. The lack of descriptions of nature or other living beings is notable. The poem's opening links the sexual entanglement of their bodies with their death-bed agonies, and that theme continues. Obliteration and orgasm are the same:

А обійми стекли, як вода,
І нічник нашу тінь роздвоїв…
Не офіра, не пристрасть, не дар—
Просто спроба лишитись живою.
Із зачумлених стронцієм міст,
Понад їх передсмертні муки
Палахкоче легкий поміст—

63 "Come in! Come in, look around."

Переплетені голі руки.
І допоки це сонце вночі,
І допоки ці спалахи бистрі—
Прокохай, продрижи, прокричи
Цю—останню!—хвилину на вістрі!
(Zabuzhko 1990, 67)[64]

The sense of impending apocalypse is implied through details of sacrifice, irradiated cities, survival, screaming, and living on the edge. Apocalypse *brings to light* that which was previously hidden. Again, illumination is a central motif woven throughout the poem: нічник, палахкоче, сонце, спалахи вистрі, мертвотний відсвіт (Zabuzhko 1990, 67).[65] The flash of light is indelibly linked to the breaking of the atom and the first atomic bomb explosion. Zabuzhko's poem offers a deathly image of life penetrated fully by radiation. We are reminded of the porousness of human bodies and the truth of our own vulnerability in the Anthropocene. The apocalyptic suffuses everything, and no one is spared.

The poem's title, "Love," draws our attention to the intimate spaces of apocalypse and nuclear disaster. While the Anthropocene invokes vast geological expanses, environmental catastrophes invade personal spaces just as insidiously. The sensuality and violence of the lovers' final moments "achieves a form of knowledge in the traffic between entities" that "calls us to reflect on the parallels between planetary ruptures past and present" (Farrier 2019, 19, 48). The love depicted in the poem is harsh and desperate, as it must be in a damaged world. After the shattering of the current reality, the lovers emerge into this new post-apocalyptic world, confronted with an uninhabitable landscape:

Але з вуст, шорсткий, як зола,
Осипається подих… […]
Так, немов відітхнути хотів –
А легені навиліт пробиті,

64 "The embrace flowed like water, / and a night-light cuts our shadow… / Not a sacrifice, not passion, not a gift—/ Simply an attempt to remain alive. / From cities plagued by strontium, / Over their dying agonies / Burns the flimsy scaffolding—/ Naked interlaced hands. / While the sun is at night, / And while these bright flares are rapid, / Love, quiver, and yell / Through this last minute on the edge!"

65 "night light," "burning," "sun," "quick flashes," "ghastly reflection"

Й ціпеніють відбитки тіл
У зім'ятім гарячім повітрі
(Zabuzhko 1990, 67).[66]

The ambiguous end represented by the last line invites the reader to imagine what comes after. While it may be too late for the lovers in the poem, it might not be too late for readers, who, in remembering, have more agency in potentially disrupting further ecological catastrophe. Zabuzhko's poetry invites us to think about how to envision the future while actively dwelling in a time of crisis by taking the reader "to a place of witness and feeling where there is no possibility of shutting down the dramatic and tense feeling of responding to the potentiality within things" (Bristow 2015, 17). The final image of our lovers peering out over a barren desert pessimistically anticipates mass extinction and total ecological collapse, but the ellipses at the end suggests unfinished thoughts. Zabuzhko's hyperbolic exercise creates a prosthetic experience of future ecological devastation that asks readers to imagine our own ending. This apocalyptic future without nature is one possibility, but it is not the only one.

Conclusion

Chornobyl poetry bears witness to the consequences of nuclear disaster by illuminating the Anthropocenic dimensions of this continually unfolding event. The fallout from Chornobyl was extensive and pervasive, affecting every facet of life, from the political, cultural, and social, to the intimate and private spaces of the body. Poets participated in a vital process of world making after the end, explaining for local audiences the disparities and grief experienced from the disaster, but also the harm that humans have inflicted on the earth. Post-Chornobyl poems are invested with a similar impulse to "address questions of truth and human morality," as Inna Sukhenko explains (2014, 118). Sukhenko continues, "Ukrainians have used Chernobyl to trigger cultural self-awareness and renewed ecological attentiveness" (Sukhenko 2014, 127–28).[67] And

66 "From the lips, coarse as ash / the breath falls… […] / Yes, as though he wanted to breathe—but his lungs are pierced, / and the imprints of the bodies numb / In the hot, wrinkled air."

67 Sukhenko comes closest to naming the Anthropocene explicitly in relation to Ukrainian poetry. Her emphasis on the recovery of an ecological consciousness in Ukraine informs this discussion (Sukhenko 2014).

just as Chornobyl's radiation spread thousands of miles away, so too did the disaster's significance, because to describe Chornobyl's traumatic and devastating contours is to describe the Anthropocene. The devastation of Chornobyl on bodies and the environment is familiar to other kinds of environmental disasters. The disaster may not have been a world-ending event, but it is felt just as acutely and reflects the multifaceted and kaleidoscopic dimensions of ecological breakdown. The poetry of Drach, Kostenko, and Zabuzhko ensures that the disaster is not forgotten and demonstrates that Anthropocene crises cannot be so easily ignored. As new conflicts threaten to worsen the current climate crisis, it becomes paramount to return to ecocritical poetry, particularly given how nuclear power is touted as a solution to combat climate change. While reading Chornobyl poetry today might seem more prophetic than revolutionary, its affective potency proves a vital addition to emerging dialogues about the Anthropocene and our ability to reimagine a future for all life on this planet.

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