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THE EXISTENTIAL TRAGEDY OF UKRAINIANNESSE IN CONTEMPORARY NATIONAL DOCUMENTARY POST-DRAMA ABOUT THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

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Abstract. The article analyzes the artistic depiction of the existential tragedy of Ukrainianness in contemporary national documentary post-drama about the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022 – 2025. The research methodology is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines strategies of literary analysis, existential philosophy and psychology, the study of collective and historical trauma, and postcolonial criticism. Documentary post-drama serves as a medium for collective testimony and memorialization, capturing the war experience in an artistic dimension. It contributes to the preservation of memory, plays a therapeutic role by helping society process traumatic experiences, and functions as an instrument of identification, shaping a new national narrative. In wartime conditions, theater becomes a means of preserving historical memory, providing therapy through art, and fostering a new perspective on national self-awareness. Theatrical art not only documents events but also transforms collective perceptions of the Ukrainian nation, its struggle, and its future. Moreover, the war has altered the very essence of theater – it has become an act of resistance that records history in real-time. Theater is no longer merely a form of artistic expression but a crucial witness of the era, actively responding to current events and shaping a new nationally oriented cultural reality.

Key words: contemporary Ukrainian drama, documentary drama, post-drama, existential tragedy of Ukrainianness, postcolonial trauma, functions of theater during war.

Introduction. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has become not only a geopolitical conflict but also a profound existential crisis for the Ukrainian nation. The war has altered perceptions of reality: the usual flow of time has been disrupted, space has acquired a different value, and the sense of stability has been replaced by radical uncertainty. Ukrainians face a dilemma: how to preserve humanity in inhumane circumstances and how to document this experience for the future. In the face of an existential crisis affecting an entire nation, theater as an art form has emerged as one of the most crucial instruments for comprehending the war. Documentary post-drama, in such an extreme situation, provides an opportunity to work with real testimonies and reflect the depth of the tragedy through new theatrical forms.

Although Ukrainian drama about the full-scale Russian invasion of 2022–2025 has attracted researchers' attention, the analysis of documentary post-drama has not yet been extensively explored. A notable contribution in this field is O. Bondareva's comprehensive study «Mariupol Drama: Commemorative Practices, Testimonies, Identity, Theatrical Code» (Bondareva, 2023). The article examines the play «Mariupol Drama», created by Transcarpathian playwright Oleksandr Havrosh based on interviews with actors who survived the bombing of the Mariupol theater and are now reviving the Ukrainian Mariupol Drama Theater in Uzhhorod. The key intentions of «Mariupol Drama» align with a vast body of documentary and commemorative sources. The author and creative team have successfully realized several crucial discourses for Ukrainian collective memory: «Mariupol as a city that resisted the aggressor while under total siege; war as an unresolved collective trauma and the

rejection of narratives imposed by Russian propaganda; the emergence of a new collective Ukrainian identity shaped through this war; and, ultimately, theater as a unique mystical space» (Bondareva, 2023: 32).

One of our studies examines the transformation of feminine roles of women in the Russian-Ukrainian war, using documentary dramas as part of the analytical material (Yuhan, 2024). In the article «Collective Trauma in (Post)Documentary Plays of Contemporary Ukrainian Drama about the Russian-Ukrainian War: Psycho-Emotional and Postcolonial Aspects», we explored the artistic representation of psycho-emotional and postcolonial components in documentary and post-documentary plays depicting the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022 – 2025. We concluded that documentary genres in drama create a space for «experiencing» and «reliving» the war: through emotional resonance and catharsis, theater helps audiences not only grasp the pain but also find paths to recovery. Artists deconstruct imperial narratives, acknowledge intergenerational traumatic connections, and address issues of national identity. Thus, these plays not only document the war but also contribute to the cultural decolonization of society. They serve as testimonies of events and means of preserving historical memory while simultaneously shaping contemporary Ukrainian identity. War-related dramaturgy is not only an artistic phenomenon but also a political, cultural, and psychotherapeutic act that supports the process of national renewal and the transformation of Ukrainian society (Yuhan, 2024).

It is worth noting that the poetics of post-drama about the Russian-Ukrainian war have not yet been the subject of academic research. Therefore, we assert that the topic addressed in our article is relevant and has scientific novelty.

The aim of this article is to analyze the artistic depiction of the existential tragedy of Ukrainianness in contemporary national documentary post-drama about the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022–2025.

Main part. The objectives of analyzing contemporary Ukrainian documentary post-drama are:

1. To explore how contemporary Ukrainian documentary theater conveys the existential dimension of war;
2. To analyze key artistic techniques of post-dramatic dramaturgy in depicting the tragedy of war;
3. To determine the main functions of theater during wartime.

These objectives will help comprehensively analyze the studied issue and achieve the stated goal.

The methodology of this research is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines strategies of literary analysis, existential philosophy and psychology, the study of collective and historical trauma, and postcolonial critique. Specifically, the following are applied: *literary analysis* – to identify the poetic features of documentary post-drama; methodological approaches from existential philosophy and psychology (R. May, M. Heidegger, S. Kierkegaard, K. Jaspers, K. Goldstein); *the theory of collective and historical trauma* – to understand ways of transforming traumatic experience into performative narratives and its impact on identity (J. Alexander, C. Caruth, M. Blasko, T. Hübl); *postcolonial critique* – to study dramaturgy as a space of decolonization, the rethinking of colonial legacy, and the formation of a new cultural subjectivity (M. Pavlyshyn, T. Hundorova, P. Ivanyshyn, O. Yurchuk). This methodological synthesis allows for a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon, taking into account both artistic features and the deep cultural, social, and psychological aspects of the collective experience of war.

The research material includes plays by contemporary Ukrainian playwrights from the drama hub «Portal of Contemporary Ukrainian Dramaturgy Ukrdramahub» (Ukrdramahub, 2022–2025), whose genre characteristics are defined by the authors and site curators as «post-drama» specifically: Tymofii Biniukov «Internal (Post-Documentary) Monologue of a Kharkiv Resident Who, Like Everyone Else, Woke Up to Explosions, Gathered Himself, and Went to War That Came to His Home...» (2022); Andrii Bondarenko «The Squirrel Man», «Survivor Syndrome», «SNUFF» (2022); Anastasiia Kosodii «Eight Short Compositions About the Lives of Ukrainians for a Western Audience» (2022),

«How to Talk to the Dead» (2023); Olha Matsiupa «Modus Imperativus» (2022); Diana Merkulova «Call Me to the War» (2022); Polina Pushkina, «Road 2222» (2022), «Damn Pyramid» (2024); Artur Sumarokov «Captivity (Part One)» (2022); Volodymyr Surai «I, Home, and Other Things» (2022); Olena Shamrina «Iron» (2022); Andrii Bondarenko «My Friend, the Black Elf» (2023); Iryna Beschetnova «Monologues of Refugee Women» (2024).

It should be noted that the genre characteristics of all these plays intersect through definitions such as «post-drama», «monologue», «documentary drama», and «verbatim». The correlation of such genre and structural-compositional features plays a crucial role in realizing the authorial concept in each play.

Let us briefly consider the theoretical aspects of this topic, specifically the terms: «post-dramatic theater», «post-dramaturgical approach», «documentary drama», «post-documentary drama», «documentary theater», and «post-documentary theater».

The distinction between dramatic and post-dramatic theater is thoroughly analyzed in the works of German theater scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann. In his book «Postdramatic Theater», he notes that traditional dramatic theater is based on the imitation of reality (mimesis) and logical construction, whereas post-dramatic theater questions these traditions by expanding the scope of theatrical art (Lehmann, 1999: 112). Lehmann emphasizes that in post-dramatic theater, text ceases to be the sole center of the performance, giving way to other expressive means such as the actor's body, sound, movement, and visual effects. This reflects a shift from the text-centered nature of dramatic theater to the multifaceted means of expression in post-dramatic theater (Lehmann, 1999: 85).

Ukrainian theater critic Pavlo Rudnev also highlights this transformation, noting that post-dramatic theater abandons literature as the basis of theatrical action, instead creating the performance text collectively during the rehearsal process (Serdiuk, 2014).

Regarding structure, traditional dramatic theater often follows a linear narrative with a clear exposition, development, and resolution. In contrast, post-dramatic theater may reject traditional plot or action, focusing instead on creating a space for shared experience and denying illusions (Vikhovska, 2014). In terms of audience interaction, dramatic theater typically immerses viewers in the story, whereas post-dramatic theater often breaks the «fourth wall», directly addressing the audience and provoking reflection (Vikhovska, 2014).

Thus, post-dramatic theater moves away from the traditional principles of dramatic theater, offering new forms of expression and interaction with the audience, reflecting contemporary trends in theatrical art.

Overall, postdramatic theater and postdramatic dramaturgy expand the concept of theatricality and reject classical narrative constraints, allowing experimentation with form, content, and audience interaction. Postdramatic theater goes beyond the traditional dramatic structure. It can exist without text, relying on performance, physical theater, improvisation, and multimedia effects. Postdramatic writing, in turn, is a way of composing texts that does not necessarily involve traditional plots, conflicts, or characters. It can be fragmentary, poetic, collage-like, documentary, or even interactive.

It is also important to differentiate between the terms «documentary drama (theater)» and «post-documentary drama (theater)». The key feature of documentary drama is that it uses real facts, events, testimonies, or documents as the basis for creating a text. This includes interviews, court proceedings, reports, and archives to reconstruct historical events or social phenomena. The main goal of documentary drama is to convey real events or stories with maximum accuracy and authenticity (Yuhan, 2023: 183). The playwright strives to preserve the authenticity of the facts and often seeks to draw attention to important social or political issues. The structure of this genre of dramaturgy is usually clear and logical, resembling a factual chronicle where all dialogues and actions are based on real events.

Post-documentary drama, on the other hand, is based on real facts but does not aim to faithfully reproduce reality. It may include fictional elements, abstract imagery, or collages of documents, as well

as interpretations of real events. Post-documentary drama allows for a freer interpretation of reality, where the author can add elements of artistic invention or mix facts with fiction to create metaphorical or conceptual meanings. The structure of post-documentary drama is often more fragmented, with texts lacking clear boundaries between fact and fiction. The playwright may use a nonlinear approach to events.

When comparing documentary and post-documentary theater, one can observe their certain kinship, continuity, and interconnection. Documentary theater uses various oral and written documents and different types of recorded testimonies –interviews, witness statements, news reports, excerpts from documents, etc. The creators of a performance strive to reproduce events and reality as accurately as possible. Post-documentary theater may use documents and testimonies, but it is not limited to strict fact reproduction. Authors use documentary material as part of a more complex performative structure that includes abstraction, elements of fiction, and formal experimentation (Bortnik, 2023: 66). The goal of documentary theater is to present facts in a way that compels the audience to reflect on social, political, or historical issues. Post-documentary theater seeks not only to showcase reality but also to highlight subjective perceptions of that reality, reveal its fragmentation, or transform it into an artistic experience.

Documentary theater is often structured as a «reconstruction» of real events or facts on stage, with authenticity as its primary goal. The structure of a post-documentary performance, however, can be associative, fragmented, and unconventional (Apchel, 2011). Directors may use multimedia elements, blending reality with fiction. In post-documentary texts, traditional storytelling is often absent: instead of a linear narrative, there is a mosaic of voices and fragments.

The main difference between documentary and post-documentary theater lies in their relationship to reality: documentary theater and drama aim to preserve authenticity and accuracy, whereas post-documentary works experiment with these materials, using them as tools for creating more artistic, abstract, or conceptual meanings (Humennyi, 2020). Documentary drama/theater is oriented toward accurately reproducing real facts and events on which a performance or play is based. This genre emphasizes credibility and truthfulness. Post-documentary drama/theater, by contrast, employs a more flexible approach to using real materials: creators may combine facts with artistic fiction, manipulate documentary sources, and create new interpretations or abstract images without necessarily preserving factual accuracy. As Ukrainian researcher Zh. I. Bortnik notes, «dramaturgy acquires a new toolkit for approaching reality in the context of transitioning from «reality – artistic work – imagination» through post-documentary forms of artistic exploration of the subject of consciousness: the meta-genre of the diary, postdrama, and other genres characterized by their «draft-like aesthetics» (Bortnik, 2023: 69).

A logical and pressing question arises: why have the genres of postdrama and post-documentary drama become central to depicting the Russian-Ukrainian War of 2022–2025? We believe that the poetic features of these genres make it possible to document war crimes and real stories in real-time. The absence of artistic conventions creates an effect of maximum authenticity. The audience in the theater perceives and experiences the events depicted on stage not as an abstraction but as the immediate truth of Ukraine's wartime existence. The mosaic structure of the play, the fragmentation of scenes, and the interweaving of real documents (announcements, quotes from press publications, social media, Telegram and Facebook chats, actual recordings of phone conversations, intercepted radio communications, personal correspondence, narratives from Russian propaganda, etc.) best reflect the chaotic nature of war.

For example, Tymofii Biniukov's monologue «An Inner (Post-Documentary) Monologue of a Kharkiv Resident Who, Like Everyone Else, Woke Up to Explosions, Gathered His Things, and Went to War That Came to His Home...» (2022) consists of five pages, but they are blank because the entire text is just a single sentence. This piece of postdrama accurately reflects the existential tragedy of Ukrainians in today's war.

The protagonist states that he did not choose to go to war – it came to him. This statement symbolizes the loss of personal choice in the face of brutal reality. He is terrified of everything happening, yet he acts because there is no alternative. Survival becomes routine, and being «on the edge of death» turns almost habitual. This highlights the tragic nature of existence, where a person is forced to adapt to an absurd and cruel reality.

The protagonist sees «strikingly cinematic scenes» that could become masterpieces of art, but he has no interest in capturing them. This is a crucial element of postdrama – war does not require aestheticization; it exists beyond art, leaving only experience and pain. The playwright emphasizes the collective dimension of this tragedy. The protagonist is not alone – he is surrounded by «incredible people», ordinary yet worthy of «knightly and Cossack honor». This is not just a personal story but a collective fate of Ukrainians, who are forced to become warriors while preserving their humanity.

Despite all the horror, the protagonist does not lose faith in victory. He is convinced that he has a place in a bright future. Yet, this faith is also part of the tragedy – he wants to see his loved ones «whole and unharmed», even though reality offers no such guarantees.

The monologue's single sentence is not just a speech but a concentrated existential cry of a person going through war. The post-documentary nature of the text is felt in its realism, fragmentation, and rejection of excessive pathos. It is undeniably postdrama because it does not offer a traditional dramatic conflict or catharsis – only the existence of a person in a liminal state between life and death, routine and tragedy.

In Andrii Bondarenko's documentary and postdramatic play «The Squirrel-Man» (2022), the protagonist has been living for three months since the full-scale Russian invasion began. He asks himself: Is it finally time to eat the potatoes he stockpiled in late February in case of occupation? How should he play the game he invented with Russian missiles? Why don't sappers say goodbye, and why did the infantry kill a beaver? Who are the «Guardians of Space»?

The protagonist searches for the right name to define himself. He feels like «The Squirrel-Man» because he hoards grains, oil, and halva in corners and cabinets. He also considers himself «Schrödinger's Man» because he has moved beyond the initial shock and started searching for meaning in his new life, yet he remains uncertain about the normalcy of existing alongside Russian missiles constantly flying and targeting him.

«I am Schrödinger's Man. At any given moment, it's impossible to say for certain whether I am alive or dead. Fifty-fifty. Do you know this concept? Schrödinger's cat – a thought experiment about an imaginary cat that exists in two quantum states at once. Either a wave or a particle. Either alive or dead. That's me. I seem alive, but at any second, a missile could hit my house. Poof – and I'm gone. So, calling me truly alive wouldn't be accurate. Unless some invisible observer constantly sits next to me, watching whether I'm alive in this second, the next, and the one after that... But there are no such observers, or they're too expensive – so, formally, I am neither alive nor dead» (Bondarenko, 2022).

The protagonist also identifies as «Radar-Man», someone who hears and internalizes every news report about new attacks and casualties. His inner monologue intertwines with snippets of news reports.

Bondarenko's text embodies documentary postdrama, where war unfolds not in battle scenes but in the smallest details of everyday life. This is reality stripped of embellishments, narratives, and heroization, where a person exists in between two states – between life and death, between the familiar past and an uncertain future, between war and peace (which no longer exists in its pure form). The play is a fragmented stream of consciousness, resembling snatches of conversations, passing thoughts, and news headlines, all forming a chaotic yet profoundly realistic depiction of existence.

This text conveys the depth of Ukraine's existential tragedy. A person who once lived an ordinary life is now forced to exist in a state of constant readiness – continuing to eat, stockpile water, and go to the store, all while knowing that at any moment, a missile could destroy their home. They become

Schrödinger's person – seemingly alive, yet already potentially dead. It is a state where there is no certainty – not about tomorrow, nor even the next minute. War takes away not only peace but also the sense of wholeness – it forces people to learn to live in a new reality where air-raid sirens sound so often that they become part of the sonic landscape.

There is a strange play with perception in the text: the characters stare at a banana and notice new details, observe the sun through a malfunctioning phone camera, and imagine missiles as cartoon characters. This is not merely an escape from reality – it is a way to endure it, to make it feel even slightly controllable. At the same time, it is a reminder that war is not something distant or extraordinary – it infiltrates even the simplest moments, making them bitter yet piercingly honest.

This text also features the phenomenon of the «watchman». The one who stands guard is not just fighting; he is literally holding space together with his gaze, preventing it from falling apart. This is a heavy yet symbolic metaphor: every Ukrainian today is a watchman, holding the world at the edge with their very existence, keeping it from plunging into the abyss. And despite all the tragedy, this text contains the most important thing: hope. Because even in hell, even where death has become routine, there is still room for life – for halva, for TV series, for the sun, for conversations with friends. And as long as these things exist, there remains a chance that the war will end, the missiles will run out, and all those who survive will finally be able to emerge from the state of Schrödinger's person.

Anastasiia Kosodii's play «Eight Short Compositions About the Lives of Ukrainians for a Western Audience» (2022) combines such poetic features as verbatim, documentary drama, monologue, and post-drama. Before the reader and viewer unfolds «a kind of 'chorus' of countless experiences, but also an attempt to reach beyond a mere description of horrific reality, an exploration into the inner world of a Ukrainian citizen during the war» (Kosodii, 2022). The play is written in free verse and contains no punctuation other than periods, which separate one stream of consciousness from another, and occasionally question marks, which may be placed not at the end of a question but on a separate line.

The first «composition» of the play, «About Courage», is a stream of consciousness that, through its enumerative rhythm, conveys the chaotic experience of war. The lack of punctuation and traditional syntactic structure creates an effect of fragmentation, fear, and confusion, where thoughts overlap and events and emotions merge into a single whirlwind. The author depicts multiple manifestations of courage – from heroic acts (standing on a bridge with a rifle, walking under shelling) to everyday ones (eating hot borscht, buying red lipstick, worrying about acne). The text contains almost no direct reflection on emotions; they are only hinted at through actions and reactions, which amplifies the eeriness of the experience, as reality becomes a series of forced decisions made on the brink of survival.

The central theme is not just courage as bravery in the face of danger but also the courage to keep living amidst destruction. The protagonist balances between the necessity of adapting and the fear of losing sensitivity: she «feels nothing» and simultaneously dreads the moment when she will start feeling again. War erases familiar time markers («counting time», «its quantity»), meaning («saving everyone except the closest ones»), and emotional attachments («deleting conversations»). Yet, at the same time, this text contains a spring of resistance: the repeated verbs («to go», «to listen», «to write», «to scream») maintain the rhythm of life, where each act is a way not to disappear. Ultimately, courage here is not only action but also the ability to hold on to the small things that still allow one to feel human.

The second «composition», «About Appearance», explores collective Ukrainian trauma through the lens of family history, where individual memory intertwines with national memory. The narrative spans several generations, repeating experiences of loss, forced displacement, fear, and adaptation to violence. The depiction of Soviet repressions, forced leadership of a village council in Western Ukraine, the tragedy of an accidental killing, and the subsequent escape is just one version of how Ukrainian families were forced to survive, burying pain in silence or alcohol. A symbolic detail is that the grandfather feared revenge from the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) his entire life, even though

the act of killing was accidental: this illustrates the complexity of Ukrainian historical memory, torn between the Soviet past and the struggle for independence.

National identity in this second fragment of the play appears as something uncertain, wavering between the trauma of the past and the attempt to find beauty amid chaos. The lyrical heroine avoids Russian-language tours in Munich – an act of distancing from the colonial shadow looming over Ukrainian cultural space. At the same time, she ponders how other nations endured wars and managed to preserve art and love – a question that long remained unanswered for Ukrainians. The search for beauty here feels unnecessary, even luxurious, as family history is primarily one of survival. The grandmother, who no longer hears air raid sirens due to hearing loss, becomes a symbolic figure of ultimate detachment from reality – she does not perceive the threat in the same way younger generations do, having already lived through her own wars. But now this cycle repeats itself, and even prayers against aging cannot protect from new historical upheavals.

The fifth «composition», «About the Celestial», revolves around the symbolic meaning of «Mriya» - both as an aircraft and as an abstract concept. The AN-225 «Mriya», the world's largest cargo plane, destroyed by the Russians in Hostomel, becomes a metaphor for shattered national pride, an unreachable dream broken by war. But there is another «mriya» - the dream of freedom, of faith in protection, in one's own strength, in one's army. The lyrical heroine unwittingly undergoes a transformation: from annoyance at her mother's habit of recording everything to realizing that lost things can no longer be captured; they turn into memories, fragments of reality that must be preserved. War not only destroys the material but also erases entire layers of culture, making saved videos an act of resistance.

National narratives shift here from traditional pathos to a deeply personal experience of war's existential reality. A fighter jet soaring in the sky becomes an object of hope, a personified protector in whom people believe and to whom they pray. But this protection is no guarantee of safety – the protagonist flees Kyiv, unaware that Vasylykiv will soon be bombed. Her reflection on «Mriya» reveals a profound shift in consciousness: there is no longer a naïve wish that the war simply wouldn't have started; instead, there is a radical, painful need to destroy the enemy. This marks the transition from pre-war perception to a new one, born in aggression and survival, where dreams are no longer about the future but about basic safety here and now.

In the final, eighth «composition», «About What Comes Next», Kosodii states that war destroys not only cities but also lives, relationships, habits, and even the ability to talk about what is happening. The play's text is as fragmented as the time in which its author lives. It contains loss, fear, uncertainty, bitter humor, but also memory and hope. Even in the silence after an explosion, even in the sleeplessness after an air raid siren, even in conversations reduced to «quiet» or «not great», life continues. And perhaps this ability to live, to notice, to preserve – is the most important thing that remains.

Anastasiia Kosodii continues this theme in her next documentary post-drama, «How to Talk to the Dead» (2023) (Kosodii, 2023). She dedicates her monologue to the occupied and destroyed cities and the people killed by the invaders.

Let us quote:

«At night, I lie down and remember an interview with an artist from the Kyiv region, who, after the de-occupation of Bucha, helped exhume bodies from mass graves and also spent the night in the local morgue.

At night, the artist says in the interview, sometimes I hear sounds.

I am not afraid of them. They are our dead, let them come.

They died so horribly.

At least I will talk to them.

How to talk to your dead, I think you know.

No special workshops are needed.

Your dead are defined by the fact of life, not death, even tragic death.
We tell stories about them, we tell them: «Yes, I remember this, but if anything,
add
about the pine forests on the way to the East,
minibuses to Irpin from Arsenalna metro station,
the Azov Sea nearby, the silhouette of a metallurgical plant,
tours to the salt mines of Soledar,
champagne from the last harvest in Crimea» (Kosodii, 2023).

The existential dimension of the work is revealed through the daily actions of a girl who, as a refugee in Germany, continues to live in her thoughts and memories in war-torn Ukraine: preparing for a possible airstrike and experiencing a constant state of anxiety, emphasizing the divide between physical rest and emotional tension. The lyrical heroine tries to remain calm, but the war, with its historical and contemporary experiences, constantly reminds her of itself. The plot shows how the past and present intertwine, leaving a heavy, unforgettable mark on her consciousness.

The description of everyday reality in the drama is intertwined with dreams and a state of delirium. One of the key dreams of the heroine tells of a meeting with a German soldier on a Ukrainian train heading to Bakhmut. This episode highlights how war and historical trauma are passed down between generations. The dream about the German soldier, who talks about camouflage and champagne, symbolizes not only the current war but also the memory of World War II, which continues to influence present-day realities. The German soldier acts as a metaphor for historical trauma that does not release the generation that endured occupation and is now facing new threats. His presence in the dream serves as a reminder of the repetition of history and the ongoing experience of war across time.

The second dream about home continues the theme of intergenerational trauma, particularly through the image of the German soldier, who appears in the context of the history of the village of Novokarlivka. This character in the dream combines modern and historical experiences. He is not just a symbol of another nation but a bearer of a complex history linked to periods of war and conflict. The reference to this German soldier being a Mennonite pacifist who refused to participate in military actions adds another layer to the intergenerational trauma, as his descendants became part of a history connected to the Ukrainian steppes, once invited by Catherine II to develop agriculture and now tied to new conflicts.

In this dream, where time seems to have frozen, the image of the German serves as a reminder of the importance of memory that is not limited to specific events but encompasses entire generations who are experiencing a sort of «reboot» due to the war and its consequences. This also symbolizes the continuous repetition of history, where new generations seek a place between the traumas of the past and the realities of the present, facing uncertainty and the experiences of war. The character in the dream, speaking about the role of Mennonites in the development of agriculture, demonstrates the interconnectedness between generations and their difficult, contradictory place in the context of Ukrainian history, where they have become part of the collective memory that exists not only in the village spaces but also in dreams and experiences.

Polina Pushkina's play «The Broken Pyramid» (2024) explores the existential dimension of war through the personal experiences and psychological state of the lyrical protagonist. In the context of conflict, war becomes an inseparable part of existence, penetrating all aspects of life: from losses and destruction to personal crises. Feelings of hopelessness, apathy, and the search for meaning in a chaotic environment become central themes. The heroine, experiencing the war, tries to find her place in this world, interacting with others and cultural realities, but simultaneously tries to escape reality through fantasies and dreams, musical preferences, TV series, or even through participation in philosophical or religious practices.

The existential dimension of war in Pushkina's postdrama is expressed through the search for self-definition and the struggle to preserve humanity in conditions of constant danger and social chaos. War not only destroys physical structures but also triggers deep psychological changes in people, forcing them to adapt to new realities, which often take tragic or absurd forms.

1. «I don't want to devalue the problems of others. My main goal right now is to survive. Everything else is irrelevant to me. If it's clearer to you, imagine the damn Maslow pyramid».

2. «Well».

1. «Well, the base of the pyramid is missing».

2. «Hahaha» (Pushkina, 2024).

In the context of the characters' experiences and inner states, Pushkina applies the well-known and widely spread psychological theory of Maslow's hierarchy of needs to understand how changes in security, basic needs, and self-actualization can be reflected in the experience of those enduring war.

In Vladimir Surai's postdrama «I, the House, and Other Things» (2022) (Surai, 2022), a deep existential vacuum caused by war is felt. The characters are constantly on the brink of life and death, where even the most ordinary objects, like a bicycle or a phone, acquire new meanings, becoming symbols of hopelessness, loneliness, and despair. War not only physically destroys their surroundings but also deeply alters their perception of reality, forcing them to question even the most basic values and relationships. Technical objects that were once part of everyday life become markers of destruction and lost connections, filled with pain and loss.

The existential crisis in the context of war is depicted through the disorientation of the characters, the sense of meaninglessness of their actions, and the brutality of their interactions. Through these images, the author demonstrates how war tears apart not only physical connections but the very fabric of human existence. In this context, war becomes a metaphor for inner struggle, where the characters try to find meaning and purpose in circumstances where everything seems destroyed.

Surai's «I, the House, and Other Things» can be considered through the lens of postdramatic theatre, as it reflects important characteristics of this theatrical movement, including fragmentation, non-linearity, intertextuality, experiments with form and language, and the blurring of clear boundaries between actor and audience.

The play consists of a series of self-contained episodes or monologues, each with its own temporal and spatial autonomy. This is a clear reflection of the fragmented reality often depicted in postdrama. In each episode, we encounter a change of characters and objects, which independently take on roles usually assigned to living characters. This emphasizes the postdramatic theatre's tendency for experimentation with form and content, where linear narratives or simple character constructions, typical of traditional theatre, disappear.

In the text, important roles are played by objects such as a bicycle, a phone, an old house, and a grenade launcher. This reflects one of the key characteristics of postdramatic theatre – the attribution of human qualities not only to characters but also to objects. These objects become bearers of consciousness, emotions, and even conflicts, which changes the traditional perception of the «human» in theatre. This can be seen, for example, in the image of the bicycle «Ukraine», which has its own point of view and philosophical reflections on its condition, or the phone, which plays the role of a constant reminder of calls and connections.

This postdrama is characterized by blurred boundaries and the absence of a clear structure. There are numerous intertwining voices and thoughts arising from different sources (monologues, dialogues, inner thoughts of characters, sounds). This is typical of postdramatic theatre, where the stage is not always built around classical «actions» or clear plot lines. The lack of conventional dramaturgical structure enhances the sense of chaos and fragmented reality in which people and things collide but do not create a stable story or development.

In V. Surai's text, there are elements of interactivity, especially in the scenes with the phone, where excerpts of conversations are heard. The audience becomes part of the action, as the phone or the voice on the receiver can directly address them. This form, where the audience or participant can actively interact with the characters or objects, is typical of postdramatic theatre, where the role of the viewer is not limited to passive observation but becomes part of the event.

Many situations in this postdrama are absurd (for example, the dialogue with the grenade launcher or the conversation about love through the prism of biochemistry), which is key for postdramatic theatre, where reality is often depicted as disorganized, illogical, and unpredictable. Irony and satirical elements are often used to emphasize the absurdity of human actions and attitudes towards things.

In the text of the postdrama, we also see how traditional roles (like in the case of the boy who plans to join the army or the old house talking about its decay) are deconstructed through a change in context. The characters here are not who they seem to be, and objects, concepts, and even ideas can be as important as people. This deconstruction is part of postdramatic theatre, where each character or element can carry deeper and more complex meanings than just an object or person.

In the analyzed play, there is a significant amount of technical and media symbols (old rotary phone, exercise bike, weapon), which is another feature of postdramatic theatre. Using these elements as part of the action or as metaphors gives them new meaning, again blurring the line between humans and technology.

Analyzing V. Surai's play through the lens of postdramatic theatre, we can see how he uses fragmented form, absurdity, interactivity, irony, and the transformation of familiar objects into active participants in the event, which are key features of this theatrical movement. The absence of a traditional narrative and central characters makes this text closer to the postdramatic idea of theatre, where reality is broken into separate pieces, and the audience actively interacts with what is happening.

From the above, it is clear that contemporary Ukrainian documentary postdrama, as a relevant genre strategy in the 2022 – 2024 period, is best suited to convey the existential tragedy of the Ukrainian nation in the context of war. The threat to existence in documentary postdrama is interpreted as a new dimension of reality. It generates a crisis of being, in which war has become a dangerous routine. The constant experience of death and destruction transforms, or even breaks, conventional ideas about home, security, and the future, forcing people to live «here and now». In dramaturgy, war is portrayed not only as an external conflict but as an internal struggle between hope and despair, between the desire to live and the necessity to survive.

Another important conclusion that authors and readers of contemporary Ukrainian plays come to is that before our eyes, the old national identity is being destroyed, and a new one is being born. And the catalyst for the transformation of Ukrainian national identity has been the war itself. Contemporary plays and performances raise questions about who a person is during war – a soldier, a victim, a witness, a refugee, a perpetrator? Drama analyzes moments of identity crisis, when a person is forced to adapt to new circumstances, live in extreme conditions, and make difficult moral decisions.

Contemporary documentary postdrama actively addresses themes of loss, pain, and collective trauma. The process of war is portrayed not only as the destruction of cities and the killing of soldiers on the front but also as the death of loved ones, deportations, torture, and the destruction of family ties. In contemporary Ukrainian documentary theatre, the direct speech of victims and witnesses is used, creating an effect of collective trauma. Ukrainian playwrights uniquely use the well-known war motif of the «missing grave» in world literature. It is understood primarily as the inability to bury the dead with dignity, returning to the theme of unnamed, lost, and missing people. Contemporary Ukrainian postdrama also understands this motif as imagined dialogues with the dead, those who died in the Russian-Ukrainian war (for example, the postdrama «How to Talk to the Dead» by Anastasia Kosodiy (2023)). Ukrainian documentary and postdramatic performances convey existential tragedy,

rejecting the classical plot (war as an endless stream of losses), using direct testimonies to create an effect of authenticity, and understanding theatre as a place of meeting between the living and the dead (for example, actors recreate the voices of the deceased, perform imagined dialogues with victims of military aggression, etc.).

Contemporary Ukrainian dramaturgy proclaims modified functions of documentary and postdramatic theatre during the war. First, it is the function of testimony and the preservation of historical memory: recording events that may be distorted or forgotten; forming a counter-narrative against Russian propaganda. Second, the function of collective therapy and processing of collective and intergenerational trauma: theatre as a space for living through pain, the effect of catharsis through recognizing one's own experience in the performance. Third, contemporary Ukrainian postdramatic documentary theatre deals with the formation of a new national identity, namely: rethinking the role of a Ukrainian in the war (from victim to subject of struggle), the role of theatre in a state that is at war and defending itself. This theatre becomes a platform for reflection on changes in civil society.

Conclusion. Contemporary national documentary postdrama dedicated to the Russo-Ukrainian war has become an important means of understanding the existential tragedy of the Ukrainian people. The war has caused a profound existential crisis for the nation, which finds its expression through theatrical art. Theatre, in this context, becomes a space for reflection that helps Ukrainians rethink their identity in light of current historical challenges.

Documentary postdrama fulfills the function of collective testimony and memorialization, capturing the wartime experience in an artistic dimension. It contributes to preserving memory, plays a therapeutic role, helping society process traumatic experiences, and serves as a tool for identification, shaping a new national narrative.

In times of war, theatre assumes special functions: it becomes a means of preserving historical memory, providing therapy through art, and creating a new perspective on national self-awareness. Thus, theatrical art not only documents events but also transforms the collective perception of the Ukrainian nation, its struggle, and its future.

Moreover, the war has changed the very nature of theatre – it has become an act of resistance, documenting history in real time. Theatre is no longer just a form of artistic expression but plays an essential role as a witness of the era, actively responding to current events and shaping a new cultural reality.

Therefore, contemporary documentary postdrama is not only an artistic phenomenon but also an important socio-cultural phenomenon, helping Ukrainian society comprehend and survive the tragic events of the war, while anchoring them in national memory.

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