

THE MARIUPOL TEXT IN CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN DRAMA AS A STUDY OF MEMORY AND A NEW COLLECTIVE SYMBOL OF GENOCIDAL PRACTICES

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Summary

The article is dedicated to the analysis of the Mariupol text in contemporary Ukrainian dramaturgy as a study of memory and a new collective symbol of genocidal practices against the Ukrainian people. The methodology of the research is based on an interdisciplinary approach, combining strategies of literary analysis, the study of collective and historical trauma, memory studies, and postcolonial criticism. Theater and dramaturgy play a key role in the memorialization of Mariupol, transforming individual testimonies and experiences into artistic works that preserve the memory of the tragedy. Through theatrical art, contemporary Ukrainian plays preserve the authentic experience of survivors and honor the memory of those who perished. Documentary and postdramatic theater serve as a unique way to capture and convey the real experience of war. The use of eyewitness testimonies, excerpts from letters, diaries, and social media makes these performances as truthful and emotionally powerful as possible. This approach allows theater not only to inform but also to deeply impact the audience, compelling them to feel the horrors of war, the despair, and the hope of those who survived the Mariupol tragedy. The Mariupol text is gradually becoming a new national symbol of resistance that will remain in history as a reminder of the aggressor's crimes and the strength of Ukrainian resistance.

Key words: contemporary Ukrainian drama, Mariupol Text, documentary drama, post-drama, existential tragedy of Ukrainianness, postcolonial trauma, Memory Studies.

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1. Introduction

The Mariupol tragedy became one of the most horrific war crimes of the 21st century, encompassing elements of blockade, mass killings of civilians, destruction of cultural objects, deportations, and the ruin of the city as a living space. The fall of Mariupol, after nearly three months of heroic defense, carved the image of the city into the national memory as a symbol of resilience, while also turning it into an embodiment of Russia's genocidal policies toward Ukrainians.

Since 2022, the so-called "Mariupol Text" has emerged in contemporary Ukrainian dramaturgy – an artistic-documentary layer that performs the function of memorialization, truth-fixing, and transmitting traumatic experiences. Today, an important issue is understanding how theater and dramaturgy participate in the creation of the national narrative of Mariupol and how these artistic forms become a vital tool for preserving national collective memory.

Although contemporary Ukrainian dramaturgy about the full-scale Russian invasion of 2022–2025 has attracted attention from researchers, the analysis of the Mariupol dramaturgical text has not been extensively explored until now. We can refer to the comprehensive work of O. Bondareva *"Mariupol Drama: Memorial Practices, Testimonies, Identity, and Theatrical Code"* (Bondareva, 2023). The article examines "Mariupol Drama", created by the Transcarpathian playwright Oleksandr Havrosh, based on interviews with actors who survived the bombing of the Mariupol theater building and are now reviving the Ukrainian Mariupol Drama Theater in Uzhhorod. The main intentions of "Mariupol Drama" correspond to a significant body of documentary-memorial sources. The author and creative team managed to fully realize several crucial discourses for Ukrainian collective memory: "Mariupol, which resisted the aggressor while being fully surrounded; war as unprocessed collective trauma and the cancellation of the narratives imposed by Russian propaganda; new collective Ukrainian identity that is being shaped in this war; and ultimately – theater as a special mystical space" (Bondareva, 2023: 32).

In one of our works, we explore the changing roles of women during the Russo-Ukrainian war, using dramas related to the Mariupol tragedy as material for analysis, such as Elena Petrovskaya's *"Fish Don't Cry"* (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 examined the artistic reflection of the psycho-emotional and postcolonial components in the documentary and post-documentary plays of contemporary Ukrainian dramaturgy depicting the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022 – 2025. The conclusions made can be useful when analyzing the plays of the "Mariupol cycle" (Yuhan, 2024a).

Thus, it can be concluded that the part of the Mariupol text that already exists and has been written in contemporary Ukrainian dramaturgy has not yet been fully explored. The topic addressed in this article is relevant and holds scientific novelty.

The aim of the research is to analyze the Mariupol text in contemporary Ukrainian dramaturgy as a study of memory and a new collective symbol of genocidal practices against the nation.

The tasks of the analysis of contemporary Ukrainian documentary postdrama are:

1. To define the specificity of the "Mariupol Text" in contemporary Ukrainian dramaturgy.
2. To analyze how theatrical practices form collective memory about the Mariupol tragedy.
3. To demonstrate how this text works as a symbol that goes beyond Ukraine and becomes the embodiment of genocidal practices in the modern world.

The research methodology is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines literary analysis strategies, the study of collective and historical trauma, memory studies, and postcolonial criticism. In particular, the following are applied: *literary analysis* (receptive aesthetics, narratology) – to reveal the artistic-documentary techniques of representing collective trauma in dramaturgy about the Russian-Ukrainian war (works by H. R. Jauss, V. Iser, P. Ricœur); *the theory of collective and historical trauma* – to understand the transformation of traumatic experiences in performative narratives and their impact on identity (D. Alexander, K. Karuth, M. Blasco, T. Hübbel); *memory studies* – to analyze the mechanisms of constructing and preserving historical memory through dramatic texts (P. Nora, M. Halbwachs, A. Assmann, J. Assmann); *postcolonial criticism* – to study dramaturgy as a space for decolonization, understanding colonial heritage, and forming new cultural subjectivity (M. Pavlyshyn, T. Gundorova, P. Ivanyshyn, O. Yurchuk). This methodological synthesis allows us to examine

the phenomenon comprehensively, considering both its artistic features and the deep cultural, social, and psychological aspects of the collective experience of war.

The material for this study is drawn from the plays of contemporary Ukrainian playwrights from the dramaturgical hub "Portal of Contemporary Ukrainian Dramaturgy "Ukrdramahub" (*Ukrdramahub*, 2022 – 2025), which discuss events in Mariupol, namely: Andriy Bondarenko *"Mariupol: Diaries of the Siege (Documentary Play)"* (2022), Kateryna Penkova *"Marathon "Russian Roulette" (2022)*, Irina Feofanova *"Ten Kilometers" (2022)*, Vitaly Karaban *"I Can't Even Imagine How You Do It" (2022)*, Tetiana Kytsenko *"Call It by Its Name (warning)" (2022)*, Elena Petrovskaya *"Fish Don't Cry" (2023)*, Olena Shevchenko *"What to Do with These Snot?" (2024)*, Alex Borovensky, Nina Zakhodzenko, Alina Romashko, Oksana Kovalova *"Once Upon a Time in Ukraine" (2024)*.

2. Mariupol Text: A Symbol of Tragedy, Memory, and Resistance

The Mariupol text is an artistic and documentary narrative that encapsulates stories about the destruction of the city of Mary, while simultaneously transcending its local theme to become a metaphor for shattered lives. It includes eyewitness testimonies, monologues, interview fragments, voice messages, diaries of civilian participants, and more, which are adapted into theatrical forms. Within it, personal pain is transformed into a collective experience, engraved in historical memory. Its structure is often nonlinear and chaotic, mirroring the dynamic nature of the catastrophe as it unfolded in real life.

The Mariupol text unfolds through profound existential dimensions that reflect tragedy, resistance, and the apocalyptic reality of the destroyed city.

One of the key aspects of examining the Mariupol tragedy in contemporary Ukrainian dramaturgy is the experience of genocide, manifesting in the systemic and deliberate destruction of the city and its inhabitants. The aggressor denied Ukrainians their very right to exist, as reflected in mass killings, forced deportations, blockades, and the destruction of cultural heritage. Mariupol became a symbol of barbarism, where not only the material environment was annihilated but also the cultural code of the Ukrainian people.

At the same time, Mariupol became a symbol of resilience, as its history of heroic resistance embodies the archetypal struggle of good versus evil. Both military personnel and civilian residents demonstrated incredible fortitude in the face of aggression. This recalls historical parallels – Stalingrad, the Warsaw Ghetto, the defense of Aleppo. The heroism of soldiers and civilians in Mariupol is inscribed in cultural memory as an example of self-sacrifice and the defense of dignity.

Mariupol also became an apocalyptic space where normal civilization ceased to exist. A city that was once a hub of life transformed into a zone of total devastation, where hunger, death, and basements serving as final refuges became the prevailing realities. The landscape of Mariupol took on the traits of an end-of-the-world scenario – a space without a future, where the complete physical and spiritual destruction of human existence unfolded.

Mariupol became the site of mass crimes whose brutality and scale evoke the tragedies of the 20th century, particularly the Holocaust and Holodomor. A city that had symbolized development and peaceful coexistence before the war turned into a space of genocidal terror. Mass graves, communal burials, and unrecognized victims serve as reminders of the systematic extermination of civilians orchestrated by Russian occupiers. As in Babyn Yar, where the Nazis executed people solely based on their nationality, civilians in Mariupol were annihilated in a denial of their right to life and Ukrainian identity.

One of the most horrifying crimes was the deliberate destruction of the Mariupol Drama Theater, where hundreds of civilians had sought refuge. Despite clearly visible markings reading "CHILDREN", meant to shield civilians from attacks, Russian forces deliberately bombed the building, killing those inside. This crime became a symbol of barbarism and the targeted extermination of innocent civilians. The theater, once a cultural center, turned into a mass grave, while its ruins stand as a memorial, reminding the world of the fragility of civilization in the face of war's cruelty.

Today, Mariupol is a point where history and the present intertwine, creating a new memorial space. The crimes committed in the city cannot remain solely a part of national tragedy – they acquire global significance, serving as reminders of history's darkest repetitions. Theater will continue to be an important symbol – a site of memory that helps process the experience of tragedy and the Ukrainian people's struggle for survival. Alla Kyrdon, distinguishing between individual and collective memory, emphasizes that to "confirm", "clarify", or even "fill in certain gaps", "individual memory can rely on collective memory". In turn, collective memory "revolves around individual memory without equating to it, evolving according to its own principles" (Kyrdon, 2016: 71). This strategy is particularly relevant for the plays that constitute the Mariupol text.

The Mariupol text in contemporary Ukrainian dramaturgy can be regarded as a unique literary phenomenon that reflects experiences of destruction, loss, survival, and rethinking identity. It emerges at the intersection of several crucial concepts: existential crisis, memory studies, collective trauma, and postcolonial re-evaluation. These are not merely artistic or documentary texts – they are the voice of a city that has endured a tragedy and has become a symbol of resilience.

3. The tragedy of Mariupol as the central theme of documentary dramas by Andriy Bondarenko, Kateryna Penkova, Iryna Feofanova, and Yelena Petrovskaya

Andriy Bondarenko's drama "City of Maria: The Siege Diaries (Documentary Play)" (2022) (Bondarenko, 2022) can be seen as part of the Mariupol text through the lens of several important concepts.

1. Existential Crisis. The foundation of the play consists of diary notes and fragments of interviews with two sisters, Nastya and Anya, who survived the siege of Mariupol, managed to evacuate, and later moved to Georgia. The text is permeated with a sense of the loss of meaning in everyday life and the search for new meaning in a reality dominated by destruction and uncertainty, as well as a new understanding of oneself. The heroines find themselves in a constant state of survival, where basic human needs (food, warmth, security) come to the forefront. But alongside this, they try to preserve fragments of their previous life – lighting scented candles, wearing "going out" clothes. These are attempts to find meaning in the everyday that is being destroyed.

Bondarenko's depiction of the everyday war shows how human consciousness changes under the influence of crisis: "We used to hide from shelling, but now we walk under planes to fetch water" (Bondarenko, 2022). The texts also trace the motif of the rupture between peaceful life and the present: "I liked being an adult in Mariupol, "but this life is no longer attainable" (Bondarenko, 2022). The existential crisis manifests itself in a sense of powerlessness before the circumstances ("We didn't leave", "I was waiting for a sign that it would all end") and the necessity of adapting to a reality that is constantly changing.

The heroine of the play, Nastya, tries to answer a difficult psychological question that arose for anyone who witnessed the tragedy that took place in the city of Maria: "Many people asked – why did people stay so long before leaving? It's hard to explain, but I understand them. It's just shameful that you'll have to be homeless. That now you will be without your home. But you do have it – your own home! Leaving means admitting that your home, your world, your life no longer exists. It's very difficult and very hard" (*Bondarenko, 2022*).

Nastya feels the loss not only of her home but also of her own identity, which was inextricably linked to the city: "Now I don't know who I am anymore. My 'self,' my identity, were tied to the city where I lived. To the city that no longer exists. It has simply been wiped off the face of the earth" (*Bondarenko, 2022*). This shows how deeply the environment shapes our self-awareness: places, streets, buildings, the sounds of the city become part of our inner "self".

When a city is destroyed, it takes with it not only material things but also symbols, memories, and connections. Nastya seems to find herself in emptiness – she has lost her point of reference, the context in which she understood herself. Bondarenko describes a deep identity crisis, where a person is forced not only to mourn the loss but also to search for a new way of existence in a world where their former "self" no longer exists. This also suggests that for many, identity is not just a personal choice but a relationship with the place that gives meaning and defines who we are.

2. Memory Studies: Archiving War and Preserving the Past

"City of Maria: The Siege Diaries" is also a way to record the memory of a city that endured a catastrophe. The text uses various "practices of recording" (diary, interview, witness monologue, recounting what was heard, etc.). As researchers note, all such practices "are built in a way that we must do something to capture and preserve information long after the human body can no longer provide it" (*Konnerton, 2004: 115*), and they form "collective memory" as "a set of conscious or unconscious recollections about experiences that have been lived through and (or) transformed into myth by the living community, to which the feeling of the past is inherently tied" (*Konnerton, 2004: 188*). However, one more remark must be made. While there is an evident high level of trust in the "memory of witnesses", it is also worth noting that we "manifest a greater skepticism toward it, which leads us to compare and verify sources. As often happens, the same event may be perceived and interpreted differently, even by direct witnesses or participants" (*Holka, 2022*).

The author frequently uses the contrast between peaceful life and war to emphasize the scale of loss. Interwoven into the diary entries and interviews are memories of pre-war Mariupol: the last autumn before the war, cafés, walks by the sea. A particularly significant aspect of the diaries is the documentation of horrors: the siege, the lack of water, cold, and fear. Anya reflects: "In those days, I often had the thought that I had thought too little about death before", "It was very scary and painful to leave my home, my whole life. It's good that we took some photos". Memory is generated through loss: "Grandmother's house is destroyed", "How good that grandmother and grandfather passed away and didn't see all this horror. They wouldn't have survived", "It turned out that Russian feminists are not our friends" (*Bondarenko, 2022*).

The Mariupol text, as a text of memory, is not just a testimony to war, but a way to remember the city as it was, so that its history does not disappear.

3. Collective Trauma: A Shared Voice of Pain and Loss

In the text about Mariupol, not only individual but also collective trauma is heard, manifested in shared experiences, fears, and attempts to make sense of the tragedy: "We all slept in the hallway", "People began hiding, even the sun hid" (*Bondarenko, 2022*).

An important motif is the search for loved ones, the uncertainty about their fate. The phrase "Where are they? What happened to them?" is repeated, emphasizing the depth of loss and powerlessness in the face of war. The collective trauma of Mariupol is not only about physical destruction but also about the psychological dimension: the guilt of those who survived, the fear of the future, and the feeling of a broken connection with the native city.

4. Postcolonial Dimension: Mariupol as a Space of Decolonization

As is known, Mariupol existed for a long time in the shadow of imperial narratives. Soviet industrialization and Russian influence shaped the city's culture, and war became the breaking point with this past. In "City of Maria: The Siege Diaries", the process of decolonization of consciousness is reflected. The Russian-speaking heroines permanently switch to the Ukrainian language: "I am no longer a Russian speaker", "Eventually, I started to be proud of the fact that I changed. That I, a person who spoke Russian all my life and grew up in a Russian environment, managed to understand what is happening and what is important" (Bondarenko, 2022). The shift to the Ukrainian language is presented in the text as an act of resistance, a struggle for one's own subjectivity, and a rethinking of national identity.

Anya rejects imperial narratives: she realizes that even Russian activism is not solidaristic with Ukrainians. The girl propagates feminism, and she communicates in chats with feminists from the post-Soviet space. After the siege of Mariupol, she understood that "Russian feminists were first and foremost Russians, and their imperial thinking dominated, while the ideas of feminism were not their priority"; "They were just sitting in their national bubble. It turned out that our feminist friends are not our friends" (Bondarenko, 2022). The shift in Anya's worldview regarding national identity is an important aspect of postcolonial transformation.

The Mariupol text, based on "City of Maria: The Siege Diaries" by A. Bondarenko, as a postcolonial discourse, is not only a story about war but also about exiting the imperial paradigm, about the formation of a new Ukrainian identity. This play is a chronicle of an existential crisis, a depiction of the collective trauma of the nation, a method of archiving memory, and a symbol of the postcolonial transformation of Ukrainians under the pressure of an extreme situation. It shows how war changes a person, a community, and culture. And at the same time, it serves as a reminder: the memory of Mariupol should not fade away.

"The Marathon "Russian Roulette" (Penkova, 2022) is a documentary drama-monologue written verbatim by a participant in the events. An ordinary woman, displaced internally from Donetsk since 2014 with two daughters, is forced to become a military nurse in a bunker under the 3rd hospital in Mariupol. She sees this event, her strange transformation, as an example of a kind of "Russian roulette": "I became a nurse. That's how the circumstances played out" (Penkova, 2022). In the extreme situation of war, a person loses their identity and becomes who the circumstances force them to be. The heroine experiences the trauma of her younger daughter, the loss of her older daughter, who got lost in an area of the city on the other side of the Kalmius River and lost contact with her family for a long time. By a twist of fate, this story ends with a happy ending: the woman's ex-husband, who had stayed in the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic", comes to help the family and finds the older daughter. And this, again, in the heroine's opinion, is an act of "Russian roulette", because in this meat grinder of survival and life preservation, luck is a major factor. "According to official data, 87,000 people died in Mariupol. But how many more are unknown, missing, buried under debris in stairwells... Before February 24, the city had 430,000 residents. So, approximately every 5th person died" (Penkova, 2022).

This text is an incredibly powerful and painful testimony of war, intertwined with themes of existential crisis, collective trauma, memory studies, and postcolonial trauma.

The heroine constantly questions the meaning of life, the randomness of survival, and the injustice of what is happening. Her thoughts about God, who remains silent, about the miracle of survival, and why she remained alive while others did not, reflect classic signs of an existential crisis. This is especially clear in the lines: "Lord... You saved my life. I'm in the bunker. Why is my older daughter... where is she?" (*Penkova, 2022*). These are not just reflections; this is the cry of a soul, caused by the chaos and absurdity of war. The loss of a child, witnessing deaths, causes a religious conflict: why is God silent if He can save? "God is silent... What's wrong with Him? You know He resurrected His own Son, right? What is that called?" (*Penkova, 2022*).

A component of existential trauma is the symptom of the destruction of human dignity: "We stripped down to our skin and warmed ourselves with our bodies... We warmed ourselves like that. Because there was nothing. Nothing but our own bodies and our own lives" (*Penkova, 2022*). War strips people of normal life, forcing them to descend to the most basic survival needs.

The dramaturgical text conveys not only the experience of one person but the entire community that is experiencing the horrors of war. All together, in the bunker, they try to survive, share resources, and hug each other to stay warm. At the same time, the heroine watches as people around her lose loved ones, as they are forced to leave those who won't survive ("We left people there... because we knew they would die. There was nothing we could do to help" (*Penkova, 2022*)). The woman, together with other Mariupol residents, watches as the city slowly turns to ruins, much like Pompeii. Horror unites strangers; in the bunker, there are no longer separate individuals – they become a single entity.

The text performs the function of testimony, documenting what happened in Mariupol. It is not just a personal memory – it is the preservation of collective memory, which will become part of history. Even the details – how people in the basement warmed themselves with their bodies, how they collected medicines, how children sniffed the bread – all of this has enormous significance for understanding what survival in war means. The victims of the tragedy constantly compare the past and the present, showing how reality has changed: "We had a life. We argued, choosing between Netflix and HBO" (*Penkova, 2022*).

The documentary drama-monologue can also be viewed through the lens of postcolonial trauma, especially in the context of Russia's historical role as an empire that has been destroying Ukraine for centuries. The heroine directly addresses the enemy, expressing outrage and pain: "Lord, what do you bastards want here?! This is children's stuff. Not like traumatology. Children's traumatology, maternity hospitals, oncology" (*Penkova, 2022*). Russia, as an empire, destroys Ukrainians, disregarding the civilian population. In "The Marathon...", there is an awareness of the systematic aggression that is not accidental – it is a continuation of imperial policy that has lasted for centuries. The heroine testifies that the Russians intentionally bombed hospitals, disregarding international laws: "Red crosses drawn on cellophane. They know exactly that we're here" (*Penkova, 2022*).

"The Marathon "Russian Roulette" by K. Penkova is not just a testimony but a literary document that records the emotional, psychological, and social state of people during war. This text is harsh, painful, uncompromising, but necessary. It exposes the nature of war as a catastrophe that not only breaks bodies but also minds. It preserves the memory of what has been endured, transmits collective experience, and raises questions for which there are no answers. The drama is an important document of the modern era.

In the play "Ten Kilometers" (2022) by I. Feofanova (*Feofanova, 2022*), a twelve-year-old boy drags a sled with some kind of package along the shores of the Azov Sea. As the reader

and viewer gradually learn, the boy has suffered a tragic family loss – his father was killed when a rocket struck their home, his mother died in a basement where they had been sheltering with their dog, Aida, from Russian bombings, and Aida herself perished after stepping on a mine on the beach near the sea. This happened when the boy was trying to escape Mariupol and make his way to Berdyansk. Near his home, he created a family cemetery, burying his mother, father, and dog.

Mariupol in the play appears as a city devastated by siege, famine, destruction, and the mass death of civilians, drawing parallels to Leningrad during World War II. One of the most brutal methods of extermination is hunger. The play features a scene where basement residents argue over food shortages, and some even attempt to kill a dog for sustenance. This recalls the tragic events of the Leningrad blockade, where people, driven by despair, resorted to cannibalism.

Another horrifying parallel is the vast number of dead bodies left unburied. In the play, the boy describes how corpses lie in the streets because there is no place to bury them. A similar situation occurred in Leningrad, where the deceased were often left in the open due to a lack of resources and burial opportunities.

The bombing of civilians is also a central motif of the play. Russian aviation deliberately targets the Mariupol Drama Theater despite a large inscription reading "CHILDREN", which should have served as a sign of its untouchability. This echoes the bombings of civilian sites in Leningrad, where the enemy intentionally destroyed residential buildings, hospitals, and schools.

Beyond physical suffering, the city is also consumed by psychological collapse. The protagonist describes how people gradually lose strength and move through the streets "like zombies". This reflects eyewitness accounts of the Leningrad blockade, where people spoke of a state of "death apathy", when they stopped feeling pain, fear, or even the will to live.

Thus, the image of Mariupol in the play resonates with the tragedy of besieged Leningrad, illustrating the horrific consequences of war and the inhuman trials faced by civilians. Thus, fascism and russism demonstrate their identity.

The main character – the boy – is not just trying to survive the war but is also gradually losing faith in a world that no longer aligns with his understanding of justice and safety. One of the most painful moments for him is the collapse of his trust in his father's words. His father always believed that "Russians would not harm civilians", but reality proves otherwise – civilians become the primary victims of the war. For the boy, this is not just a horrifying fact but a profound rupture between expectation and reality, shattering his childhood perception of the world.

Equally painful is his confrontation with the absurdity of the new reality. In his memories, the boy returns to a peaceful life filled with art school, gifts, and calendars – symbols of stability and joy. But now these things seem foreign and meaningless. War erases the boundary between past and present, making his dreams unattainable. Feeling this loss, the boy constantly escapes into his memories. Flashbacks to happy moments appear in the text, as if attempting to preserve his identity amid the chaos of war. These brief memories become his last refuge, a fragile thread connecting him to a life that no longer exists.

Thus, the protagonist's existential crisis unfolds not only through physical suffering but also through the loss of faith in a comprehensible world, where there is no longer room for childhood notions of goodness, justice, and safety. The play captures not only the individual pain of the protagonist but also the collective trauma of an entire city that endured siege, famine, and mass death. This experience does not just destroy lives

but also threatens to erase the memory of the tragedy itself, turning it into nameless darkness.

One of the key symbols of memory in the play is the grandmother, who urges people not to forget who is responsible for their suffering. A quote from the play reads: "We should not be angry at each other but at those damned Moskals. They herded us into basements like rats. They took everything we had and called it "liberation". They can shove that "liberation" where the sun doesn't shine" (*Feofanova, 2022*). Her words emphasize that war is not just physical destruction but also a struggle for truth. In a world where the aggressor tries to hide its crimes, memory becomes an act of resistance.

Another powerful symbol is the motif of the calendar. The father used to cross out days, counting down the time until normal life would return. But after February 24, this habit loses meaning – time stands still. This symbolizes the breakdown of the usual order, the moment when life was divided into "before" and "after".

The inability to mourn losses also becomes a crucial aspect of collective trauma. The boy cannot bury his beloved dog in a dignified manner – instead, he drags her body on a sled, as if carrying an unbearable weight of memory. This metaphor illustrates how war denies people even the right to farewell and grief. The boy tries to gather all his deceased loved ones together, creating his own place of remembrance.

Thus, the play not only documents the horrors of war but also explores how memory of tragedy is formed – through pain, silence, broken rituals, and the struggle to preserve the truth. The play does not merely document war crimes but also reveals their colonial nature. Mariupol is depicted not just as a city under siege but as a symbol of resistance against an empire seeking to subjugate and annihilate its people. This war is not a conventional conflict but an attempt by Russia to impose its colonial "order" through violence, hunger, and terror.

The only hope in this situation is de-occupation. The boy's escape from Mariupol is not just a flight from war but a symbolic departure from a colonial space. He seeks to break free from the invader's control, to find freedom and survive. His journey mirrors the path of the entire Ukrainian people, who are striving to rid themselves of the imperial legacy.

The key words in the play are: "This is genocide". This is not just an assessment of events but an understanding that the war is aimed not only at the physical extermination of the population but also at the eradication of Ukrainian identity. "Someone in the basement kept saying that they wouldn't stop until they destroyed us all. This is genocide. We had just learned about genocide in school, in the fall. I remember thinking then: at least this will never happen again... But it did" (*Feofanova, 2022*). The genocide in Mariupol is a continuation of Russia's imperial policy, which for centuries has sought to erase Ukrainian culture, history, and memory. The play transcends a specific tragedy and raises global questions of colonial violence, resistance, and the struggle for the right to exist.

The text intertwines personal tragedy with historical memory, depicting Mariupol as a new Leningrad but through a different lens – the lens of postcolonial Ukrainian resistance.

The poignant lyrical monologue "Fish Don't Cry" (2023) by Yelena Petrovska (*Petrovska, 2023*) is a tragic narrative about a family's failed escape from Mariupol. Their car was shot at, Marta's husband and children were killed, and only she and a fish in an aquarium survived. Now, the woman wishes to forget that she is human and become a fish because fish have very short memories and cannot cry: "I used to be a human in my past life. But in this one – I am a Fish. And I don't want to be human anymore. It hurts. Being human", "Fish don't cry. They used to. But then they cried all their tears, and the sea turned salty. And now fish have

no reason to cry anymore. But people must. Because there isn't enough salt on earth. Especially during war" (*Petrovska, 2023*).

The drama is filled with reflections on life and death, on the boundary between existence and oblivion. Marta experiences a moment of existential choice: to remain in a world where she "no longer exists" or to step out of the car, symbolically departing into nothingness. Her words, "The main thing is not to die before death" and "Sometimes you think you're alive... but in reality, you're already gone", point to a liminal experience, a loss of subjectivity in the conditions of war. She is no longer "human" but rather a fish, adapting to a new reality of silence.

The text portrays the destruction of memory as a survival mechanism. Memory appears as the main enemy: "The scariest thing is memory. Not death, no. And not hunger. No. Memory..." (*Petrovska, 2023*). Marta loses her sense of time ("just five seconds"), attempting to reconstruct the past in fragments: the mythology of Mariupol intertwines with personal memories. Her narration of the city resembles a ghostly tour – she reconstructs a reality that no longer exists or exists only in her fractured consciousness.

Mariupol in the work is not just a setting but an embodiment of trauma itself, shaping the structure of the narrative. The fragmented storytelling, repeated phrases ("we're driving, driving... still haven't left..."), and chaotic movements of the characters convey the psychological state of those who have survived catastrophe. The symbolic scene with the Violinist and scattered sheets of paper highlights the loss of control over reality. The themes of losing loved ones, fear, and a peculiar detachment – where the consciousness, in an attempt to protect itself, distances from pain ("He is already sleeping soundly") – demonstrate psychological defense mechanisms that allow a person to endure unbearable circumstances.

The text echoes postcolonial discourse by depicting Mariupol as a space where "our own attacked us". The protagonist struggles to distinguish between enemies and "her own people", as the colonizer, pretending to be "one of us", turns out to be the aggressor. Even the history of the city in her monologue is filled with moments of destruction and reconstruction, symbolizing the cyclical nature of violence.

Y. Petrovska's lyrical monologue "Fish Don't Cry" is a unique Mariupol existential drama that explores the limits of human existence in the face of catastrophe. It embodies the pain of loss, uncertainty, collective trauma, and the impossibility of full recovery.

4. Mariupol as a Chronotope, Now Associated with Genocidal Practices (Based on the Plays by O. Shevchenko, A. Borovensky and Co., V. Karaban, T. Kiytsenko)

Almost every play in contemporary Ukrainian drama about the war of 2022–2025 accentuates the concept of Mariupol. It plays a significant role in the works of Vital Karaban "I Can't Even Imagine How You" (2022), Tetiana Kytsenko "Call Things by Their Names (warning)" (2022), Olena Shevchenko "What to Do with This Snot" (2024), and Alex Borovensky, Nina Zakhovenko, Alina Romashko, and Oksana Kovalova "Once Upon a Time in Ukraine" (2024).

In Olena Shevchenko's play "What to Do with This Snot?" (2024) (*Shevchenko, 2024*), which consists entirely of voice messages from the refugee Oksana, who is in Greece, Cyprus, with her young son, the protagonist's exhaustion from hard work and emotional struggles is vividly depicted. Oksana transfers her anxieties about her sick child to the mothers and children in Mariupol:

"I don't know what a mother felt or did when her child was dying in a basement in Ukrainian Mariupol. Simply because, in the 21st century, in the middle of developed Europe,

the mother had no paracetamol. She could have called an ambulance, but there was no connection. And ambulances don't drive under bombs and bullets. She could have run out under the bombs and bullets herself. But whom to ask for that paracetamol, when the streets were empty? What did she do? Did she press a cloth to the child's forehead? Cry, pace in circles, scream? I don't want to think about it. I can't think about it" (*Shevchenko, 2024*).

This excerpt powerfully reflects the deep existential crisis experienced by a Ukrainian refugee in Europe. Her narration intensifies the sense of confusion, fragmented thoughts, and unspeakable helplessness. Oksana can neither change the situation nor fully comprehend it – thus, her words in the finale take on a tone of rejection. This signifies an attempt to shield herself from unbearable pain while also underscoring her heightened empathy, which becomes part of her own trauma. The contrast between the expected safety of the civilized world and the reality of destruction and suffering makes this passage particularly painful and poignant.

In the documentary post-drama, dystopia, and philosophical drama "Once Upon a Time in Ukraine" (2024) (*Borovenskyi et al., 2024*) by Alex Borovensky, Nina Zakhozenko, Alina Romashko, and Oksana Kovalova, the discourse of Mariupol is crucial and one of the most significant themes. One of the main characters, the Russian-speaking Masha, initially embodies a character from the well-known Russian animated series "Masha and the Bear", which carries imperial narratives of the "Russian world". Later, Masha transforms into Maria, who becomes the city of Maria – Mariupol.

"*Masha*: Hello. I am your Mariupol.

The enemy has knocked out my glass eyes-windows.

See my blackened walls? He burned my body.

He is dismantling me piece by piece – brick by brick – because he is searching for my soul.

My people.

I shield them as best I can.

They say I am a fortress.

And I am holding on.

I am holding on while they fight for me.

I must endure" (*Borovenskyi et al., 2024*).

Maria recalls the school, where "there were many children, very loud, very noisy", which contrasts with the current emptiness of the city. This is not only nostalgia for a peaceful past but also the realization that this past can never return. The children's play is interrupted by the reality of war, emphasizing the loss of the familiar world.

Mariupol in this fragment of the post-documentary drama-verbatim is personified – it speaks, suffers, resists. The city is perceived by the authors as a living entity and a subject of trauma. The lines "I am your Mariupol. The enemy has knocked out my glass eyes-windows. He burned my body" (*Borovenskyi et al., 2024*) create the image of a city as a wounded yet indomitable being. It is not merely a backdrop or setting – it experiences the pain of war itself. The phrase "They say I am a fortress. And I am holding on" resonates with the mythologeme of the hero city, which, despite destruction, remains a symbol of resistance. However, this image is ambivalent: a fortress city is both strength and a prison, from which there is no escape.

The repetition of the words "Further. Further. Further" resembles a trance state that reflects the psychological shock of the characters, their inability to comprehend the horrors of war in a linear sequence. The cyclical structure – when Sasha (another main character in the drama) "does not know where to start, so he starts from the end" – is a reflection of traumatic experience, where memories are mixed, and the past, present, and future merge into one.

The authors of the drama emphasize that "Around the city is a wall. Around the city is war" – a closed circle with no way out. The city does not merely suffer from war – it is surrounded by it, engulfed by it. This idea echoes the real experience of besieged Mariupol, where people found themselves trapped without communication, food, water, or the possibility of escape.

This excerpt exemplifies the Mariupol text through its fragmentation, combination of the real and the metaphysical, personification of the city, cyclical structure, contrasts between past and present, and the totality of destruction. It not only documents the tragedy of Mariupol but also reproduces it through language, structure, and rhythm, allowing the reader or viewer to experience it on an emotional level.

The "Mariupol text" emerges in the dramas of Vital Karaban "I Can't Even Imagine How You Are" (2022), and Tetiana Kytsenko "Call Things by Their Names (war-ning)" (2022) (Karaban, 2022), through the introduction of characters from Mariupol who serve as emblematic bearers of the tragic experience of the Russo-Ukrainian war and collective trauma, as well as through the example of renaming the Soviet city of Zhdanov to the Ukrainian city of Mariupol.

In V. Karaban's drama "I Can't Even Imagine How You Are", characters who have endured the catastrophe of Mariupol are present. They are not merely witnesses to the war but symbolic carriers of the experience of occupation, blockade, and destruction of the city. Their stories personalize the tragedy, making it more tangible for the viewer or reader. Through them, collective trauma is conveyed, transcending individual pain to become part of national memory.

The mention of renaming Zhdanov to Mariupol in Tetiana Kytsenko's reflective play "Call Things by Their Names (war-ning)" (2022) underscores Ukraine's struggle for its cultural identity. Zhdanov represents Soviet colonial history, while the restoration of the name Mariupol is an act of decolonization, reconnecting with historical roots. Within the context of the "Mariupol text", this takes on new significance: the city's past struggle for its name echoes its contemporary fight for survival.

Thus, these dramatic texts do not merely mention Mariupol; they expand and deepen the "Mariupol text" as a phenomenon, adding personal, historical, and national dimensions to it.

5. Documentary Drama as a Means of Preserving the Memory of Mariupol: Poetic Features

War transforms not only people's lives but also art, compelling it to seek new forms of reflecting reality. Contemporary Ukrainian documentary drama and monodrama have become crucial tools for capturing the tragedy of Mariupol, as they preserve the voices of witnesses, the experiences, and the emotions of those who lived through it. These plays are based on real documents: testimonies of Mariupol residents, fragments of conversations, social media posts, and excerpts from war diaries.

One of the main features of post- and documentary drama is the use of authentic sources (Yuhan, 2023: 181). Recordings of conversations, excerpts from social media and diaries create a sense of presence and authenticity. The audience or reader does not just immerse themselves in a documented story but becomes a witness to real events. This allows the truth about the war to be preserved, which is especially crucial in the face of information warfare and attempts to distort historical facts.

The use of such sources makes theatrical productions about Mariupol particularly poignant. They allow audiences to feel the pain and fear of people who survived the blockade and

shelling while also immortalizing the memory of the dead. This is also a form of resistance against oblivion and indifference since documentary texts remain unchanged, and their emotional power impacts every viewer.

Modern Ukrainian documentary plays about Mariupol have distinct characteristics. Their structure is often fragmented, reflecting the chaos and shock of real wartime experiences. Instead of traditional narrative lines, these works create a polyphony of voices that together form a mosaic of collective suffering.

Thus, documentary drama becomes a crucial means of preserving historical memory and truth about Mariupol's tragedy. It not only reconstructs events but allows for a profound emotional experience, ensuring that the truth endures in a world where it is constantly under threat of distortion or erasure.

Russian propaganda seeks to erase evidence of crimes in Mariupol, but theater serves as a platform for preserving the truth. Through art, the struggle for historical memory continues, as artistic interpretation of the tragedy helps to embed these events in the collective consciousness. Thanks to theater and documentary drama, Mariupol becomes not just a symbol of loss but an integral part of national identity, reminding people of the necessity to resist historical distortion.

Theater plays a vital social role – it becomes a space for public mourning and rethinking the tragedy. Readers, along with the author and the play's protagonists, undergo a process of understanding pain and loss, helping society to heal. Performances based on Mariupol residents' testimonies transform into a ritual of remembrance, aiding in processing loss, comprehending its significance, and preventing such tragedies from recurring in the future.

Just as Babyn Yar became a symbol of the Holocaust, Mariupol is becoming an embodiment of war as a genocide against Ukrainians. This city is not just a site of tragedy but a symbol of resilience, shaping a new Ukrainian identity. Through documentary performances and artistic dramatic texts, Mariupol is affirmed in the national narrative as a symbol of struggle, suffering, and hope. It is a reminder of the price of freedom and the strength of a nation that, despite immense losses, continues to fight for its independence.

6. Conclusions

Theater and drama play a crucial role in the memorialization of Mariupol, transforming individual testimonies and experiences into artistic works that preserve the memory of the tragedy. Performances based on real events not only recreate the harrowing moments of war but also serve as a means of collective trauma processing, fostering societal awareness and reflection on the past. Through theatrical art, the authentic experiences of survivors are preserved, and the memory of those who perished is honored.

Documentary and post-dramatic theater provide a unique way to capture and convey the real experience of war. The use of eyewitness testimonies, excerpts from letters, diaries, and social media makes these performances profoundly truthful and emotionally powerful. This approach enables theater not only to inform but also to deeply affect the audience, compelling them to feel the horrors of war, the despair, and the hope of those who lived through the tragedy of Mariupol.

The "Mariupol text" is gradually becoming a new national symbol of resistance, destined to remain in history as a reminder of the aggressor's crimes and the strength of Ukrainian resilience. Just as Babyn Yar became a symbol of the Holocaust, Mariupol embodies both the

suffering and the indomitable spirit of Ukrainians. Through theatrical productions, documentary plays, and artistic interpretations, this theme continues to resonate, reminding future generations of the victims of the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022 – 2025, while also affirming the unwavering strength of the nation.

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