

МІНІСТЕРСТВО ОСВІТИ І НАУКИ УКРАЇНИ
ДРОГОБИЦЬКИЙ ДЕРЖАВНИЙ ПЕДАГОГІЧНИЙ УНІВЕРСИТЕТ
ІМЕНІ ІВАНА ФРАНКА
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF UKRAINE
DROHOBYCH IVAN FRANKO STATE PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY

ISSN 2519-058X (Print)
ISSN 2664-2735 (Online)

СХІДНОЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИЙ ІСТОРИЧНИЙ ВІСНИК

EAST EUROPEAN HISTORICAL BULLETIN

ВИПУСК 27
ISSUE 27

Дрогобич, 2023
Drohobych, 2023

*Рекомендовано до друку Вченою радою
Дрогобицького державного педагогічного університету імені Івана Франка
(протокол від 15 червня 2023 року № 8)*

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дисертаційних робіт на здобуття наукових ступенів доктора і
кандидата наук у галузі «ІСТОРИЧНІ НАУКИ»
(Наказ МОН України № 358 від 15.03.2019 р., додаток 9).

Східноєвропейський історичний вісник / [головний редактор В. Ільницький]. Дрогобич:
Видавничий дім «Гельветика», 2023. Випуск 27. 292 с.

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Збірник індексується в міжнародних базах даних:

**Web of Science (Emerging Sources Citation Index), “Index Copernicus”
(ICV 2016-50.70; 2017-71.75; 2018-86.66; 2019-88.82; 2020-100); DOI 10.24919/2664-2735.27**

Статті збірника прирівнюються до публікацій у виданнях України, які включені до міжнародних науково-метричних баз відповідно до вимог наказу МОН України від 17 жовтня 2012 р. № 1112 (зі змінами, внесеними наказом МОН України від 03.12.2012 р. № 1380).

*Свідцтво про державну реєстрацію друкованого засобу масової інформації
«Східноєвропейський історичний вісник» Серія КВ № 22449-12349P від 28.12.2016 р.*

Усі електронні версії статей збірника оприлюднюються на офіційній сторінці видання
<http://eehb.dspu.edu.ua>

Засновник і видавець – Дрогобицький державний педагогічний університет імені Івана Франка.

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імені Івана Франка, вул. Івана Франка, 24, м. Дрогобич, обл. Львівська, 82100.
тел.: (0324) 41-04-74, факс: (03244) 3-38-77, e-mail: halivm@yahoo.com

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Recommended for publication
by Drohobych Ivan Franko State Pedagogical University Academic Council
(protocol dd. 15.06.2023 № 8)

Under the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the collection is included in CATEGORY "A" of the List of electronic professional publications of Ukraine authorized to publish theses of applicants for the degree of doctor and candidate of sciences in the field "HISTORICAL SCIENCES" (Order of the MES of Ukraine № 358 on 15.03.2019, Appendix 9)

East European Historical Bulletin / [chief editor Vasyl Ilnytskyi]. Drohobych: Publishing House "Helvetica", 2023. Issue 27. 292 p

This collection is meant for scholars, history lecturers, postgraduates, doctorants, students and all the readership interested in historical past.

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The collection is indexed in the international databases:

Web of Science (Emerging Sources Citation Index), "Index Copernicus"
(ICV 2016-50,70; 2017-71,75; 2018-86,66; 2019-88,82; 2020-100); 10.24919/2664-2735.27

The articles are equaled to publications in Ukrainian journals entered in international scientometric databases in accordance with the MES of Ukraine order dd. 17 november 2012 p. No. 1112 (amended by the MES of Ukraine order dd. 03.12.2012 No. 1380).

Print media registration certificate «East European Historical Bulletin» series KV No. 22449-12349P dd. 28.12.2016

All electronic versions of articles in the collection are available on the official website edition
<http://eehb.dspu.edu.ua>

Founder and Publisher: Drohobych Ivan Franko State Pedagogical University.
Office address: Drohobych Ivan Franko State Pedagogical University, Ivan Franko Str., 24, Drohobych, Lviv Region, 82100. tel.: (0324) 41-04-74, fax: (03244) 3-38-77, e-mail: halivm@yahoo.com

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UDC 327.5(47+57:73):623.454.8(100)“20”
DOI 10.24919/2519-058X.27.281547

Nataliia ROZINKEVYCH

PhD (Philology), Teacher at Applied College “Universum”, Borys Hrinchenko Kyiv University, 16 Leonid Kadeniuk Avenue, Kyiv, Ukraine, postal code 02094 (n.rozinkevych@kubg.edu.ua)

ORCID: 0000-0002-7292-1015

Researcher ID: HKN-9032-2023

Scopus-Author ID: 57961090300

Наталія РОЗІНКЕВИЧ

кандидатка філологічних наук, викладачка Фахового коледжу “Універсум” Київського університету імені Бориса Грінченка, пр. Леоніда Каденюка, 16, Київ, Україна, індекс 02094 (n.rozinkevych@kubg.edu.ua)

**THE NUCLEAR THREAT IS A TIMELY ISSUE.
ECOCRITICAL READING OF THE BOOK-WARNING**

**(review on: Serhiy Plokhyy. Nuclear Madness. History of the Caribbean Crisis.
Kharkiv: KSD, 2022. 368 p.)**

**ЯДЕРНА ЗАГРОЗА – ПИТАННЯ, ЯКЕ НА ЧАСІ. ЕКОКРИТИЧНЕ
ПРОЧИТАННЯ ТВОРУ-ЗАСТЕРЕЖЕННЯ**

**(рецензія на книгу: Сергій Плохій. Ядерне безумство. Історія Карибської кризи.
Харків: КСД, 2022. 368 с.)**

Multimedia platforms of foreign broadcasting of Ukraine, news agencies are full of headlines: “Nuclear Threat: What you Need to Know about it” (Ukrinform)¹, “Nuclear Threat: Where to Hide and What to Do” (DW)², “Nuclear Threat – how the Ukrainians should Prepare” (UNIAN)³, “Nuclear Threat: is it Possible to Prevent a Nuclear Strike by russia?”⁴ (Radio Liberty)⁵, etc.

Media publicity and fiction and non-fiction serve an educational function: they help learn about the danger and to understand the consequences in order to be able to prevent it. The purpose of the review is to analyze Serhiy Plokhyy’s book “Nuclear Madness. History of the Caribbean Crisis” from an ecocritical point of view and understand the author’s message, which is relevant nowadays, in the 21st century.

The subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature, culture and nature (not synonymous with the word environment). The interdisciplinary discourse “individual – society – nature – text” is decisive for creating a complete picture of the world. Ecocriticism focuses on the urgent problems of humanity, warns against crisis phenomena,

¹ Ukrinform. URL: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3581539-aderna-zagroza-so-pro-ce-treba-znati.html>

² DW in Ukrainian. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6iJ4yQg2hEQ>

³ UNIAN. URL: <https://www.unian.ua/war/yaderna-zagroza-yak-ukrajincyam-pidgotuvatis-12002145.html>

⁴ A proper name, used to express disrespect is spelt without a capital letter

⁵ Radio Svoboda. URL: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/yadernyy-shantazh-rosiyi-pro-ssha/31925154.html>

emphasizes educational potential of research papers. This discipline, originating in the USA, actively developed in Great Britain, became an academic discipline only in the 1990s.

In Ukraine, Ecocriticism is still a fairly young discipline. It should be noted that such researchers as Inna Sukhenko (2011), Alina Oleshko (2016), Larysa Statkevych (2017) considered the theoretical and methodological formats of modern ecocriticism and ecoliterature in the Ukrainian scientific paradigm and the stages of development of public consciousness regarding the importance of ecological thinking formation. The expediency and acceptability of applying ecocritical dimensions in projection to the Ukrainian literature and problems of adapting ecocritical knowledge for a Ukrainian-speaking recipient were studied by Larysa Horbolis (2011), Mykola Tkachuk (2011), Tetyana Hanzha (2018), Oksana Vertyporoh (2021), Anna Horniatko-Shumylovych (2022)), Natalia Maftyn, Halyna Sokol (2022). Tereza Levchuk, Viktoriya Sokolova (2020) proposed an innovative approach in developing a typology of ecotexts based on the concept of the American ecologist Barry Commoner: everything is connected with everything; everything has to go somewhere; nature knows better; nothing is given for nothing. Yuliya Kumanska (2019) did research on ecological aspects of literature for youth.

It should be noted that the current State Standard of Basic and Comprehensive General Secondary education (2011) provides for the formation of “Environmental literacy and healthy life” among the key competencies. Ukrainian literature as an educational subject has a rather significant potential for the implementation of cross-cutting line: “Environmental safety and sustainable development”, which involves an ecocentric ecological worldview formation of students, at the centre of which is the understanding that a human being does not dominate environment, but is a part of it.

Evidence of the purposeful interest of the Ukrainian researchers in environmental issues and understanding of the need to carry out transformational processes in the system of ethical principles of modern society are relevant scientific events and thematic collections, for example, International Scientific Conferences: “Artistic Phenomena in the History of World Literature: Transition of Language into Writing (“Ecocentrism: Culture and Nature”))” (Kharkiv, 2017); “Songs of the Earth: Biology and Ecology in Literature and Culture” (Berdiansk, 2022).

Eco-literature has great educational potential, because it lays the foundations of modern environmental ethics and transforms values determined by the application of knowledge about nature and ecology.

The issue of survival in the era of globalization for a modern man is no longer a metaphor. Disappointing ecological situation is caused by man-made disasters, pandemics, wars, depletion of valuable natural resources, global warming, demographic explosion, spread of exploitative technologies, conquering space before using it as a garbage dump, pollution (with toxic waste, radioactive fallout, phosphorous munitions), extinction and consumerist worldview and mindless inhumane killings by people of non-human species (animals, plants), etc. However, right now there is a more serious issue. This is a nuclear threat. Nowadays, the world has entered a new atomic era. Although world leaders implement the policy of deterrence, none of them gives a full guarantee of protection by “deterrent forces”⁶ against the use of nuclear weapon and does not express confidence that such a threat does not exist.

⁶ **Deterrence policy** (*nuclear deterrence policy*) is a geopolitical theory developed by the American diplomat George Kennan in the 1940s. This theory provides for the maintenance of *peace* by the so-called “nuclear troops” based on the inevitability of revenge to enemy in case of a nuclear first strike.

The threat is real, because no agreements and laws have any leverage to terrorist countries. Russia is an example of this leverage absence.

Contrary to the terms of the Treaty between the USSR and the USA on the elimination of medium- and short-range missiles (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, INF), which entered into force on June 1, 1988, Russia concealed the production of long-range cruise missiles. However, in July of 2018, under pressure by NATO, Russia acknowledged the development of such 9M729 missile. As a result, the United States withdrew from the agreement on February 1, 2019 for six months. On August 2, 2019, the agreement became invalid after Russia also officially withdrew from it.

Nowadays, the bilateral SNO-III (Arms, New Start) Agreement on measures to further reduce and limit strategic offensive weapons has been extended between the United States and Russia from February 3, 2021 to February 5, 2026. Nuclear weapons are called offensive: intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine ballistic missiles, heavy bombers. (In the 60s of the 20th century, in the resolutions of the Soviet party and government, this armament was called the euphemism “special charge” (Plokhii, 2022, p. 66)). However, the diplomatic achievements of world security are annulled, because the work of the US inspectors on the territory of Russia from August 9, 2022 due to Russia’s war with Ukraine is limited, they do not have access to nuclear strategic facilities. Russia does not allow inspectors into its strategic facilities, citing the US sanctions. Until August of 2022, the reason for restrictions was the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, as a result, there has been no absolute control of weapons in the Russian Federation for several years. It is also dangerous that DSNO-III is the last of the nuclear arms control treaties in force between Moscow and Washington, in addition, Russian representatives constantly postpone the meeting with the US representatives to discuss the terms of compliance with this treaty.

Nuclear arsenals are also available in China, Iran, North Korea, France, Great Britain, India, Pakistan and Israel, but only Russia uses nuclear terrorism against Ukraine: threatens to use nuclear weapons and radioactive materials or to destroy nuclear facilities. Since Ukraine is the largest European country and the breadbasket of the whole of Europe, a humanitarian catastrophe, in the case of the use of nuclear weapons by the Russian Federation, will also provoke famine in the European part of the Eurasian continent, and it is almost impossible to stop the flow of polluted rivers that will carry radioactive pollution.

Germany, Turkey, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy are the unofficial nuclear states of Europe that are not part of the “nuclear club”. There are also quite a few countries that have nuclear weapons programmes. Ukraine gave up nuclear weapons (in favour of Russia⁷, its historical enemy) and acquired non-nuclear status on December 5, 1994, when the Budapest Memorandum was signed.

Although nuclear and thermonuclear weapons – weapons of mass destruction – are an argument for deterring world wars, territorial encroachments are a great danger for humanity and environment, because their power is deadly – a human life can remain as an artifact, and consequences of damage (environmental pollution) last for millennia: the half-life of carbon-14 is approximately 6 thousand years, plutonium-239 – 24 thousand years, and iodine-194 – 16 million years (Plokhii, 2022, p. 321). Our brain is not even capable of comprehending these numbers – the data are too convincing, levelling time and space.

In the 21st century, the world has lost all guarantees of security, it is threatened by the entropic danger of war. A new phase of the arms race has begun: “Cold War-2” (a numeral

⁷ The Russian Federation deceived Ukraine: without agreement in the first months of 1991, after Ukraine’s declaration of independence, Russia semi-secretly exported tactical nuclear weapons to its territory.

was added to the term introduced by reporter Walter Lippmann in 1947). Once again we live during the most dangerous period in human history – “we are officially at the start of an uncontrolled nuclear race” (Plokhii, 2022, p. 18). Nothing can prevent the nuclear arms race and competition, the risks of military conflict. Although scientists model scenarios for the use of a nuclear arsenal, no one can predict the real consequences, because nuclear weapons were used infrequently and even relatively in uninhabited territories: on July 16, 1945, the world’s first test of a 21 kiloton atomic weapon was carried out in the state of New Mexico, the USA (the beginning of the nuclear era); on July 25, 1945, an underwater nuclear explosion with a power of 23 kilotons was tested (for the first time in history); then, on August 6 and 9, 1945, the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed with 15 and 21 kilotons; on March 1, 1954, the American 15-megaton “Castle-Bravo” bomb was tested on Bikini atoll; the test of the 58-megaton Soviet hydrogen “Tsar-bomb” in the New Zealand archipelago in the Arctic Ocean was carried out on October 30, 1961 (Plokhii, 2022, p. 54); on April 25, 1962, a nuclear bomb was detonated on Christmas Island in the Pacific Ocean (Plokhii, 2022, p. 63), etc. Nuclear bombs are quite fast, they instantly destroy everything around, contaminating the environment with radiation.

World leaders are looking for mechanisms that would stop the threat: they develop anti-aircraft defense (ADF) and anti-missile defense (ABD), while the average person loses the ability to be responsible for his fate, the fate of region, nature and the planet in general and is forced to live in anticipation of a nuclear threat. The Ukrainians understand this quite clearly, unfortunately, because from February 24, 2022, their natural environment will be permeated by: anti-aircraft guided missiles S-300, S-400, hypersonic missiles “Kynzhal”, cruise missiles Kh-101, Kh-47, Kh-55, Kh-555, “Kalibre”, “Iskander-K”, “Point-U”, “Onyx”, ballistic missiles R-500, “Iskander-M”, X-59, “Tochka”; aircraft – strategic bombers MiG-31K, Tu-95MS, TU-160, Tu-22M3 – missile carriers; kamikaze drones of Iranian production “Shahed-131/136”, reconnaissance drones “Orlan-10”, etc. There are many modifications of rockets. In NATO lists, the codification of missiles is different. On some of them, it is possible to install a nuclear warhead. Many missiles are still being developed and tested. For example, this is the hypersonic cruise missile “Tsyron” and the 9M729 – a promising long-range cruise missile, which the Russians hide and do not recognize its existence.

The Ukrainians enriched their vocabulary with new military lexemes, which changed from passive to active vocabulary. Like the Cubans in the 60s of the 20th century, the residents of Ukraine clearly felt the grotesqueness of being at the epicentre of American-Russian relations. The Ukrainians live “at the centre of two nuclear crises – related to nuclear energy and the threat of using nuclear weapons” (Plokhii, 2022, p. 12), in the breaks between air raid signals and hours of blackouts, which has become a part of their life, they do not have an eschatological approach to life, they do not expect an apocalypse, because an important feature of the mentality of the Ukrainian philosophical worldview is atheism, which also affects the model formation of a human being relations with environment.

Serhiy Plokhii, a member of the Ukrainian PEN, Ukrainian-American historian in the documentary book “Nuclear Madness. History of the Caribbean Crisis” (2022), analyzing the Caribbean crisis of the Cold War period of the 60s of the 20th century, raises the urgent and important problem of “arms control” (Plokhii, 2022, p. 325), encouraging citizens around the world to re-read the history of nuclear weapons and dangers “to understand the uncertainties of today’s world” (Plokhii, 2022, p. 15), because through knowledge one can draw many parallels, realize and take into account that “at the height of the Cold War, the issue of arms

control appeared on the political agenda through public debate: governments alone would not have done this” (Plokhii, 2022, p. 325).

The planet is our common home, and we must be united by the idea of planetaryism, together take care of our own existence, understand all possible consequences and prevent irreparable global catastrophe, because some cynical people with heightened egoism have a zoological desire to dominate – to have access to resources.

The noun “madness” in the title of Serhiy Plokhii’s book-warning means “reckless, careless actions that contradict the requirements of reason”. “The book is a reminder of a fine line between peace and war, between life and death, between international agreements and spontaneous decisions, between past, present and future. Catastrophes of incomparable scale can depend on the logic of the actions of individuals, often spontaneous, emotional, adventurous.

Having analyzed hundreds of historical sources and popular studies: archival protocols, transcripts, memoranda, ultimatums, reports, lists, recordings of conversations, telephone logs, telegrammes, cover letters, reports, speeches, newspaper articles, secret agreements, resolutions, eyewitness accounts, documentary books, etc., – in the book with 612 references to various sources, the author, “taking on the reconstruction and analysis of the Caribbean crisis”, calls into question the traditional narrative that dominated historical sources: “Kennedy showed character” (Plokhii, 2022, p. 16), to properly regulate US-Soviet relations at the height of the Cold War.

“We looked into each other’s eyes and waited to see who would blink first” – this is the metaphorical definition of the confrontation between the policies of Mykyta Khrushchov, John Kennedy and Fidel Castro in the Atlantic, in the Caribbean at that time, given by Dean Rusk (an American statesman). World leaders in the military, economic, political, ideological confrontation “stepped from mistake to mistake” (Plokhii, 2022, p. 17), but they were united by the fact that they were “balancing on the edge” (Plokhii, 2022, p. 69) and their strategic military forces were at a high level of combat readiness, but still, neither Khrushchov nor Kennedy wanted, and the latter was afraid of a nuclear war, so they made compromises, because they understood that they were one step away from disaster.

M. Khrushchov wanted to have primacy in the world communist movement and to have influence in the third world, while avoiding confrontation by the US and China. His plan was to keep Cuba in the Soviet camp and maintain the power base (nuclear balance) because American missile launchers, as a nuclear shield, were located in Italy and on the territory of eastern Turkey and were directed at the USSR. The Secretary General went on a nuclear adventure: the subject of the bargain was to make the Americans feel what it’s like to “live under the sights of nuclear weapons” (Plokhii, 2022, p. 76) – “offensive means”. The official version of that operation is “to help the Cuban revolution withstand the US aggression” (Plokhii, 2022, p. 81).

The first secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU signed an agreement on a package of military aid to Cuba for 228 million rubles. This top secret operation was called “Anadyr”. Secretly M. Khrushchov stationed 44,000 officers and soldiers, 1,300 civilians in Latin America, sent 24 medium-range R-12 missile launchers, 16 intermediate-range R-14 ballistic missile launchers (Plokhii, 2022, p. 73), S-75 “Desna” missiles, “Luna” tactical nuclear weapons, etc. The Soviet military base was established in Cuba with all types of “nuclear weapons at his [Khrushchov’s] disposal” (Plokhii, 2022, p. 121).

After discovering the positions of anti-aircraft missiles in Cuba, the American democratic president John Kennedy was faced with the choice of how to eliminate these bases: “what should be preferred – diplomacy or military action” (Plokhii, 2022, p. 134).

The Soviet ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads were on alert (the Americans didn't even know about it), so if Kennedy had chosen to strike the missile sites in Cuba, a nuclear war would have erupted instantly. Everything was decided by an accident: the young and inexperienced American president changed his position: he chose a blockade instead of a strike or an invasion.

The consequences could be unpredictable, because politicians lost control, resorted to diplomatic juggling, sent diplomatic letters and warnings with various messages, revoked orders, invented laws, organized provocations, sabotage, adventures, conducted secret operations, used tactics of intimidation, ultimatums, threats and blackmail, mutual suspicions, gave vague promises, bluffed, exploded with emotions, lied, did not keep public promises, refused agreements, undermined the trust of allies, fell into diplomatic traps with incorrect judgments and hints, endured psychological attacks, image defeats and misunderstandings were misleading. These are the tactical and strategic factors and means that were used in politics, and which prove that the border between war and peace is quite conditional. The author focused not only on historical and political generalizations, but also on individually made decisions of statesmen – political, economic, social.

Outdated and incomplete intelligence, the lack of reliable and timely information showed that the information age had not yet arrived, and therefore an ordinary incident could provoke a war, preserve life – and return the world to the stone age.

Nuclear war can depend on individuals who often do not even imagine the danger, and their spontaneous decisions, wrong orders, double understanding of certain situations and impunity can turn into unpredictable consequences. Serhiy Plokhiiy gives such examples in the book.

The shooting down of the American U-2 plane over Cuba by the Soviet anti-aircraft missile on the orders of the Soviet commander in the middle of the morning (!), carried out by a military man who “was 22 years old and had the build of a teenager” (Plokhiiy, 2022, p. 227) – this is one of the examples of the “irony of fate” that did not provoke an appropriate response from the Americans.

It was also a lucky accident of instant death that the torpedo on the submarine, which was equipped with a nuclear warhead with an explosive power of 10 kilotons, did not fire, because as “it turned out that each captain had his own understanding of what to do with a single nuclear torpedo” (Plokhiiy, 2022, p. 242).

The threats of the extremist Castro, who had his own understanding of politics, and believed that it was correct to use weapons to shoot down American planes, could also return the situation to the brink of war, and a human life and equipment – to tombstones and monuments.

The ability of world leaders to retreat rather than escalate the conflict, to find an alternative, to concede, to understand in time, the ability to buy time or to make a quick decision – all this was the basis for stopping a full-scale, unprecedented nuclear war in the 60s of the 20th century.

Serhiy Plokhiiy draws parallels and explains the motivation of the policies of Moscow, Washington, Havana, and occasionally Beijing. The rivalry between socialism and imperialism was based on the production of weapons. In the USSR, for example, various modifications of missiles were manufactured: R-7A, R-9, R-12, R-14, R-15, R-16, R-36, IL-28, MiG-21 bombers and other weapons.

The documentary nature of the book “Nuclear Madness” is confirmed by the facts. There are Names of locations and institutions (the White House, the Kremlin, CIA). For visual

perception, conditional maps of the Soviet troops location in Cuba are provided, where the locations of “surface-to-air”, “surface-to-surface” missile positions, patrol vessels, ground troops, airfields for MiG-21 fighters and Il-28 bombers are marked, positions of ballistic missiles and a map of the movement of submarines with nuclear torpedoes and the path of the air route to Cuba. The statistics of weapons, military and civilian personnel are given, and monetary costs are calculated.

One of the compositional elements of the book is the “Acknowledgement” section, in which the author once again assures that he used verified sources of archival documents, which enabled him to make an analytical cut and reconstruct fragments of memory. The figurative titles of parts of the book are interesting: “The Opponents”, “The Red Game”, “The Torment of the Decision”, “Resurrection from the Dead”, etc. – this is a fiction sign of the book work.

In the book there are mentioned the names of politicians, soldiers, scientists of that time: Kyrylo Moskalenko, Anastas Mikoyan, Rodion Malynovskiy, Semyon Ivanov, Frol Kozlov, Leonid Brezhnev, Oleksii Kosyhin, Issa Pliiev, Ihor Statsenko, Stepan Hrechko, Mykhailo Tokarenko, Anatolii Hrybkov, Andriy Hromyko, Andriy Dobrynin, Che Guevara, Raul Castro, Willy Brandt, Walter Ulbricht, Lucius Clay, John McCone, Dean Rusk, McGeorge Bundy, Robert Kennedy, Robert McNamara, Marshall Carter, Curtis Limey and the others.

The plot lines are built exclusively on real events, while the writer created bright, vivid pictures of events and situations. Episodes that took place more than 60 years ago are chronologically reconstructed, myths are debunked: the author structures the material – indicates the exact dates. Using a journalistic style with artistic elements, he conveys and evaluates events, explains the motivation and background of actions, summarizes the consequences and encourages a reader to find allusions to current events. This is the educational, social and cognitive function of the art of words – the literature of fact.

Thus, ecocriticism records the change of rationalist and technocratic, humanitarian and ecological ideas of a human being about nature, as a separate reality (the space of paradise) that is not squeezed into any systems and coordinates of existence. By decoding the messages of the book-warning, the reception of the new socio-cultural reality of the 21st century is formed, which may be outside of space and time. The book of Serhiy Plokhii, Harvard University History Professor, is of a historical and literary character – it has prospects for future scientific research.

Professor Serhiy Plokhii can repeat the same thing so that a reader, like a student, will definitely absorb the material, pass it through himself, and store the information in long-term memory, because there may not be winners in a nuclear war, but the modern “cyber war makes the current situation even more dangerous” (Plokhii, 2022, p. 323). Radioactive fallout can threaten the life of entire planet and will be difficult to get rid of. We have to realize a lot so that one day we don’t end up in an apocalyptic abyss.

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*The article was received December 23, 2022.
Article recommended for publishing 14/06/2023.*

НАУКОВЕ ВИДАННЯ

**СХІДНОЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИЙ
ІСТОРИЧНИЙ ВІСНИК**

**EAST EUROPEAN
HISTORICAL BULLETIN**

**ВИПУСК 27
ISSUE 27**

Головний редактор
Василь Ільницький

Відповідальний редактор
Микола Галів

Літературне редагування
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Редагування англomовних текстів
Віра Слінецька, Юлія Талалай

Технічний редактор
Лілія Гриник

Макетування та верстка
Наталія Кузнєцова

Дизайн обкладинки
Олег Лазебний

Здано до набору 10.06.2023 р. Підписано до друку 26.06.2023 р.
Гарнітура Times. Формат 70x100 1/16.
Друк офсетний. Папір офсетний.
Ум. друк. арк. 23,73. Зам. № 0623/381
Наклад 300 примірників

Друкарня – Видавничий дім «Гельветика»
65101, Україна, м. Одеса, вул. Інглезі, 6/1
Телефон +38 (095) 934 48 28, +38 (097) 723 06 08
E-mail: mailbox@helvetica.ua
Свідоцтво суб'єкта видавничої справи
ДК № 7623 від 22.06.2022 р.