

Zvizdal (****) Berlin.

by Geert Van der Speeten, published in *De Standaard* (17/05/2016)
translated by Nadine Malfait

Fukushima was worse, Nadia and Pétro insist.

The only remaining inhabitants of *Zvizdal* are clearly not that isolated from the outside world after all. The village lies in the no-go zone around Chernobyl, the scene of a nuclear disaster in 1986. The old couple refused to move and has been living without water and electricity ever since. The nearest border crossing is thirteen kilometers away.

How did they hear about Fukushima? The radio. When tested, all it does is crackle. *Zvizdal* is full of that kind of black humour.

It is a poignant, flawless filmed portrait of two elderly people who seem stuck inside a Beckettian nightmare. The loneliness, the extreme isolation, the years that weigh: all is loss and irreversibility. Every single day is about survival. Stubbornness keeps them going. Moving would be capitulating, displacement and certain death.

All Nadia has left after the horse, the cow, and finally Pétro have died, is a couple of chickens and some supplies. She started with one stick, now she needs two. On her weather-beaten face we read pent-up anger, but also incertitude and fear. Like a silent shriek that chills you to the bone.

The Antwerp *Berlin* duo has built a masterly theatre installation for *Zvizdal*. The audience sits on either side of a film screen. Underneath it there are three scale models: the farm in summer, autumn and winter. A camera on a robotic arm hovers over the still life. It encircles the no-go territory, tries to penetrate deep inside their intimacy.

What a striking contrast: today's state-of-the-art visual culture comes face to face with the primeval forces of weed-infested nature and a raw survival instinct.