

# The Reception of Serhiy Zhadan in Ukraine and in the West

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Serhiy Zhadan (born in 1974), an acclaimed Ukrainian poet, novelist, and cultural figure, has garnered significant attention and critical acclaim not only within Ukraine but also across Europe. His bestselling works include prose novels *Depeche Mode* (2004), *Voroshilovgrad* (2010), *Mesopotamia* (2014), *The Orphanage* (2017), and poetry collections *Life of Maria* (2015), *Templars* (2016), *Antenna* (2018) and others. These literary works, characterized by their raw emotional power, captivating storytelling, and thought-provoking themes, have transcended national boundaries, engaging readers and igniting conversations about Ukrainian literature and its place in the global literary landscape. This paper aims to delve into the reception and impact of Serhiy Zhadan in Ukraine and in the West, shedding light on his significance as a literary voice and the wider implications of his work within a transnational context.

The reception of Serhiy Zhadan's writings in the West provides a lens through which we can explore the broader dynamics of literary reception and the interconnectedness of Western literary landscapes. Zhadan's exploration of themes such as post-Soviet identity, historical memory, political upheaval, and the human experience in a changing world resonates with readers who seek literature that explores the complexities of contemporary society. His unique storytelling style, infused with lyricism, realism, and a deep social consciousness, has captivated audiences, allowing them to glimpse into the Ukrainian experience while also engaging with broader universal themes.

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This paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing upon literary analysis, reception studies, and cultural studies. By analyzing interviews, critical responses, and reviews of Zhadan's works, this study aims to uncover the ways in which his writings have been embraced and interpreted by Ukrainian and Western readers, critics, and scholars.

Zhadan's works are known for their honest and unflinching portrayals of the Ukrainian experience, particularly in the aftermath of the 2014 Revolution of Dignity and the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine. Western audiences have been drawn to Zhadan's writing because of its universal themes of struggle, resilience, and the human cost of war. His works have been translated into several languages, including English, and have been well-received by critics and readers alike for their raw, emotional power. Zhadan's descriptions of the Ukrainian experience are both deeply personal and politically charged, making his writing an important contribution to the ongoing conversation about Ukraine's place in the world.

Upon moving to Kharkiv in 1991, the writer quickly immersed himself into the literary and cultural life of the city. He was one of the co-founders of the neo-futurist literary movement *Chervona Fira* (Ukr. Червона Фіра), which utilized wordplay and grotesque to parody journalistic clichés and challenge conventional public tastes. Building off the traditions of Ukrainian futurism (in particular, the poetry of Mykhail Semenko (1892-1937)) and postmodernism (most prominently represented by the literary performance group *Bu-Ba-Bu*, founded in Lviv in 1985), *Chervona Fira* offered a fresh perspective on poetry and became a powerful force in the Kharkiv literary underground scene.

Tamara Hundorova views Zhadan's work in the context of punk culture. She writes,

In Ukrainian literature and culture of the late twentieth century, Serhiy Zhadan embodies punk parody along with youthful insecurity in his poetry. Of course, we are not talking about a consistently sustained punk style, but about its recognizable elements that are combined with bohemianism and avant-garde. Moreover, bohemianism in this case somewhat falls out of the middle-class format, as it contains elements of youth punk consciousness (Гундорова 2005, 159 – trans. K.N.).

According to Hundorova, punk worldview is rooted in a combination of factors, which include loss of trust in the older generation, lack of faith in the happiness that can come from having a home and family, unwillingness to grow up, and infantilism lasting well into the old age. At the same time, Hundorova points out that these themes had already been explored by representatives of the hippie and beatnik movements, which had preceded punk chronologically. Therefore, she chooses to position Zhadan's work closer to the Western generation of the 1960s, a generation for which the main conceptual metaphor was the metaphor of the road (after the title of Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* (1957)). "The road that leads nowhere, homelessness, fatherlessness – these are the coordinates of the world chosen by the leader of the nineties in Ukraine, Serhiy Zhadan" (Гундорова 2005, 160 – trans. K.N.).

Drawing on Hundorova's remarks, I should note that Zhadan's artistic endeavors of the 1990s were indeed characterized by the profound themes of spiritual displacement and identity turmoil. However, with the passage of time, his creative perspective has undergone a notable transformation and attained a greater level of depth. Within this evolution, elements of punk subculture and protest against societal shortcomings became intricately interwoven into a multifaceted framework of values. In her study of Kharkiv-based writers of Zhadan's generation, Tanya Zaharchenko calls them the doubletake generation due to their coming of age, or entering historical consciousness, when the Soviet Union fell apart:

Upon reaching adulthood, they revisit the intense historical experience that coincided with their childhood or adolescence – a time when external changes fuse with internal ones, and are therefore not immediately accessible to articulation; at least not to the extent allowed by a subsequent backward glance (Zaharchenko 2016, 181).

Zhadan's literary output, thus, successfully amalgamates protest with an intellectual and critical apprehension of the global landscape, all while concurrently exploring the intricate quest for a sense of belonging within the Ukrainian societal fabric.

Originally from Starobilsk (Luhansk region), Zhadan has taken an unequivocal anti-war stance since 2014, when Donetsk and Luhansk regions were occupied by Russian troops. In christening Zhadan "the unofficial bard of eastern Ukraine" Marci Shore (2016) has concisely summarized the significance of his voice for the writer's compatriots as well as the recipients of his work abroad. Through his literary works, the writer actively engages in the construction of Post-Soviet identity by embracing marginal narratives and offering alternative perspectives on history. In this way, he is able to disassemble the traditional image of Ukraine as it appears in classical literature (traditionally depicted as a monolithic unity centered around the dominant power structures) and highlight the experiences of individuals "occupying subordinate and subaltern positions vis-à-vis the center" (Kratochvil 2011, 496). By giving voice to these marginalized perspectives, Zhadan challenges the dominant historical discourse and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the Post-Soviet era in Ukraine. According to Stefaniia Andrusiv, utilizing an approach like this can successfully transform history into a collection of stories, an unfinished metatext that evolves through the interplay of myths, symbols, and cultural codes (Andrusiv 2005). These stories, in turn, will offer multiple interpretations and representations of the past in the present, allowing for a dynamic and evolving construction of post-Soviet identity.

In Zhadan's novels of the aughts, particularly *Voroshilovgrad* (2010) and *Mesopotamia* (2014), the topos of the lost and found home and the sacred border with the dangerous space beyond it takes on a special significance. This was emphasized by Tetiana Sverbilova, who examined these novels in the context of the theory of cultural hybridity, noting that the experience of living in the borderland portrayed by Zhadan in his novels opens a new vector for researching the cultural identity of Ukrainians, especially Ukrainians living in the border town of Luhansk (referred to as Voroshilovgrad during the Soviet era) and Kharkiv, which is located on the border and is open to all migration routes.

A constant motive is the need to return to one's memory and thus to one's native topos of home. The interfluvium of Mesopotamia, like Voroshilovgrad, appears as a refuge for eternal migrants, a home where a hybrid borderland type of culture is carried, not devoid of conflict and hostility, but which ultimately transforms the general space of national culture anew every time" (Свербілова 2016, 503-4 – trans. K.N.).

Therefore, in Zhadan's novels, Ukraine is presented as a real, modern country in the multitude of its contemporary realities - formed by diverse human destinies, social problems, and cultural influences.

Zhadan's works have been instrumental in dispelling several myths and stereotypes about Ukraine and its people that have persisted in the Western imagination. One of the most prevalent myths is the idea that Ukraine is a backward, Soviet-style country with little cultural or artistic value. Through his works, the writer showcases the vibrant cultural scene that exists in Ukraine, highlighting the country's rich literary traditions and its contemporary artists and musicians. Another stereotype that Zhadan challenges is the notion that Ukrainians are passive and fatalistic, resigned to their fate in the face of political upheaval and conflict. Zhadan's works portray Ukrainians as resilient and determined, actively fighting for their rights and freedoms even in the face of great adversity. Finally, Zhadan also dispels the myth that Ukraine is a divided and polarized society, torn apart by ethnic and linguistic differences. Instead, he emphasizes the shared experiences and struggles of Ukrainians across different regions and social backgrounds, highlighting the country's unity in the face of external challenges.

One of Zhadan's most famous novels is *The Orphanage* (2017), which depicts the first weeks of the war in Eastern Ukraine. It tells the story of a teacher who sets out on a long and arduous journey to save his nephew, who is currently staying in an orphanage in an occupied town. Portraying the daily life of people amid the horrid realities of war, Zhadan exposes the wounds of our society. He discusses the problems of collective memory and personal responsibility, bravery and cowardice, patriotism and national consciousness.

In a German translation by Sabine Stöhr and Juri Durkot, this novel won the Leipzig Book Fair Prize (Ger. *Preis der Leipziger Buchmesse*) in 2018. It also received the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Literature Prize in 2022, which is traditionally awarded to the best translated book from Europe, Africa, and Asia. As of right now, Suhrkamp Verlag has sold the translation rights for *The Orphanage* for 26 languages.

The novel depicts a horrifying, absurd picture of war. "There's the sound of automatic gunfire coming from the city itself. The bursts aren't that frequent, though. Seems like that's it for today, time to sleep" (Zhadan 2021, 109). In conventional circumstances, the sound of machine gun fire cannot be interpreted as calming or sleep-inducing. In Zhadan's novel, however, the characters' perception has been altered by the war, which is why this very sound seamlessly assimilates into an ominous new reality. As a result, an atmosphere of profound unease and perturbation pervades, heightening the narrative's tension and unsettling the reader's sensibilities.

As the plot unfolds, the characters are forced to navigate an increasingly more complicated and unpredictable environment. The sources of impending danger remain elusive, and differentiating between friend and foe proves close to impossible. The city is akin to

a black pit. Hovering above it is thick black smoke with long tails, like strings on kites. And it's as though somebody's pumping souls out of the city. And those souls are black and bitter, snagging on trees and taking root in basements – you can't just rip them out (Zhadan 2021, 109).

Unforeseen and abrupt disappearances punctuate the narrative fabric, further accentuating the fickle nature of war portrayed in the novel. Ultimately, the novel portrays a somber reality where survival is not a guaranteed outcome.

Within the prevailing atmosphere of uncertainty, Zhadan presents a protagonist whose disposition is marked by passivity, indecisiveness, and fragility. Pasha, an unassuming Ukrainian language teacher from a modest station town, can be viewed as an anti-hero who tries to evade perilous circumstances and adopt a detached stance, abstaining from active participation in the events transpiring around him. Pasha's reluctance to intervene on behalf of his nephew, whom his sister sent to an orphanage, his inability to establish a meaningful rapport with his father, and his unwillingness to participate in the elections exemplify his inclination to neither endorse nor condemn, opting instead to remain unobtrusive and avoid provocation.

However, a notable shift in Pasha's personality occurs when he decides to rescue his nephew from the orphanage. This decision comes as a surprise even to the protagonist himself: upon suddenly realizing how limited the time at his disposal really is, he rushes to the already occupied city.

And he's standing here, like a priest taking questions after his homily, and thinking, 'This is some responsibility – leading a group of people I hardly know, in the dark, who knows where.' Pasha isn't used to this kind of thing. [...] But now he's suddenly got a whole bunch of women, children, and sick people that he has to take somewhere (Zhadan 2021, 88).

The plot of the novel revolves around the hero's journey as he navigates the desolate cityscape, amidst the remnants of destroyed buildings, shattered glass, lifeless bodies, and ravenous dogs. The recurring phrase "Don't feel sorry for anyone" serves as a haunting motif throughout the narrative, hinting at the problem of compassion and responsibility for oneself and other human beings during wartime. "How much more time needs to pass before all of this disappears underwater? Time has stopped, nothing's left, don't feel sorry for anyone" (Zhadan 2021, 224).

A poignant moment in the plot occurs when a soldier, exhausted and injured, gives Pasha a piece of coal with a fossilized fern imprint. This fern has a particular significance in Ukrainian culture, as it is thought that discovering a fern flower on the night of Ivana Kupala will bring good luck, prosperity, and miraculous power. According to the myth, only a young man can find the fern flower, after overcoming the evil forces that will hinder him. Zhadan reinterprets and transforms the

fern's symbolism in the novel, as it no longer merely represents luck and wealth, but rather stands as a symbol of something indestructible and eternal amidst death, pain, and suffering. The introduction of the fern's image also provides hope for the hero's spiritual salvation, as he overcomes not only the dire circumstances but also his own fears and limitations by leaving the occupied city and saving his nephew.

In his creative work, Zhadan seeks to engage a wide audience by employing a language familiar to the masses and utilizing media that resonate with them. Through his artistry, he aims to introduce both domestic and foreign audiences to a more comprehensive understanding of Ukrainian culture, shedding light on aspects previously obscured and presenting them in an engaging manner. A prominent example of this artistic approach is evident in the musical *1917-2017: Tychyna, Zhadan & the Dogs*, which was created in conjunction with the Yara Arts Group and premiered in New York in 2017. This performance piece encompasses the literary works of Ukrainian poet Pavlo Tychyna (1891-1967) and philosopher Hryhoriy Skovoroda (1722-1794), as well as the musical compositions and lyrics by Serhiy Zhadan and *Dogs in Space* (whose work will be further highlighted in this paper). By spanning a century of Ukrainian history, the production reflects upon the country's revolutionary experiences, the oppressive era of Stalinist rule, the burden of Soviet occupation, and the challenges posed by Russian invasion. Director Virlana Tkacz played a pivotal role in the project, collaborating with Wanda Phipps and Bob Holman to translate the texts by Tychyna and Skovoroda. Tkacz expertly arranged, choreographed, and wove the poetic texts into powerful and poignant scenes, effectively juxtaposing the tragic trajectory of the Ukrainian people from its agrarian origins to the series of rebellions against the political machinations of Russian and Soviet hegemony. The artistic merit of *1917-2017: Tychyna, Zhadan & the Dogs* was recognized when Yara Arts Group was awarded two New York Innovative Theatre Awards in September 2018. The musical, along with Zhadan's regular literary projects and readings, demonstrates the organic fusion of his poetic work with his musical career. This convergence creates a space where contemporary and classical elements coexist harmoniously, enabling both music enthusiasts and literary critics to perceive and uncover new layers of meaning.

The writer exhibits a notable affinity for rock and punk music, identifying acclaimed artists such as Pink Floyd, Oasis, AC/DC, The Stooges, Patti Smith, and Depeche Mode among his sources of inspiration. On his most recent birthday, punk icon Patti Smith even presented him with a copy of her book entitled *Year of the Monkey* (2019), emphasizing the significance of their artistic connection. Approximately fifteen years ago, Zhadan embarked on a collaborative journey with a ska-punk band from Kharkiv, known as *Dogs in Space* (Ukr. *Собаки в космосі*), which prompted a subsequent renaming of the ensemble to *Zhadan and the Dogs*. Ska is a music genre that originated in Jamaica in the late 1950s and was the precursor to rocksteady and reggae. It combined elements of Caribbean mento and calypso with American jazz and rhythm and blues. Ska punk, being a synthetic genre, strives to combine the provocativeness of punk with an uplifting spirit of ska. It tends to feature brass instruments, especially horns such as trum-

pets, trombones and woodwind instruments like saxophones, making the genre distinct from other forms of punk rock.

Today, *Zhadan and the Dogs'* concerts sell out in hours— not just in Ukraine, but in other European countries as well (including Germany, Poland, France and others). It is not coincidental that *The Time* and *Deutsche Welle* have referred to Zhadan as a “rock star poet” (Coakley 2022; Landsberg 2022). His lyrics are angry and full of satire. In his mocking of social vices like bribery, vanity, greed, or bureaucracy, Zhadan is merciless. His music is for those who think critically, act decisively and are not afraid to voice their opinions. At the same time, his lyrics are full of life, humour and love for his native country. By combining the rebellious punk spirit with upbeat ska melodies and discussions of contemporary Ukrainian realities, Zhadan has created a singular phenomenon in Ukrainian music.

In his interview with Deniz Yücel for German newspaper *Die Welt*, Zhadan proclaimed, “Ich möchte keine Konjunktur-Kultur machen, keinen Bayraktar-Pop” (Eng. “I don’t want to contribute to conjuncture culture, nor do I want to make Bayraktar-Pop”) (Yücel 2023 – trans. *K.N.*). I find this statement to summarize Zhadan’s creative philosophy in a succinct and powerful manner, although it does require a terminological explanation. The word “conjuncture” (Ukr. *кон'юнктура*) in the USSR (and, subsequently, in Post-Soviet countries) has acquired a connotation of “adapting to the existing political regime” and thus become synonymous with the image of the soulless bureaucratic machine and slow-witted officials supporting its functions. Thus, in claiming that he has no wish to create “conjuncture culture,” Zhadan distances himself from platitudes and empty promises that occur frequently in government officials’ speeches, and reasserts his ambition to make “real” art that can speak to the people and connect to their real emotions and problems.

By mentioning “Bayraktar-Pop,” Zhadan refers to a phenomenon in Ukrainian music that is a tad more recent. After the full-scale invasion of Russia commenced on February 24, 2022, the Turkish company Baykar has supported Ukrainian military by supplying their Bayraktar drones which proved to be invaluable in combat. In June 2022, the company gifted three of its Bayraktar TB2 drones to the Armed Forces of Ukraine completely free of charge, which came to be widely acclaimed as an unprecedented show of support and has won Baykar even more fans and clients both in Ukraine and beyond. This decision was a response to a crowdfunding effort which raised \$20 million in less than three days to buy Baykar’s mainstay Bayraktar TB2 drones for Ukraine (BAYKAR 2022).

With this in mind, Ukrainians’ admiration for Baykar has unsurprisingly become ubiquitous, but this has not been the only war-related theme that has permeated contemporary Ukrainian culture. From 2022 onwards, songs have been written about the sinking of the largest Russian warship “Moskva,” the now legendary village of Chornobayivka in Kherson region where many a Russian troop has been exterminated, the bomb-sniffing dog nicknamed Patron (Ukr. *патрон*, Eng. *cartridge, shell*), and many other phenomena of wartime life in Ukraine that have been amply discussed in news outlets and on social media. This cultural trend is often believed to have been spearheaded by the singer and songwriter

Taras Borovok, who recorded a song about Bayraktar drones in the early days of the full-scale invasion, thus providing the name and the blueprint for the whole genre of Bayraktar-Pop. Songs and poetry within this genre usually deal with urgent, topical war-related themes (preferably ones that have garnered wide media coverage and are thus familiar to the general population); tend to use simple but vivid imagery; utilize catchy, upbeat rhythms which have the potential to make the song go viral; quickly rise to fame, however are forgotten just as swiftly when “old news” fades into oblivion and a new event occupies the minds of the public. Therefore, in distancing himself from this genre he so aptly christened “Bayraktar-Pop,” Zhadan reiterates his ambition to create long-lasting art both in literature and in music.

Over the years, Zhadan’s musical career has become closely intertwined with his literary work, adding another dimension to his artistic output and expanding the understanding of his works. His music often reflects the same themes and concerns that appear in his writing. In particular, his music explores the intersections between language, culture, and identity, and the role of art in shaping political and social movements. Zhadan’s music has also helped to popularize his literary works, with many of his fans discovering his writing through his music and vice versa. Additionally, Zhadan’s performances have created a space for dialogue and engagement between artists and audiences, allowing for a deeper exploration of the issues that he addresses in his works. Overall, Zhadan’s musical career has enriched and expanded the understanding of his literary works, demonstrating the power of art to connect people and provoke thought and discussion.

In 2019, a selection of Zhadan’s poems was published in English under the title *What We Live For, What We Die For*. Bob Holman states in his foreword that these poems

extraordinarily depict the lives of working-class Ukrainians struggling against an implacable alien machine dedicated to eating their very identities, their *souls* if I can say that, whose road to the future seems blocked at every turn by oligarchs and remnants of a Russian past in which Ukrainians were forced away from their country’s heritage (Zhadan and Holman 2019, x),

suggesting that the ideas articulated by Zhadan could also be used by U.S. citizens as an impetus for fighting “their own demagogic forces hellbent on challenging the foundations of *their* country – freedom of speech, freedom of the press, protection of the poor and newly arrived, etc” (Zhadan and Holman, p.x). In drawing this connection between the social and political landscapes of today’s Ukraine and U.S., Holman reiterates the power of honesty and integrity in literature as the force that could be instrumental in exposing harmful social phenomena and forming the individual and collective philosophy of citizens.

While Zhadan’s poetry undoubtedly explores some heavy topics including death, loss of loved ones, loss of home, loneliness, despair, and abandon, it is still full of vivid energy, liveliness and hope for a better future. German newspaper *Die Zeit* called him a “poet against fear” (Weidermann 2022), emphasizing the significance of the poet’s voice in today’s Ukraine.

Serhiy Zhadan's literary achievements have garnered international recognition, as evidenced by his nomination for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2022 by the Committee of Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Zhadan's literary oeuvre, characterized by his ability to articulate the individual and collective experience of war, resonates with readers in Ukraine and beyond. As the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* noted, "Free Ukraine speaks with Zhadan's voice!" (Nogaś 2022). Despite ultimately losing out to Annie Ernaux for the 2022 Nobel Prize, Zhadan's nomination bears testament to his status as a significant literary figure on the world stage.

In 2022, the writer was also awarded with the Hannah Arendt Award for Political Thought, funded by both the state government of Bremen and the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Bremen. This annual award was created to honor individuals who identify critical and unseen aspects of current political events and who are not afraid to enter the public realm by presenting their opinion in controversial political discussions. The jury motivated their choice in the following way,

In his books, readers come to know how a traumatized mass of shattered individuals, affected by war and hardship, continually gives rise to new forms of solidarity and civil energy. Zhadan not only describes the Ukrainian world but also helps us comprehend it in all its chaos, suffering, and humanity. This style of storytelling, in which the narrator is not a master but rather one among others, immersed in the chaos of everyday life and searching for a path, is also indebted to the musical world that Zhadan invites us to experience through his punk band *Dogs in Space* (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung 2022 – trans. K.N.).

Today, the writer is in Kharkiv, fighting against the full-scale Russian invasion. He gathers and distributes humanitarian aid, purchases cars and technical equipment for the Ukrainian military, gives literary readings and concerts for charity.

Zhadan's Facebook posts serve as a sincere chronicle of the war, depicting the struggle, courage, and resilience of those affected by it. These posts typically conclude with formulaic phrases, such as "Our flags are flying over the city" or "Tomorrow we will wake up one day closer to our victory." A certain formulaic character of these endings actually has a potent psychological impact: Zhadan's supporters from Ukraine and other parts of the world can read them daily and find reassurance that despite all the occupiers' attempts, the city remains standing and fighting, and its inhabitants have not given up. In late 2022, Zhadan's Facebook posts were compiled into the book *Sky Above Kharkiv: Dispatches from the Ukrainian Front*. In her online review, one reader wrote, "I'm waiting for the sequel and I want to continue reading every evening that Ukrainian flags are flying over Kharkiv, just like in this book" (Waldfee – trans. K.N.).

Zhadan's war diary is presently available in German and English, with Polish and Danish translations to follow soon. However, there are no plans for a Ukrainian edition yet. The deliberate targeting of a Western audience for this publication is not incidental, as Zhadan seeks to communicate extensively not only with his native audience but also with foreign readers about Ukraine and Ukrainians. Here, the author's objective is to articulate both individual and collective experiences

of war and to present this experience in a comprehensible and accessible form to the readers. Simultaneously, we must acknowledge that modern European youth (who constitute a significant part of Zhadan's audience) tend to primarily learn about the war from textbooks and stories from their grandparents' generation. As a result, *Sky Above Kharkiv* may be regarded as an effort to bridge the gap between different perspectives: those who lack direct experience of war and those who are actively living through war's realities, feeling its presence every moment of their lives.

For Western audiences, Zhadan's poetry poses important questions about the nature of war and conflict, and their impact on human lives and communities. His works challenge simplistic narratives about conflict and violence, highlighting the complexity and nuance of human experience in times of crisis. At the same time, Zhadan's poetry speaks to universal themes and concerns, demonstrating the power of art to transcend boundaries and connect people across different cultures and contexts. Overall, Zhadan's poetry offers a compelling and deeply moving portrait of the contemporary war landscape in Ukraine, and its impact on the lives of ordinary people caught up in the midst of conflict.

As for Ukrainians, many of us now have to live in a different world – a world with destroyed schools, burned books, and ruined human lives. This new reality, no matter how frightening it is, poses many complex and ambiguous questions that require reflection, discussion, and the search for new spiritual supports and life meanings. In October 2022, Serhiy Zhadan received the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade (Ger. *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels*) for his artistic and humanitarian work. In his acceptance speech, he formulated his own questions.

How can one talk about war? How can one manage all the desperation, fury, and rancor in one's tone, as well as all the energy and eagerness to stick by your fellows, not to retreat? [...] Actually, war changes our memory and fills it with excessively painful images, excessively deep traumas, and excessively bitter conversations. You can't rid yourself of these memories; you aren't able to fix the past. It will always be a part of you. Hardly your best part. [...] As long as we have our language, we have, at the very least, the vague chance to articulate ourselves, speak the truth, and tidy up our memories. So we speak and we go on speaking. Even when words hurt our throats. Even when they make us feel lost and empty. The possibility of truth is behind our voices. And it's worth taking advantage of this opportunity. This may be the most important thing that could happen to us (Börsenverein 2022 – trans. Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler and Reilly Costigan-Humes).

In conclusion, the work of Serhiy Zhadan demonstrates the power of literature to bridge cultural divides and forge connections across borders. Through his powerful and evocative portrayals of life in contemporary Ukraine, Zhadan has captured the attention of readers and literary critics alike. While his work grapples with themes that are often difficult and painful, such as the trauma of war and the struggles of daily life in a post-Soviet society, Zhadan's writing is imbued with a sense of hope and resilience that speaks to readers across the globe. As evidenced by his nomination for the Nobel Prize in Literature and the growing popularity

of his work outside of Ukraine, Zhadan's voice is one that will undoubtedly continue to resonate with readers for years to come.

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