

**Tanya Zaharchenko. *Where Currents Meet: Frontiers in Post-Soviet Fiction of Kharkiv, Ukraine*.** Central European UP, 2016. xvi, 212 pp. Illustration. Primary Sources. Bibliography. Index. \$50.00, cloth.

**I**n this recently published monograph, Tanya Zaharchenko sets two ambitious goals: to write a cultural history of Ukraine's prolific and diverse eastern region (with its major hub in Kharkiv); and to introduce a group of newly emerged authors from that region, whom she calls, collectively, a "doubletake generation" (2). These authors (Serhii Zhadan, Andrii Krasniashchykh, Iurii Tsaplin, Oleh Kotsarev, and others) grew up during the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and their prose reflects an attempt to relive that experience, in the imaginary realm—hence the label *doubletake generation*. The prose of these authors is shaped by the region's frontier nature, and it features many common leitmotifs: an emphasis on liminal time and space; fluid borders between life and death and the presence of otherworldly figures (most often ghosts); an element of transition associated with a journey, often on a train; the pervasive disorientation of protagonists owing to blurred coordinates; and the presence of "peoplespeak" (that is, black humour, uncensored language, and stream of consciousness techniques [79]). Zaharchenko perceives that all of these elements bring forward the region's traumatic past and underscore its complicated association with a Soviet reality that it cannot easily cast off.

The monograph goes against the West-East dichotomy that may be found in the study of Ukraine. This dichotomy is also known as the formula of two Ukraines—a nationally conscious West and a Sovietized, nationally backward, and underdeveloped East. The book draws attention to the status of eastern Ukraine (especially Kharkiv) as a Ukrainian cultural-renaissance hub in the early nineteenth and, subsequently, early twentieth centuries. This premise occupies the majority of Zaharchenko's chapter 1 (39-77), which along with the introduction (1-38) draws attention to the hybrid national identities in the region and the region's soft local border (which became a geopolitical reality only after Ukraine's independence in 1991). Zaharchenko then points to Ukraine's historically diverse and complex collective memory, viewing the theory of approaching that memory from the perspective of a neatly split country with mutually exclusive narratives as an overly dogmatic, lose-lose scenario. The book subsequently sets out to analyze the voice of the Ukrainian eastern region through the prose of Kharkiv authors, arguing for acceptance and tolerance of diverse memories and identities that can help consolidate Ukraine as a viable modern nation.

In chapter 2 (79-106), the reader will find one of the most detailed and interesting analyses in the book. The bulk of the monograph is divided into five chapters, all of which draw on the notion of frontiers associated with

Kharkiv prose and with the Ukrainian eastern region in general. Chapter 2 focuses specifically on the themes of frontiers and emptiness in discussing Zhadan's award-winning novel *Voroshylivhrad* (2010). Zaharchenko insightfully applies Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the literary chronotope to an analysis of locale in Zhadan's text. And she argues that memory is the key principle for existence, viewing the loss of memory as a path to nothingness and chaos. The resurfacing and processing of the complicated grey area of the past in *Voroshylivhrad* is, in Zaharchenko's own words, "an important counterweight to homogenizing attempts at post-Soviet nationalization" in Ukraine (90). *Voroshylivhrad*, like other works that are analyzed in Zaharchenko's monograph, goes beyond didacticism, engaging the reader in recollecting and rethinking the past in question. Chapter 3 (107-33), which is equally insightful and detailed in its analysis, deals with the subject of frontiers in the life-death dichotomy. It looks at Krasniashchykh's collection of short stories about an amusement park, *Park kul'tury i otdykha: Rasskazy (Park of Culture and Leisure: Short Stories* [2008]). The stories take place in a gap between the world of the dead and the world of the living and focus on the to-and-fro movements of ghosts across that gap. Krasniashchykh views death as a transformation rather than an ending, and he uses the gap between the world of the dead and the world of the living to address the same issue of the historical past (that Zhadan does in his novel). But his prose focuses more on the theme of Soviet victims and perpetrators (who often could be the same people): "Anyone could fall prey to the system, including the executioners themselves" (117). As Zaharchenko argues, these texts become therapeutic, as they introduce the possibility of choice for receding into a past situation that seemed out of control; this consequently places the agency in the reader, allowing the reader to (re)claim responsibility (125) and, through that, to come to terms with the traumatic past.

The final two chapters, 4 (135-60) and 5 (161-80), bring up themes of trauma and madness (respectively) as awakened in the frontier fiction of the Kharkiv authors. Zaharchenko argues that it is possible to express how trauma feels without addressing or uncovering the cause (or truth [137]). Drawing a parallel between contemporary Kharkiv authors and authors from the 1960s generation, Zaharchenko emphasizes that the prose of both groups portrays symptoms of distress without offering any clear-cut causes. This may be seen in the broken storylines of Tsaplin, Zhadan, and Krasniashchykh and in their portrayal of intense violence, fear, and pain. Finally, Zaharchenko addresses the blurred lines between sanity and madness in the prose of these three authors, referring to the presence of a shattered "I," a "drunken reality," and twisted and fragmented narrative lines, all of which make the plot difficult to follow. Zaharchenko sees in these techniques the main essence of

Kharkiv's borderland fiction: "Fragmented writing reflects fragmented memory; it is therefore true to style" (178).

Zaharchenko's monograph is a welcome addition to the anglophone literary criticism of Ukraine. It is firmly rooted in theory and draws on trauma studies and borderland, memory, and identity studies without losing its ability to engage with primary texts. A number of questions emerge from this examination, and Zaharchenko lists most of them in her conclusions. But the two most obvious issues that spring to mind are the relative absence of women in this cohort of authors; and the bilingualism of the texts (many of which are written in Russian). Furthermore, the distinct sense of regionalism in the works of the Kharkiv cohort (analyzed in this monograph) sets them apart from texts written by other Ukrainian authors who publish in Russian, such as Andrii Kurkov. This sense of regionalism could be a fruitful area for further study. The book is meticulously copy-edited and firmly maintains the narrative arch, moving between the historical backgrounds of the authors and between theories and texts while staying true to the theme of Ukraine's eastern region. The book will be a welcome addition to courses in Ukrainian studies: it presents a comprehensive picture of a historically diverse region of Ukraine and attempts—through cultural discourse—to reassess the region's past without diminishing its local identity.

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#### Works Cited

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