

**The Role of Mass Media and Popular Culture in Formation of Masculinity
in Serhiy Zhadan's *Depeche Mode***

The article studies the influence of Anglo-American and Western popular culture and mass media in Serhiy Zhadan's *Depeche Mode*. The author of the article traces elements of pop-culture, globalization and consumerism in Zhadan's debut novel and shows that the protagonists' fascination with all that is new and foreign gradually changes into a critique of the Western role models and nostalgia of the Soviet times.

After the collapse of the USSR Soviet colonization proved to have long-lasting effects that hindered Ukrainian society to fit into the Western culture of consumption. Nevertheless, globalization and the growing popularity of Television and the Internet allowed the foreign (especially Northern American) models of behavior to penetrate the conservative Ukrainian worldview. For years dehumanized by the regime, Ukrainian men and women had to face the new visions of masculinity and femininity. Women managed to benefit from this encounter with the West. However, suppressed by their Soviet past, Ukrainian men found it very challenging to deal with the models of masculinity presented by the hypermasculine figures such as Superman and James Bond, extremely loving fathers as Bill Cosby, and metrosexuals like David Beckham.

Serhiy Zhadan belongs to the most popular Ukrainian writers born in the 1970s. After releasing four collections of postmodern poetry in the second half of the 1990s, in 2003 he published *Big Mac*, a compilation of short stories, and a year later a novel titled *Depeche Mode*, which proved to be very successful with readers and critics. In *Depeche Mode*, like in all of his subsequent novels, Zhadan goes back to the time of his childhood in the 1980s and 1990s. Zhadan's prose presents images of young people growing up in the post-totalitarian reality in the late 1980s and early 1990s. *Depeche Mode* is one of the first Ukrainian coming-of-age novels published after 1991 and the first one taking place in the early 1990s. Its young protagonists, who grow up in Kharkiv, face unexpected social changes caused by Ukraine's gain of

independence. Even though the mass media are still full of remnants of the Soviet propaganda, they promote new globalizing models of behavior. Zhadan's *Depeche Mode* shows the complicated process of developing individual and collective identities in the difficult period of breakthrough. The young protagonists of the novel are surrounded not only by the Soviet ethics, but also by the globalizing Western culture, which increasingly affects the creation of their identity. While almost exclusively being in their own company, boys create strong generational ties. The teenage protagonists regularly drink alcohol, take illegal drugs, and have sex with the same girl. Although they try to fit into the post-Soviet world, but they tend to see that the reality surrounding them is still being created by state institutions-simulacra and deceitful mass media that show a distorted image of the world

The need to achieve a socially constructed hegemonic masculinity and continuous proving it is rooted in the culture of colonialism and patriarchy. In *Depeche Mode* it collides with the fear of being suspected of homosexuality. Collapse of the USSR led the to re-emergence of themes previously eliminated in the Soviet mass media, but present in Ukrainian modernism, such as gender and sexuality. Homophobic discourse in Zhadan's fiction seems to be a defensive reaction to the feminization of the colonized lands and "feminization" of the conquered men. Protagonists of the novel show homohysteria, fear of being accused of homosexuality. Thus, they repeatedly accuse other men of their alleged homosexuality, referring to them as "faggots" and "queers". Interestingly, gays (or individuals accused of homosexuality) in *Depeche Mode* are either effeminate foreigners (like Wakha – a rich man from Georgia who sells vodka and American candies) or Ukrainians fascinated by the foreign culture of consumerism like Cocoa (who is infatuated with Reverend Johnson-and--Johnson), or Vasya's schoolmate who masturbates while looking at a poster of Dave Gahan from Depeche Mode.

Boys in *Depeche Mode* are constantly trying to prove that they are not like their fathers, whom just like the Soviet system they treat as "the others". Yet, they do not quite understand promises of a real rebellion characterized by a rejection of the system of values existing in a given culture, in order to replace them with new ones,

as well as by the rejection of the institutionalized means and replacing them with new ones. They want to, but cannot enjoy freedom, and only act according to the anarchist principle “better to do something than to do nothing”; that is why they get into fights, drink lots of illegally acquired vodka and cognac, and smoke soft drugs.