

**From Acting to Reality: The Rise of President Zelensky**

Joseph D. Brounstein

Department of English, Anoka Ramsey Community College

ENGL 1120: College Writing and Critical Reading

Chris McCarthy

October 16, 2022

## **From Acting to Reality: The Rise of President Zelensky**

In 2019, an unassuming actor and comedian by the name of Volodymyr Zelensky was elected president of Ukraine. The day passed with little media attention or world recognition. A mere three years later, Russia would invade Ukraine's borders and thrust president Zelensky forward to become one of the most well-known leaders in the world. With his face and name on every news network in the globe, it is essential for us to ask who this man is and how has he managed to capture the attention of the world. John Simpson (2022), a writer for the *BBC*, delves into these questions in his article titled "John Simpson: Zelensky strikes all the right notes." Simpson (2022) previously conducted an interview with Zelensky and analyzes his responses alongside past and present actions in order to formulate a decisive opinion on Zelensky's character. I concur with Simpson's assessment that Zelensky's background makes him a genuine and effective leader. His virtuous character is gaining him the support of the world and the devotion of his people. Additionally, I agree that Zelensky's unwavering presence among his people in wartime is emboldening their resolve to fight their aggressor. Finally, his cause is aided by the contrast between his actions and the aggression of Vladimir Putin, Russia's President.

At the beginning of the article, Simpson (2022) states that although Zelensky was formerly an actor, he believes Volodymyr to be genuine in his role as a leader. "He's famously an actor by profession...Maybe, of course, the quiet charm and the apparent lack of assumption are part of the act...My guess is not, though," concludes Simpson (2022). I agree that Zelensky is authentic, but I also deduce that Zelensky's acting career has prepared him with the skills needed to be an effective leader. The characteristics of a politician are often similar to those of a successful actor. An article written by Stephen Langston (2022), a professor at the University of

West Scotland, for *The Conversation* illustrates several of the advantageous, yet genuine qualities that Zelensky acquired in the acting profession that aides his presidency:

“Memorization, creativity, reading, speaking and teamwork highlight a few aptitudes. However, the ability to change one’s personality to communicate a message in a controlled and meaningful manner is proving to be a key skill for Zelensky.” Langston (2022) surmises that these traits, combined with Zelensky’s willingness to be open and honest, are gaining him the respect and support of some of the most powerful leaders in the world. Zelensky’s insightful and authentic leadership is fundamental to the integrity of his character.

Simpson (2022) expounds further that Zelensky’s innate personality is “...quiet, charming...” as well as “...calm and surprisingly warm...” and these characteristics are endearing and encouraging his people. I certainly agree that the values that Zelensky displays are garnering support for him both at home and abroad. In another article written for *The Conversation*, Suze Wilson and Toby Newstead (2022) analyze a video of Zelensky and identify the attractive traits they perceive in his character: “Being unscripted and more spontaneous than his pre-prepared speeches, it offered a clearer insight into his character. We found all seven of the key character virtues – humanity, temperance, justice, courage, transcendence, wisdom, and prudence...” The article examines the recorded interview in depth to find evidence to support their findings. Wilson and Newstead (2022) identify that Zelensky displays genuine respect and compassion for others, even enemy soldiers: “Zelenskyy expresses concern that Putin is “throwing Russian soldiers like logs into a train’s furnace”, and laments that the Russian dead are neither mourned nor buried by their own side.” Additionally, the Ukrainian leader appears to be thoughtful and careful in his words and actions. Zelensky’s answers indicate intelligent choices and a deep connection with his people. Lastly, his unwaveringly decisive commitment to

his oppressed nation reflects incredible bravery and integrity. Zelensky exemplifies countless noble and admirable traits that endear him in the hearts of the Ukrainian people and communicates to the world via media his integrity and abilities.

Simpson's (2022) article continues his investigation by assessing the many months of the Ukraine war and how Zelensky's appearance, attitude, and surroundings in the media have "struck precisely the right note" with people across the world. I agree that President Zelensky exhibits both an air of seriousness and defiance against the Russian invasion. His media appearances are unpolished and realistic. They are primarily filmed on a phone camera that Zelensky himself is holding. Even his attire reflects the gravity of the conflict, a simple green shirt. The backgrounds are often abandoned and broken streets and bunkers across Ukraine. This rough, raw, and unedited footage shows the true nature of the Ukrainian strife. The affective nature of Zelensky's media footage is also reviewed in an article written by Megan Garber (2022) of *The Atlantic*:

"The citizens of Ukraine are vulnerable. What Zelensky's videos announce, above all, is that their leader has chosen to be vulnerable along with them." There [sic] Zelensky is—a figure who came to the presidency as a relative outsider now remaining, by choice, inside the country...As my colleague Franklin Foer put it, "It is hard to think of another recent instance in which one human being has defied the collective expectations for his behavior and provided such an inspiring moment of service to the people, clarifying the terms of the conflict through his example."

Zelensky's willingness to stay with his people, even to his own end, is exceptionally noble. This bravery and loyalty to Ukraine bolsters the spirits of his people to join their leader in fighting

against the Russian invaders. Simpson's (2022) assessment of the effectiveness of Zelensky's media coverage is considerably accurate.

Simpson (2022) concludes, "Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine does have the genuine flavor [sic] of a personal battle." I adamantly agree that, by his words and actions, President Putin indicates direct hatred for Zelensky and his defiance. Like most of the world, Putin saw the election of President Zelensky as a move by Ukraine to become more independent. Before this, Russia's meddling in Ukraine had been successful. In the article written for the *Washington Post*, Robyn Dixon and David Stern (2022) discuss why Zelensky's rise to power greatly affected Russian-Ukrainian relations and why it infuriates Putin in particular. One of the first points Dixon and Stern (2022) examine is the initial stages of Zelensky's time as President. Ukraine had steadily been growing more independent of Russia following the overthrow of a pro-Kremlin president several years prior. When Zelensky was elected, Putin believed that he could bully the politically inexperienced president to regain some of the control of Ukraine that Russia had lost. However, it quickly became clear that Zelensky would not cooperate with Putin's objectives. During peace talks between the two nations, Zelensky insisted that changes be made to the previous agreements to uphold Ukraine's rights and independence. Putin refused to concede, but Zelensky held his ground. Dixon and Stern (2022) write:

Rather than seek compromise, the Kremlin leaders seemed to calculate that they could force the newcomer to make humiliating concessions," wrote Steve Pifer, an analyst at the Brookings Institution, in December. "The unsurprising result: Zelensky's attitude toward Moscow has hardened," said his article, titled "Does the Kremlin understand Ukraine? Apparently not.

Dixon and Stern (2022) also point out Zelensky's perseverance in trying to acquire Ukraine's membership in NATO, an alliance that would help protect them from Russian abuse. If they joined North American Treaty Organization or NATO, and Russia attacked them, Russia would have to answer to the numerous countries in NATO, not just Ukraine. This move help to ensure Ukraine remains independent and free of outside rule. They conclude that Putin considered this to be an attack against him and Russia even though "...Russia's actions against Ukraine have galvanized Ukrainian support for NATO." Zelensky's actions to uphold Ukraine as a free, independent nation in post-Soviet Eastern Europe have inflamed Putin's pride and deluded his judgment.

Overall, Simpson's (2022) article accurately outlines Zelensky's honest and genuine portrayal of the Ukrainian conflict and how his natural and personable character unites his country. Additionally, Simpson (2022) supports the affective nature of Zelensky's presence in the media which has gained the attention of the world. And finally, Zelensky proves himself to be a strong adversary to the personal aggression of Vladimir Putin. All these statements are congruous with the evidence presented in supporting the articles. Although some critics argue that Zelensky's righteousness and bold actions on behalf of the Ukrainian people have been extreme and done too quickly, Ukraine has earned the right to be independent and free from Russia. I believe that Zelensky's words and actions have been entirely justified and necessary. Volodymyr Zelensky has shown the world that, despite his humble begins as and actor and comedian, he is not only a capable but truly devoted and heroic leader. Much of Ukraine's success in fighting against Russia's aggression can be attributed to Zelensky's unwavering leadership.

## References

Dixon, R. & Stern, D. (2022, February 5.) Six reasons Russia is at odds with Ukraine's Zelensky.

*The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/05/russia-putin-ukraine-zelensky/>

Garber, M. (2022, February 28.) The Grim Stagecraft of Zelensky's Selfie Videos. *The Atlantic*.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2022/02/zelensky-ukraine-president-selfie-video-kyiv/622949/>

Langston, S. (2022, March 11.) Volodymyr Zelensky: how acting prepared the Ukrainian

president for the role of his life. *The Conversation*.

<https://theconversation.com/volodymyr-zelensky-how-acting-prepared-the-ukrainian-president-for-the-role-of-his-life-178955>

Simpson, J. (2022, October 7.) John Simpson: Zelensky strikes all the right notes. *BBC News*.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63171679>

Wilson, S. & Newstead, T. (2022, April 28.) The value of virtue: 7 reasons why Volodymyr

Zelenskyy's crisis leadership has been so effective. *The Conversation*.

<https://theconversation.com/the-value-of-virtue-7-reasons-why-volodymyr-zelenskyy-s-crisis-leadership-has-been-so-effective-182041>