

**Questions about solidarity
in the dystopian world
(inspired by Dmytro Ternovyi's
High Resolution)**

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Abstract

The article discusses the means of creating images and argumentation lines used to achieve a multidimensional representation of the concept of solidarity in the 2012 drama *High Resolution* by Ukrainian playwright Dmytro Ternovyi. The story of inhabitants of a certain Ukrainian city and their experiences during anti-regime protests coinciding with the hunt for immigrants organized by the authorities is interspersed with fantastic and grotesque scenes featuring animate objects, which allowed the author to create a range of social worlds haunted by traumas and fears. By definition, a dystopian reality is a space where social relationships are disturbed, which may cause the society to atomize, but it can also consolidate it. Ternovyi shows both options, indicating that it is possible to have an ambivalent point of view on solidarity. He creates alternative variants of development of such situations. The analysis of those visions shows that it is possible to perceive the discussed drama as a specific study of solidarity – an anatomy of its triumphs and failures. Furthermore, setting the drama in the context of the recent events in Ukraine made it possible to correlate solidarity and collective identity and show current trends in thinking about the Ukrainian identity.

Keywords

dystopia, Ukraine, solidarity, identity, utopianism

**Pytania o solidarność w dystopijnym świecie
(na materiale dramatu „Detalizacja” Dmytra Ternowego)****Abstrakt**

W artykule zostały przeanalizowane środki obrazowania i argumentacji, wykorzystane do stworzenia wielowymiarowego obrazu zjawiska solidarności w dramacie *Detalizacja* (2012) ukraińskiego dramaturga Dmytra Ternowego. Opowieść o losach mieszkańców pewnego ukraińskiego miasta w czasie wzmagających się protestów antyreżimowych oraz urządzonych przez władze obławy na imigrantów, przeplatana fantastyczno-groteskowymi scenami z udziałem ożywionych przedmiotów, pozwoliła autorowi na wykreowanie różnych światów społecznych naznaczonych traumą i lękiem. Rzeczywistość dystopijna *ex definitione* jest przestrzenią zaburzonych relacji społecznych, co może przejawiać się zarówno w atomizacji społeczeństwa, jak i w jego totalnej konsolidacji. Ternowij pokazuje obydwa te warianty, wskazując na możliwość ambiwalentnego postrzegania zjawiska solidarności. Jednocześnie autor tworzy odmienne wersje rozwoju takiego typu sytuacji. Analiza tych wizji pozwoliła spojrzeć na wybrany utwór jako na swoiste studium solidarności, anatomie jej porażek i triumfów. Ponadto umiejscowienie dramatu w kontekście ostatnich wydarzeń na Ukrainie umożliwiło skorelowanie zjawisk solidarności i tożsamości zbiorowej, a także pokazanie aktualnych tendencji w myśleniu o tożsamości ukraińskiej.

Słowa kluczowe

dystopia, Ukraina, solidarność, tożsamość, utopizm

Yuval Noah Harari once wrote that “every man-made order is packed with internal contradictions”. In his opinion, “cultures are constantly trying to reconcile them” (Harari 2014: 143), and this process provides an enabling environment for the development of any cultural community. Contemporary political

order is characterized by an irremovable contradiction between the ideals of freedom and equality that began to spread across the world after the French Revolution¹. As Harari puts it, “the entire political history of the world since 1789 can be seen as a series of attempts to reconcile this contradiction” (143). Shlomo Avineri (2011) notes that while the traditions of liberty and equality are discussed widely, and there is a huge body of literature focused on their interpretations, the concept of *Fraternité* has never attracted much interest. The scholar supposes that “to some extent it could be connected with a hazy, vague, maybe even kitschy and quasi-romantic atmosphere associated with that concept” (Avineri 2011). He argues that fraternity, originating from the Enlightenment tradition, was largely overlooked in the traditional liberal discourse, so in the nineteenth century it was taken over by the socialist thought. It is worth noting that this concept can be seen quite clearly in the nationalist ideology as well, as nationalists adopted the metaphor of the family as a basis for thinking about a nation. While the ideas of solidarity of all workers or mutual loyalty between members of national communities initially brought a positive force of emancipation, with the lapse of time they also laid the foundations for Messianic movements, which, as Leonidas Donskis (2016: 41) puts it, were hypnotizing with faith in the promise of collective salvation.

In the twentieth century, millions of people experienced the horror of collectivist utopias of nationalism and communism, but the end of that century saw the triumph of liberal democracy, which attempted to harmonize various aspects of liberty and equality. Nonetheless, political, state-imposed or economic regulations, which are intrinsic to that system, are generally thought to promote the expansion of freedom and individualism, stimulating the growth of worrying trends at the same time. Contemporary thinkers point out that the “Cartesian

¹ Therefore, the French Revolution which, in Bronisław Baczeko’s words, “was building its great promise from the ideas and expectations of the Age of Reason” (2016: 433), which were rooted in the belief that “an individual has the right to search for his or her own happiness, and collective welfare is the prime purpose of social life” gave rise, quite paradoxically, to one of the central dilemmas of the most recent history.

perspective with a human «me» in the centre” (Czyżewski 2014), which determines the nature of order in liberal democracy, often fails becoming a source of dysfunctions in both individuals and societies. Krzysztof Czyżewski (2014) notes that: “[...] while the field of individual freedom is constantly increasing, we have also started to learn the bitter taste of alienation, egoism and loneliness [...]”. The realization of ever deeper divisions within societies, cultural conflicts and the breakdown of relations between people is the leitmotif of most contemporary social diagnoses. Presently the concept of solidarity seems to be the cure for those pains and a way for the culture to ease the internal tensions.

There are at least several reasons why this concept is becoming a space that provokes particularly deep reflection in humanists and cultural figures. Firstly, Avineri (2011) argues, fraternity is more difficult to adapt to the Procrustean bed of legal instruments. Hence, solidarity, as Czyżewski (2014) asserts, is becoming the greatest challenge for the culture preoccupied with the most important affairs of our time. Secondly, the challenges of globalisation force the redefinition of solidarity in line with the current needs. It is emphasized that interpreting solidarity as a synonym of patriotism or thinking about it in terms of slogans borne on socialists’ banners should give way to understanding it as a foundation on which to develop an altruistic attitude combined with humanistic opening to Others. The range of traditional motifs associated with moral issues defining the meaning of that concept (such as responsibility, social justice or cooperation) is therefore extended to include tolerance, rising above divisions and even pro-environmental awareness that is not limited to just human beings. Maybe the most compelling evidence of the idea of solidarity being rooted in our culture is that it is linked to emotions, which are a hidden driving force behind social transformations connected with modernization. Literature may play an important role in this process. As Przemysław Czapliński (2015) emphasized, a mindset focused on putting xenophobic attitudes to shame and inducing pro-solidarity behaviours, which has been present in Polish literature since mid-1980s,

was one of the mechanisms that formed a pluralistic society in Poland.

Having thus outlined the issues related to the idea of solidarity, I intend to analyse them in the context of the Ukrainian reality, taking into consideration the subject-matter of Dmytro Ternovyi's *High Resolution* (2016) in the first place. For this purpose, I have developed three basic sets of questions, and the search for answers to them will lie at the heart of my analysis. The first thing of interest will be to see how images are created and what lines of argumentation showing that points of view on solidarity can be ambivalent have been used to achieve the multidimensional representation of solidarity in *High Resolution*. Secondly, I will attempt to establish the situations in which the concept of solidarity as an agent that binds fragmented societies will imply tensions between the ideals of freedom and fraternity. What qualities of literary dystopias created by post-Soviet writers make them predisposed to highlight and characterize such tensions? How is it possible to draw conclusions with regard to characteristic features of the author's utopia, which is rooted by definition in any anti-utopia or dystopia, taking into consideration the resolution of such conflicts and the concept of the protagonist in a specific work? And to what extent do the author's ideas reflect social sentiments and intellectual trends in and outside his or her country of origin? My third aim is to gain insight into how the aforementioned process of redefining the concept of solidarity is reflected in Ternovyi's work. How can the romantic pathos of national (and social) uprisings be harmonized with the anti-xenophobic discourse? In addition, how do the factors that define the Ukrainian identity change in the periods right before and just after the Revolution of Dignity as a result of such harmonizing?

Dmytro Ternovyi finished *High Resolution* in 2012. In 2013 the drama, written in the Russian language, won the first prize in the international competition for playwrights *Über Grenzen sprechen. Lebensgefühl in Zeiten des Wandels*, and in 2014 a play based on it was staged by the Badisches Staatstheater in Karlsruhe. In early 2016 the drama, by then translated into

the Ukrainian language, was included in the Contemporary Anthology of the Ukrainian Drama, entitled *The Maidan – Before and After. Contemporary Drama Anthology. High Resolution* tells the tale of inhabitants of a Ukrainian city and their experiences during anti-regime protests coinciding with the hunt for immigrants organized by authorities. Their story is interspersed with fantastic, grotesque scenes featuring animate objects. The plot centres on experiences and actions of spouses, Andrey and Yelena. To provide an in-depth coverage of the inner selves of his characters, Ternovyi anthropomorphises objects, making an extremely efficient use of that technique. The even-numbered scenes of the drama and particularly the second and the sixth scene, where the author makes protagonists out of animate objects, are significant in terms of carrying the message through the work, especially if those scenes are to be considered a form of an artistic statement on solidarity.

Crockery items – Cup, Saucer, Teapot, Decanter and Wine Glass – are made the protagonists of the second scene, which is set in the flat that belongs to Andrey's parents, Anna Sergeyevna and Lev Borisovich. The objects talk, allowing the reader to learn more about the couple's life and the nature of relationships in the family. It turns out that arguments between the husband and wife are by no means infrequent, and Anna Sergeyevna reacts to them with outbursts of cry followed by hysteria attacks during which she breaks crockery. The Teapot ceaselessly alarms his companions during the conversation because there has been a quarrel in the family recently, so there are reasons to fear that the crockery might get broken again.

The scene is constructed as a polylogue, but soon the attention is drawn to the dialogue between the Cup and the Teapot, which shows utter disagreement between the two. In terms of axiology, the characters are worlds apart. The Cup, preoccupied with Anna Sergeyevna's affairs, represents a petty bourgeois mentality. She fends off fears of an impending hysteria attack, dreaming about watching TV series together in the evening. The Teapot, on the contrary, is not interested in chit-

chatting about family affairs; he prefers meditations to tea, and the question that is central to his contemplation on life is: 'What is the purpose of our existence?' That is why he is terrified of death coming near, which to him is tantamount to failure to understand the meaning of life, and consequently to achieve self-realization. In addition, even though both the Cup and her antagonist Teapot fear destruction, there is still an abyss of alienation between them. If this scene was to be treated as a metaphor of social relationships, one would see there a well-known motif of conflict between intellectual elites and common people, who vary in all sorts of ways starting from aspirations, through attitude towards authorities, to the awareness of threats to society. Both sides are disrespectful and treat each other with near disdain. None of them conceals their irritation when they hear confessions of the other. The Teapot, whose emotions and thoughts on life are deeper and reach beyond the present circumstances, represents a type of intellectual feeling helpless when it faced with common people's inertia, submissiveness, and shortsightedness. On the other hand, the quality of his arguments that are streaked with unconcealed protectionism makes him unable to get through to the hearts of his friends of misery and trigger behaviours that would be adequate to their situation, even though he is genuinely concerned about the fate of his community. His ability to foresee tragic developments does not make him able to rise above divisions to reach an agreement, though it seems that the narrow-minded resistance his efforts are met with is decisive for that inability. In the end, Anna Sergeyevna storms into the room, wraps all the crockery in the tablecloth and throws it against the wall. Therefore, the perishable material the protagonists are made of emphasizes even more strongly the fragility and weakness of the social organism exhausted by the disintegration sickness.

At the other end of the scale of solidarity understood as a synonym of community's unity is a collective described in the sixth scene, where paving blocks become the metaphor of a post-totalitarian society. Still haunted by insecurity, such a society freezes to the spot, and its traumatized memory

adopts the strategy of passive behaviour and mimicry. With abiding memories of horrors of the old regime, people submissively yield to new authorities and their doings, condemning those who disagree with such submissiveness. This is the meaning gathered from conversations between paving blocks, which have just ordinal numbers instead of names. The block named Fifth, the youngest of them all, does not want to put up with the pain inflicted by passing troops, and he dreams of a different world. He does not know what fear is, so the older blocks try to instil that fear in him by telling him a legend substantiating their cardinal rule: 'The most interesting thing is to lie flat, life is about serenity, and patience is our work' (Ternovyi 2016: 80). This ancient tradition combines the story of the expulsion from Paradise and the tale of Icarus. The Fifth is stubborn and keeps dreaming about flying, this is why he was eventually banished from the community. What unfolds is an allegorical, grotesque vision of a society that is subject to oppression, but still generates the standards of repressive morality. The nature of community's unity is tribal in this case, which means that the unity is based on the principles of 'genetic' loyalty that makes it easier for a 'tribe' to survive. The adopted strategy does guarantee survival and accord; it draws the community members closer together, but waives the principle of individual freedom. Nonetheless, when combined with the consciousness of a victim, it leads people to eliminate themselves from the fight for national interests or for interests of an individual or a group within the state on their own.

The juxtaposition of those scenes highlights the author's intention to show that having an ambivalent attitude towards solidarity is possible. On the one hand, the lack of a consensus may cause a major disaster, but on the other hand, peremptory attitudes and negatively excessive loyalty lead to the involution of an autarkic, closed collective. Even so, the polarity of those models of society's functioning, which are anti-utopian in many ways, is not an obstacle for the author to using them as an example on which to show the tension that can be created when the ideals of liberty and fraternity are juxtaposed. This thought will be elaborated on in full in the remain-

ing parts of the drama, which describe the main protagonists' experiences in correlation with the diagnosis of problems of the Ukrainian reality.

Artistic components and the non-literary context of the odd-numbered scenes are what makes the drama a dystopia. Firstly, the author himself admitted that he had been thinking about presidential elections that were to be held in Ukraine in 2015 when writing the text back in 2012. This makes his work a near-future dystopia, i.e. a type of negative utopia, where the author's attention is focused on the near future of a country and predominantly on its political aspects. A correlation between the situation before the elections, marked by symptoms of a social and mental crisis, and the creation of numerous literary forms of dystopian fiction has been noticed in Russia and the United States as well as in Ukraine. Secondly, in line with the rules of the genre, *High Resolution* offers a diagnosis of the society's condition combined with the modelling of the developments in the future. Thirdly, in line with the rules of political fiction it is not only modelling, but also some sort of programming. As Boris Dubin (2001) notes, literary fiction that takes a form of "hypothetical warfare, confrontation, competition, solidarity or partnership" is "a mean of intellectual control over the issues connected with social changes and with the speed and directions of a society's momentum, and it is an artistic reaction to problems that arise in this area".

As regards this particular drama, such intentions are more than clear, and their sources and related reckonings easy to identify. The city where the anti-regime protests take place remains anonymous, but the name of the square occupied by protesters is mentioned many times, and the name is Maidan. It is difficult to overlook a direct reference to the Orange Revolution events, which, in fact, is not just a reference, but an evocation of its spirit (notably, the spirit devoid of bitter disappointments!). At the time when the play was being written, political elites and their ineptitude began to be blamed for the failure to implement the words spoken out on the Maidan in Kiev in 2004, and the social capital began to be seen as the greatest success of those events. This fostered a growing belief

in the Orange Revolution as the mother of another great change. Bringing the Maidan's legend back to life made it possible to conjure up optimistic visions of future changes in Ukraine, and more specifically to look for ways to break the social and political deadlock the country was in under Viktor Yanukovich.

The idea of solidarity so understood should be examined in a strictly political context as an indispensable factor in mobilizing a society to take strong corrective actions, or more broadly, to show care for the commonwealth. However, the most crucial question asked in *High Resolution* is not political but existential: is it possible for people to demonstrate solidarity with one another in the environment in which general pessimism, disintegration of human relationships and scepticism towards great ideals prevail. Furthermore, is it possible to follow the ideals of fraternity in the world in which, as Zygmunt Bauman (2013) has it, "day-to-day drudgery is inhospitable to solidarity"? Are not the dreams of an individual's freedom and welfare in conflict with self-limitation or self-sacrifice necessary to achieve common goals? Ternovyi invites the reader to think about these questions from the perspective of an artist, i.e. a representative of a group that attaches a tremendous value to the right that guarantees freedom to an individual.

Andrey is a talented musician, who signed a contract for a number of concerts across Europe. He is going through the procedure necessary to obtain the documents allowing him and his wife to leave, and he is just about to complete it when the protests begin. Initially, it seems that they both want to leave the country as quickly as possible, no longer believing it could be possible to in fact there. Their life and relationships with those who surround them can largely be thought of as an illustration of Bauman's (2013) diagnosis: "The deepening of our mutual physical and mental isolation, the loss of common language and the ability to communicate with and understand each other – these processes no longer need to receive external stimuli [...]". Still, each of the spouses suffers in secret, being torn apart by fear for their own safety and guilt because they do not commit themselves to fighting for the right cause, and

predominantly because they do not join their friends, who have decided to demonstrate.

Therefore, the dwellers of the depicted dystopian world are faced with a dilemma that is not present in the classical anti-utopia, in which efforts to save one's own dignity and the desire to liberate fellow brothers from the chains of the totalitarian system are actually inseparable. The reason for it is that the setting of the post-Soviet dystopia resembles a peninsula isolated from the civilized world rather than an anti-utopian island, and this peninsula sometimes has certain characteristics of the grey zone. What is important is that this place has an exit, and it is tempting to make use of it. At times such temptation is particularly strong because dystopias, which frequently show the condition of 'societies of survival', sometimes depict worlds that offer no hope for a change. Consequently, a voluntary decision to remain part of such a world may seem to be tantamount to giving up both freedom and dignity. At the same time, dystopian worlds are more heterogeneous, they have visible symptoms of chaos and insecurity, and thus in theory they are more flexible and susceptible of potential changes as opposed to anti-utopian ones. All the aforementioned factors conjure up a vision of a dysfunctional society, and the decision about which attitude to take towards that society is a key challenge that the protagonist has to face.

The sociological story of the play, or as Czapliński (1996: 101) puts it, the story of reconciliation (or a conflict) between an individual and a group, is moving away from dystopia towards utopia, and this movement can be described as "returning to Prometheus" to paraphrase Maria Janion's words. In fact, the return begins from the same direction that the scholar pointed to as a potential direction of escape from Prometheus nearly three decades ago. Discussing the Dionysian vision of human condition presented in *Eros and Civilization* by Herbert Marcuse, Janion writes: "Men will liberate themselves by turning away from the Prometheus myth, and turning to erotic and aesthetic activity through the myths of Orpheus and Narcissus" (1989: 155). Andrey, as we initially see him, is the incarnation of that vision, but one that lacks the most crucial

component, which is the feeling of true, genuine liberation. On the contrary, he is childish and full of concealed fears and phobias. However, if the evolution of Andrey, whom we can see playing for revolutionists on the Maidan's stage in the final scene of the drama, is to be considered a transposition of Prometheus's fate, it will be necessary to emphasize that Ternovyi, to quote Janion once again, "has tailored the titan's old clothes to suit his own size" (1989: 149), and more specifically, to suit his own times. And these are times when the motion of the utopian thought no longer resembles a brave gallop, lively march or euphoric flight (especially in the familiar territory), but it seems to have earmarks of careful movements of a tight-rope walker balancing on a rope over the abyss of bloody history lessons.

Such a play-safe type of utopianism could be called humanistic, if we took André Glucksmann's reflections into consideration, or liberal, if we were to adopt the thought of Richard Rorty. From this perspective the approach to solidarity, which was actually postulated earlier in Jan Patočka's (1975) works, is free from any ideologies in the first place, and is based on the experience of an individual and on the assumption that "the significance of violence is limited" (Rorty 1996: 6). Glucksmann insists that the new pro-society ethics should not rely on the united forces of those who are already convinced, but it should be built on equally firm solidarity of the shocked ones. The ones, who in his words are "shocked at witnessing evil" (1994: 10), i.e. the people who develop a kind of moral sensitivity underpinned by a bitter opposition against the "scandal of evil", as Adam Michnik (2009) puts it. Much as it avoids absolutism in thinking about ethical categories, the proposed approach still presumes a necessity of moral progress aiming at achieving ever wider solidarity. The leverage of such progress is not to be sought in the collectivist element, but in the individualism, and more specifically in behaviours triggered by people's emotions and experiences. That the emotion is an important stimulus eliciting pro-social behaviours is a well-known rule of social psychology. Taking a similar point of view as a basis, Daniel Batson (2008) formulated the empa-

thy-induced altruism hypothesis, arguing that an empathic ability to feel some pain and suffering of another person is one of the key mechanisms of altruism.

The evolution of the protagonists can be regarded as a literary exemplification or a kind of artistic summary of contemporary trends in thinking about solidarity which have been discussed above. Even though Ternovyi's work does contain numerous publicist components, no ideological bent or even slightest attempts to make use of the slogans sanctified by the national tradition are to be found there. The focus is primarily on human behaviour, which is rife with dramatic tensions in the face of injustice and violence. A shift in the protagonists' attitudes is gradual and determined by a spontaneous reaction to the events. Yelena, who initially covers the windows of her flat tightly with curtains, cannot refuse to help Wally, an immigrant, who accidentally knocks at her door, trying to hide away from the police dragnet. Then she learns from the officer who chases Wally that the protesters are to be shot down by snipers hidden on roofs. In exceptional circumstances the ethical imperative is decisive: the fear for lives of others makes her shed all the inhibitions arising from the fear for her own safety. Yelena acts quickly and decisively. She grabs the telephone, and passes the information to people who can pass it further to the media and protesters at the square. However, when she sees the shooting is just about to begin, she opens the window and begins to shout warnings to protesters, who hide themselves away from shots and put up effective resistance, using catapults to hurl stones onto the roofs. A stone falling in through the open window hits Yelena in the head. It is before her death that we can see her happy and triumphant for the first time. In the final scene of the drama, Andrey is getting ready to play for the crowd of protesters on the Maidan's stage. He mourns his deceased wife, and this is undoubtedly a crucial factor behind his decision. At the same time, the sense of belonging to the community and altruistic commitment to its affairs becomes one of the ways to alleviate the pain.

A year and a half after the drama was composed, snipers on the roofs and catapults used by the revolutionists became the reality of another Maidan, i.e. anti-regime protests that were later dubbed the Revolution of Dignity (November 2013-February 2014). Interpreting the drama in the context of those events and their consequences leads to a conclusion that the work anticipated the current trend concerning changes in thinking about the Ukrainian identity. In particular, the civic nature of mobilization of the Ukrainian society rules out traditional (primarily ethnic) factors that restrict the expressions of identity. On the other hand, the war that broke out in the eastern Ukraine and the general sense of insecurity that it carries must have a negative impact on the process of forming a pluralistic, open society. A situation that strikes with so contradictory tendencies still offers scholars a promising opportunity to take a close look at the changes in Ukraine and treat them as another 'case study' of a utopia clashing with reality.

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