

Supervisor's notes on Alex Asikainen's thesis: *An Actor's Tale: My Journey of Finding a Way to Share a Story on Stage*

Alex Asikainen proved during his studies that he is the kind of student that shows curiosity, asks questions, engages in debates, dares to disagree and dares to go deeper to find answers. Most of all, that he is open to exploration even if it means going beyond his comfort zone to get to the bottom of things. Observing Alex during his quest of writing his thesis, *An Actor's Tale: My journey of finding a way to share a story on stage*, was a similar adventure, especially at the beginning when he was searching for his topic and, despite the time pressure, also towards the end when he let himself be guided by his search and writing. I say 'adventure' because Alex did not set any specific goals for himself to reach; he dove deep into the process of searching, hoping to find answers to his questions. His thesis offers an insight of this process.

In the thesis, Alex presents himself as a storyteller, filmmaker, performer, and theatre maker without stressing these terms as a fashionable label. It would be more precise to say that he presents himself through the process of searching of what it means to be a storyteller or storyteller, filmmaker, performer, and theatre maker.

He uses three main tools for his research: self-reflection, documentary style of writing and dialogue. His self-reflection is admirably precise, particularly when he documents what obstacles he met with when he tried to adapt for stage a story he wrote, *A Mountain Tale* (which is also part of the thesis as the appendix). He does not omit any thought or detail in this often difficult and confusing journey; he does not offer readymade solutions. It is rather fascinating to join Alex on his quest as it proves quite soon that this is no show, no spectacle that would be constructed to show off or prove something to the reader. It is most of all and mostly an honest search.

Alex's exploration is really quite serious, as he himself notes with certain self-irony on one of the first pages but does that not mean Alex takes himself too seriously. For example, when he shares how he presented his story to his partner Emily for the first time, he admits how he orchestrated a cheap and rather banal performance instead of seductive mythical story he hoped to charm his audience with; or when he shares his disillusionment after presenting his authorial presentation to the audience at Klauzury. Self-irony and understanding why some of his attempts were vain make his reflection a valuable peak into the process of developing a sense of distance from oneself. It is throughout the writing of his thesis that Alex came to an understanding what distance is and what it does not have to be. We can observe him trying to negotiate on his own terms, what distance can be for him without succumbing to the majority's taste.

While the documentary style of writing might sometimes remind of a diary, I believe it is not because Alex sees all things as equally important but because Alex wishes to leave nothing out to offer the widest possible perspective. He attempts to leave it open even if it means the reader might see him in unfavourable light. The result is the contrary: his text seduces the reader with its honesty and openness.

The thesis is structured into three main chapters: *The Story*, *The Actor* and *'A Holy Trinity'*. It is especially in the second chapter, that the author engages in a dialogue - with other texts written by famous theatre practitioners. He does not use literature as an excuse to hide his theatrical attempts behind noble phrases about acting. He tries to find answers to the question 'what acting means for him' or 'what is acting about for him' and consults his 'mentors', or 'masters', as he sometimes refers to them. What they have to say in this matter is not taken for granted as some untouchable holy truth. It is explored and applied in practical terms in the process of adapting a story for the stage.

What adds an interesting perspective to Alex's searching/writing process is his previous experience in filmmaking and his fondness for Eastern philosophy, especially Buddhism, and zen stories in which he finds inspiration. His quest does sometimes remind of a *koan* – an enigmatic tool of zen masters to guide their pupils towards *satori* through profound confusion.

What Alex discovers in the end of his journey is also unexpected from the perspective of the first chapter: the ability to be in play. What is even more important; Alex is aware that this quality is not omnipresent or everlasting; it must be exercised.

While Alex often manifests a tendency to 'overthink everything' and his mind sometimes seems to float somewhere 'in the air or the beyond, in the land of fantasy' to paraphrase one aspect of his *Mountain Tale*, his down-to-earth systematic research and documentation of self-explorative process prove he is capable of sharing his views to the wider audience so we can understand and appreciate his point of view.

The thesis fulfils required formal criteria and I am happy to recommend it for defence.

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