

Doctoral School of the University of Theatre and Film Arts

**Practical and theoretical questions of acting and
performing arts:
monodrama/ monologue / one man show - doing theatre
independently?**

Theses of Dissertation

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Theses of Dissertation

- In the spring of 2009, in Dublin, Ireland, I began to adapt the short novel of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince* into the script of a one-man performance for myself. This time I decided on the stage birth and future performance of a material that was becoming important to me, and I was also taking active part in the preparation of this production, to choose my creative team and even the director too. Thus I had to take much more responsibility for the upcoming performance than I have ever done before in my nearly two decades of my acting career. This was strengthening my artistic confidence; it has given me a mind-altering force on my future career. I consider the stimulating effect of a one-man performance to be a huge artistic value for acting security, autonomy, creativity, the expansion of creative thinking and work, and I would like to publish my experience in this thesis.

- In my first research, I came to the conclusion that there are few studies by Hungarian researchers, theatre professionals or that available in Hungarian language that deal with the analysis of this specific area of the theatre art and the specialised books cover not more than an occasional chapter on the podium evenings. Although I do not aim to rectify this shortcoming of Hungarian theatre history, I attempt to capture, examine and describe the phenomenon, features and history of the one-person theatre from the creator's point of view, as well as giving a summary of the available data, and also mentioning the Hungarian history of the genre, placing it in a European perspective.

I base this writing on my own creative experiences, from the focus of the three seasons in which I myself, with my three other one-man productions after *The Little Prince's* fairy tale monologue, became an active participant as an actor and, in some cases, in other functions as well. This perspective is the interval spanning across three theatrical seasons from autumn 2016 to autumn 2019, in Budapest. I too was active in these three seasons with four different types of single productions, which further supports what I have said in my thesis. As far as the one man show's appearances are concerned, they are quite diverse, and because, as I mentioned, there are very few theoretical grips, it was necessary to start the inquiry from a narrower or sharper focus. However I have examined more than 100 contemporary one-man

productions, exactly 119, not to mention the productions recalled from previous decades. In the light of this high representation, it is worth examining the external or practical and internal or theatrical-creative factors and reasons for the abundance of single-person performances the amount of which have never been experienced in Hungarian theatre history before.

- This huge material provides an excellent opportunity to discover features and to create categories, in particular by examining the text base of these productions, describing the nature of the communication with the audience in them and comparing all these to the known theatrical traditions. These types are:

Storytelling (or narrative type), which is one of the oldest genres of solo performance going back to the pre-written times.

Classic monodrama, here the performance is from a play that was originally written as a monodrama.

Adaptation (or dramatized work), where the foundation comes from another literary genre which is usually an epic work – novel, short story, fairy tale, diary, or narrative poem, for example.

Compilation (or edited show), where less often homogeneous, rather mixed genre of shorter works and texts – poems, monologues, articles, letters, jokes, lyrics, diary entries or other documents – form the text of the performance.

- My four one-man shows cover the above four categories, so in my thesis I approach the subject through their creative workflow, a detailed description and analysis of the experience of making, staging and playing these performances. These four of mine were:

One Fine Day – storytelling.

Lady Bracknell's Confinement or the Bunburyist – classic monodrama.

The Little Prince – adaptation.

The Importance of Being Oscar – compilation, edited show.

The analysis of these four performances forms the backbone of my work here, along with their historical and aesthetic introduction in the first part of each chapter.

- Analysis and recognition of historical changes in the terminology set used in the theatrical industry can give one some help to capture our subject. The changes in the terms over time, the aesthetic differences behind these changes, and the alterations of programme policy, etc. can all serve as interesting additions. The terminology for single-person performances is by

no way uniform, their definition is almost unclear sometimes. If we look at historical theatre literature, we experience the same uncertainty in the application of these terms. This is also the case, for example, with the theatrical lexicons ever published in Hungary, in which I tried to find the first releases of the terms used in the subject, and then the modifications to, and the convention of their use. These volumes offer an interesting time travel from the beginning of the twentieth century until the recent past, and they offer help amidst the rather poor theoretical and historical description of the subject so far. With such an overview, we can touch and conceptually clarify related phenomena and performing genres similar to single-person theatre, which may in some way be related to the subject of the thesis. Though I do not want to address these questions more deeply, but some issues might arise that must be answered in detail when examining our topic.

- In their final results, pieces and performances from different types of literary material can indeed be called monodramas as summaries. Yet I prefer the term one-person performance because of some differences between the productions, which are often not just nuances. I intend to describe these differences in my thesis. Also, this way I can make a distinction between the literary genre called monodrama and the theatrical way of implementing it.
- The unprecedented intimacy, interactivity and excitement of the first encounters with the audience, that is so different from the quality of the actor-audience relationship experienced in performances played by two or more actors, convinced me that this theatrical genre and this direct communication is a very special form and occasion within the acting profession. It is important to describe this special relationship, which can and most often will develop in single-character plays between the only actor and the audience: analysing the question of the direct relationship between performer and viewer. As an actor, I gained the most experience in this area. The examination of this characteristic can also help us classify each solo piece and the productions resulting from them into the categories described above.
- The especially intimate relationship between actor and audience distinguishes single theatre or one-man performances from all other theatrical forms, both from the artist's presentation and in terms of the audience's experience. At the same time, the one-person performance requires a much greater investment in fantasy from the audience members, given that there are more characters and situations recalled by the single actor present than what the case is usually on traditional theatrical evenings. It seems that both sides can have significantly more

– opportunities of fulfilment in this relationship – than in all other theatrical forms – not to mention non-live performing co-arts: film, television or web-movies.

- It is necessary to ask questions about starting a solo performance, i.e. what such an undertaking might mean to the actor, even in their university years. I'm also writing about whether it can help, and if it can help, how a stalled or stagnant acting career can be helped by solo work, the creation of it and the opportunity to show off in it. Why and how did these colleagues get involved? What difficulties did they face in the process? Why did they choose that particular material or topic? Why did they present their production then and there? What did they want to say with it and to whom? What results did they achieve? How was all this in my case? These are the personal, professional, human, creative and artistic issues I am dealing with here.

- It can't be just a coincidence that, in my mid-30s, when I was stuck in my artistic career, moved away from my home country and was looking back at the years behind me, I found *The Little Prince*. This story is about a middle-aged man, stuck in the desert, which looks back at his life and meets himself: a child who wonders about everything, who is so far from himself now than as if he were from another planet. Perhaps I was looking for the enthusiastic young man in myself, who believed in the miracle of the theatre above all and regarded acting as his only possible vocation. And, of course, it is no coincidence that I recalled Oscar Wilde, and it is no coincidence that I was interested in the drama of Lady Bracknell's identity crisis too. That I created exactly these productions of all was my fight for artistic freedom. Fight for my true self-expression and my self-commitment, against the constant vulnerability of the director's theatre I was always in before, against the false values of the celebrity world around me, and, above all, against the horror of not leaving a mark.

- But it is also worth examining the external, social, historical, infrastructural, financial, technical, economical and other factors, i.e. this other side of the reasons behind the fact of the flowering of one-man productions, especially from the perspective of the 2016 – 2019 Budapest seasons. The first of these facts is the recent historical and social change: the change of regime affecting the structure of the theatres and the state/capital monopoly of maintenance, then the rapid processes since the 1990s, the emergence of smaller, usually privately operated playgrounds in the theatre scene. A similar process took place, including the expansion of playgrounds for theatres within the large public structure, as in the case of in

whole or in part private theatre companies. Productions are usually made with the money won in the tenders for creators, and especially for the actor, and co-financing by the playhouse. Independent, so-called umbrella organisations have also been created recently to support the implementation and replay of productions with their infrastructure, personal and material support – in this way standing behind the project of a particular artist or team.

- The number of actors with degrees and qualifications is increasing. For actors who graduated from university or from an actor's studio, it is increasingly common to be out of a company, without a permanent contract and regular theatre job, with very few opportunities, which seems to encourage more and more of these people to work on their own, often on a one-man show project, because of its more simple needs of exhibition. Unbound creative energy, desire for more quality work, creativity, intuition and expanding infrastructure thus affect each-other now in a fertilizing way.