

Justas Tertelis

A one-man one-act play for a
beginner actor

This is a one-man play. All the characters appearing during the monologue are played by a single actor. He is dressed formally but not richly. The stage is empty. The only scenographical element is a tree model that will be brought in during the play.

When the audience is allowed into the hall, the actor is already standing on the stage. He does not have to stand – he may be sitting, jumping, lying, or observing the audience. In other words, the actor is preparing for the play. He may have a chat with the audience if it is necessary or if he wants it. He is trying to encourage himself and focus in various ways. When the audience has gathered, the theatre manager gives a sign to the actor to start the play.

The actor moves to the centre and checks whether he is really standing at the centre of the stage, which will be marked by a white adhesive tape visible not only to the actor but also to the audience.

Before starting, the actor introduces the play and himself and mentions that he has just recently graduated from the Academy of Music and Theatre; in short, he emphasises that he is still a young actor.

ACTOR: ...so everyone please turn off your cell phones and then we can start. *(The actor takes his place in front of the tape and makes a pause)*. Actually, I have to say that I will be the one to start this play. The play will start when I cross this tape. I have a tape glued to the floor here. Nothing special, it's just a tape. Because, usually, when actors act something at the academy, there is always someone to holler "action" from behind the curtain. And I don't think I should shout "action" now... You will understand, won't you...? I will step over this tape and you will understand that it started. The lights will change in here, there will be music and *(he looks at the tape)*... and it will start.

(He makes an attempt to justify the introduction to the play) Actually, I should have started from over there *(he points to the wings)*... come out as a character and start. But since I

came out at the beginning to introduce the play ... which was the director's job anyways ... So, since I have come out, it would be silly to go back and appear again.

(A pause)

ACTOR: See, usually all plays begin from over there *(he points to the backstage)*. Usually, the actor stands behind that screen and waits until the audience gathers and then he makes that first step... and the play begins. .. It's all very simple...

The actor stands *(he hides behind the curtain) and you don't see him*. He takes a step *(he emerges from the backstage)* – and then you see him, and this is where the play begins.

And then the actor stands here. *(He takes a position in front of the curtain so that the audience can see him better)*. He waits until you gather. He waits for a sign until someone says “action” or the lights go down. He stands anxious.... And he is a very real person over here. He has a name, a surname, a personal number. Over here he has some personal problems, unpaid bills, a toothache... But then he takes that first step *(the actor steps forward)* and – over there it was him but here ... *(mystically)* here the play has already began and he is someone else already. Here he has a different name and surname; he is free from those problems and no longer has a toothache.

The actor is hectic to find a practical example of this theory. The example may be different in each play. In this case, the actor recalls his colleague during the graduation play.

ACTOR: Let's just imagine. You have a young, promising actor standing here – Jonas Šarkus. He takes that step and he is no longer Jonas Šarkus over here. Here he is someone else. Now he is ... Now he is Bartley McCormick. A character. So Jonas just stands here, saying whatever.

Most importantly, everyone who enters this space ... All of us! When we enter, we see Jonas Šarkus, we know him very well and yet we say “Hello, Bartley McCormick!”. And even those in the audience who see Jonas as well and, especially, those who know him

personally – everyone pretends that he is not Jonas Šarkus but some Bartley McCormick. Not exactly normal, is it? So this is how plays begin.

The actor is himself surprised by the discovery he has made. This cheers him up and he continues talking more and more enthusiastically, gradually “growing into” the imaginary characters.

ACTOR: Do you know how else the play may start? The audience gathers and takes seats. There's a bunch of actors standing on the stage before the play begins. You don't see them because they've hidden behind the curtains. They are nervous. Then it grows totally dark and all the actors run onto the stage and freeze into some posture... and the “main” actor stands at the front. Each play has that one – the strongest, the most spiritual, the leader! Then the lights come back slowly and the audience can see those characters that, one would suppose, have once frozen and are reviving only now that the public came to the theatre. See how lucky you are! You came to the theatre at the right time! You came at exactly the time when the characters are coming back to life!!! And then ... Then the main character, you know, the one who will drive the whole play, comes back to life first and makes a serious opening (*he starts mumbling loudly*) and then waves at another character. Then that one comes back to life, and another, and so on. And they begin quarrelling, bickering, arguing over who is more important and who is suffering more... And that goes on throughout the play...

He looks at the audience expecting admiration and approval but remembers that he has long had to step over the tape and start the play. He comes back to the tape.

ACTOR: So plays can start from the side (*points to the screen*) or from the dark but this play starts here (*points to the tape*). That's because the light operator put that tape for me. It's here for me... It's because of the lighting... Young actors get these tapes on the floor;

they think we don't feel the light (*at the light board operator*). So, see, this tape is for me (*the actor stands staring at the tape*).

The actor stands glances alternately at the tape, the light board operator, and the audience.

ACTOR: And still it's always very difficult to start. It doesn't even matter what to start because nowadays starting anything is hard enough. Because the starting point is extremely important, it's crucial. And so people find it difficult to start something because people have problems. All kinds of problems. For example: (*he pauses and looks around*) how to start everything? Where to start everything? In which way to start everything? Where *not* to start? And why start anything at all? (*He looks at the audience*). And then you see that everyone around you has already started it. See, it somehow makes you anxious before you start but when you finally start (*points to the area of the stage beyond the adhesive tape*) everything is completely different; it's much easier over there, and there ... and there... (*he accidentally steps over the tape with one foot, music breaks out, as if it is the beginning of the play, and the actor jumps up startled by the music and gestures to the sound board operator that it's not time yet*).

ACTOR (*to the technicians*): No, we haven't started yet. That was just an example. Don't you get it? You will understand when we start. I cross that tape properly.

Actor is somewhat upset with the technicians and glances at the audience.

ACTOR: No, no, don't think that I retarded or something. Physically I am perfectly capable of stepping over this tape. But you have to understand that this crossing, this beginning must somehow be internal, spiritual. It starts inwardly. That's what they teach at the academy: the internal action leads to an external action and...

He looks at the audience and notices that the audience is not really following him.

ACTOR: Whatever, forget it, we'd better start, we've got to start ... *(The actor grows anxious)*. No matter what, one day you realise you have to start. You have to. And everyone wants not just any kind of start but a powerful one. So that there is a real BEGINNING. So that it's like the beginning of a new day. The beginning of a new life. A kind of beginning of the BEGINNING.

The actor steps over the tape accidentally and a majestic music starts. The actor tears off the tape and sticks it back to the floor in front of him.

ACTOR: ...And this is how a person is reborn. And the first question that comes to his mind is "where am I?"

The actor looks around and examines everything.

ACTOR: Because people are born in all kinds of places. Naturally, they are born in hospitals, and then become doctors, nurses and carers. They are born in trolleybuses and become trolleybus drivers, ticket collectors or ticketless passengers. People are born in schools and they become teachers or schoolmasters. Sometimes they are born at sea and they become fishermen, captains or mermaids. Sometimes people are born at the writing-desk and they become writers, poets or, in the worst case, journalists and critics. Sometimes people are born on planes and they come out as pilots or stewardesses.

The actor realises where he was "born".

ACTOR: But sometimes, occasionally people are born at the theatre as well. Those people then become heavy smokers. Naah. They become actors. I really don't know where the directors are born but one becomes an actor here at the theatre or, to put it more accurately, here on the stage.

The actor is very impatient and tries to describe the birth of an actor eagerly.

ACTOR: You are born as an actor (*mysteriously elatedly*) when you get on the stage for the first time (*the actor runs to the back of the stage and gradually makes his way forward telling the story somewhat exaggeratedly*) and, like all the other newborns, you see and feel the light. You sense that heat shed by the projectors. You step forward and catch the real scent of the stage. You see your partner. You feel vibration in the air. You see the audience; you feel its breath, and then ...

He gives it a thought.

ACTOR: ...Actually, you don't see or feel a damn thing because that fear of the opening night gives you nausea and your head is spinning so fast that you don't feel or see a damn thing. Inside, you look just like that (*the actor stiffens in some posture*) and all that matters is not to lose it and not to forget what you have rehearsed, and if you do forget it, then at least to deliver the text. And if you have forgotten the text, then you must at least utter the first phrase. Because once you have uttered the first phrase, you can relax – your experienced partner will manage to rescue you in some way.

He acts this experienced, mature actor.)

ACTOR: And your partner will be more experienced in any case. After all, you are only on your way to become an actor. This is your first time, while your partner has been acting on the stage for ten years already. He has already learned all these stage tricks. It's not the first time your partner's colleague forgets the text. And what about you? You are just being born today. You are so small, so small. You need help. You are still very weak. And your partner looks at you and remembers his own first time, which was even more painful than yours, and tries to help you.

Actor continues feverishly.

ACTOR: But you have not yet become an actor yet. You become an actor when ... Now you can all try to feel or understand how one becomes an actor. You don't need to do anything, just sit and listen. And imagine that what you hear is for you – not for all of you together but for each of you individually: you, you, and you. Close your eyes. You become an actor when the lights go down and you hear this in silence ... *(the actor begins clapping)* an applause for you, an applause from a crowd of people, and you hurry to bow to them. *(The actor runs to the end of the stage and bows several times, his back turned to the audience, and tells everything as if over his shoulder, as if all of this is taking place right now)*. You bow to the audience, and then you run with all the actors to the backstage; you hear that they continue applauding you and you run back; you see your relatives waving as if you didn't know where their seats were. And everybody is giving you applause. Perhaps they are actually applauding some much more prominent actor who acts with you. But you don't give a damn about this because it seems to you that they love you as much as him. They bring flowers to you too – of course, it's the relatives. *(The actor runs to the front of the curtain)*. Then you go to the backstage and here nothing is over yet either – all the actors are congratulating you here. No one is criticising. The senior actors congratulate you. Just a few years ago you were gaping at them and thinking “if only I could ever do it like that”, and now they are shaking your hand, saying “excellent, keep it up!”, and you go: “thank you, thank you, thank you.” Later everyone leaves *(the actor wipes his hand into the screen leaving the curtain)* and you go to the corridor.

And there your relatives, aunts and uncles are waiting. Aunts start crying – see how our kid is acting. Uncles look at you with pride. Everyone “loads” you with flowers and perhaps a small package of home-made food – sausages and bacon. And then everyone leaves again. Later you change your clothes and leave for home with all these bags, packages and flowers. You can't leave anything – these are your first flowers, the first presents. You stop for a while before leaving. Everyone has already left and no one sees you and you get up on the stage. It's dark and quiet here. Standing on the stage, you think about *that* feeling ... mhh ... And that's when you become an actor.

Well, not quite an actor yet. But a certain “file” opens in your head that says “I AM AN ACTOR”. And when you visit someone, your friends and the people that you know will say “Hey, here comes the actor!” You’ll say “No, I am not an actor”. But somewhere deep inside you’ll think “Yes, I am!”.

He looks at the audience and begins talking calmly and matter-of-factly, although somewhat bitterly.

ACTOR: Dear children, teenagers, youths, women, men, if you ever have to or if you ever get a chance to get up here on the theatre stage, please think twice before doing it. Perhaps it is better to stay where you after all. Sitting and watching all the wonderful things taking place onstage. Everyone dancing, singing, acting, sweating. Think twice if it’s worth it. Is it really worth such a sacrifice?

He gets angry.

ACTOR: But then there’s not much to think about when you really want it. It’s not that you want it – you are dying for it, it looks to you like the only place in the world where you should be, must be born is here – on the theatre stage. So you won’t go about thinking something like “Would it be better to be born somewhere else? Shouldn’t I think about it more?”

And even if you were considering it, during the birth you have been brainwashed not to remember anything and because you don’t remember anything you start crying. It happens sometimes that actors start crying during their birth as well. It also happens that parents cry that they didn’t get a son or a daughter but an actor.

So the actor is a person born in the theatre. That person, born in the theatre, tries to make sense of the place he has gotten himself into. Doctors treat patients in hospitals,

bankers count money in banks, and fishermen catch fish in the sea. And the actor acts in the theatre.

When you get sick, you go to the hospital. When you need to do something with money, you go to the bank. But do you come to the theatre?

I see that you came to the theatre and ... Why did you come to the theatre? (*He pauses*) Why do you need it? What's the purpose of all this?

The actor realises that he will not receive an answer from the audience and tries to come up with an answer himself.

ACTOR: (*remembering*) Shakespeare has once written that (*reads Shakespearelly*) "The purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure". That's what Shakespeare believed in around 1601. And what about today? What's going on with theatre? What is that theatre?

ACTOR: The theatre is ... to work at the hospital, doctors study at the faculty of medicine. If one decides to become a scientist, one studies physics or chemistry. And when you decide one day to become an actor ... You start looking around to see whether you are alone in this ... whether it's normal. You go to some theatre school – those can be found. Then you skim through the newspapers and, one day, you open the heavy black door to the academy and find that there are more people like you. You think – "Thank God". And as soon as you think that, the next thought is usually: "hang on for a sec, not all of us will get in" (*to the audience*) Trust me, I got nothing against you and I like theatre as well; but if I was a choice between you and me to become an actor, then it better be me.

It better be me.

And if you're lucky, you get into that institution that trains those who desire to be born in the theatre. There's the Academy of Music and Theatre in Lithuania, and then there are similar places in Klaipėda and now Šiauliai as well. And all of these people want to be born in the theatre. And they teach you how to be born there. They train you for birth.

The actor moves forward (without stepping over the tape) and talks while walking on the ramp, as if exhibiting his knowledge of the theatre to the audience.

ACTOR: You learn how to be a born actor. You learn working with imaginary tools, singing, dancing, moving, speaking correctly, and you just have to learn fencing. But you are always curious about what the theatre - is yes, precisely, *that* theatre in which I will be born. What is it?

And apart from all kinds of lectures, you come to this class and there's this elderly lecturer, a theatre critic or something, who is ready to give you a class on theatre history. World theatre history, to be more precise. Because before you are born in the theatre, you must necessarily know about all those who were born before you and about how they were born. You need to know everything about the Ancient Greek theatre, Sophocles and Euripides, Shakespeare, Molière, Goldoni, Antonin Artaud, Chekhov, Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Peter Brook, as well as Vaitkus, Nekrošius, Tuminas, and Koršunovas... But before learning all these name – see, they're not made up – the very first words of the lecturer are these:

The lecturer asks the audience. (The actor stands on the tape)

LECTURER: children, do you know what theatre is? *(A pause)*

And everyone just starts thinking about it. What is theatre? And you sit and think: “nah, I won't tell you what theatre is. Did I enrol to tell *you* what theatre is? No way. I'll just sit tight and you will surely tell me yourself what theatre is.” The one thing that I learned at school very well was that teachers always ask only those questions that they know the answers to themselves. So why bother asking? But the lecturer continues the lecture when she sees that no one has a clue.

The actor acts out a dialogue between the lecturer and a student seated at back of the classroom.

LECTURER: Children, theatre is made of several very simple things.

STUDENT: No doubt they are very simple.

LECTURER: Theatre consists of one person in an empty space.

STUDENT: Must be an actor.

LECTURER: And another one who is watching.

STUDENT: Must be a spectator.

LECTURER: And that is perfectly enough for a theatre.

STUDENT: That's it?

LECTURER: That's it. A person in an empty space and at least one spectator.

STUDENT: But wait a bit – an empty space? What do you mean? Isn't the theatre ... isn't it ... isn't the theatre a building?

LECTURER: That does not matter at all.

STUDENT: What do you mean it does not matter? Look at the opera house – it's huge; how can it not matter? Shouldn't the actor have a theatre building?

LECTURER: The theatre building is built for the audience; it's just a building that defines the theatre stage – that empty space. You will become actors (*the lecturer looks at her students*) – actors! – and all an actor needs is just an empty space. The rest in the theatre building – the cloakroom, the corridors, the cafes and the bars – are all for the audience.

The actor – student can't stand it anymore and he bursts out.

STUDENT: But wait – what do you mean it's enough? What do you mean it is for the audience? Look at all the others. Let's compare. Dammit, everyone else has much more. Doctors have hospitals full of all sorts of equipment that beeps, measure blood pressure; they have their syringes after all. Bankers have computers and those machines that can count a stack of bills within seconds...

The actor starts flouncing about the empty stage.

...And what about me?! What about me? I have an empty space? What? Will I be born where there is nothing? Hang on a second – there's absolutely nothing? Completely empty?! Just me and nothing else?!

The actor calms down as if in resignation.

ACTOR: And so from the very first lecture you start doubting the theatre history lecturer and all the theatre critics in general.

But while you are pondering this, you notice that the lecturer pays no attention to you and continues reading her lecture, starting with the primeval man, his dancing around the bonfire and his ritual. And then you realise that this empty space in which you will have to be born originates in some primitive grand-grand-grand...father, in some ritual caveman's dance before the hunting.

The actor regains his composition.

ACTOR: But then it all becomes better. It turns out that people have been doing theatre for a long time. Like many of the things we have and use today, it was born in Greece – where else. It developed to Shakespeare, to Artaud, to Stanislavski, to Brook, to Nekrošius, until it came to you. It came to you and now it is your business whether you will develop it further or not. Since you started studying there, you try to develop it in some way. But if you go about this business without knowing it, rest assured you will fail. And you do. But then it's important not to give up and start again. And then you fail again. And so a lot of time passes until you learn how to improve theatre just a little bit. That's still in the future for me. And when you start developing theatre by developing yourself, you realise that everything is not as simple as it first appeared. Everything is far more complex. You realise that the empty space is sometimes not so empty.

There're basically two ways to fill the stage so that it's not or at least doesn't look so empty.

The first one is – put an actor there. That's the director's job and we will come to them in a minute. The second one is to put some scenography.

He realises that the time has come for him to tell everything how it really is or at least how it looks to him. The actor puts on a malicious smile.

ACTOR: As far as scenography is concerned, scenography in the theatre is created by scenographers. *(He is talking now as if he was a scenographer)*. Scenographers are people who studied art. They learned all kinds of artistic skills and, generally, must have been born in a painting or some sculpture. And they are also trying to be born in theatre as well or even on the stage. Indirectly, of course. To be born on the stage, they must develop stage design. From time to time they come to rehearsals and watch the actors rehearsing. While watching, they look for empty spaces that could be filled with some scenography, even if a tiny one. They need to design it to be born. Therefore, an actor, who sees a scenographer or an artist coming to a rehearsal, will always try to act his best to occupy as much space on the stage as possible. But all of this is for nothing because the experienced eye of the scenographer will notice that empty space on the stage no matter what. The he thinks about it at home and discusses it with the director. We'll get to the director in just a while. So the scenographer thinks hard about it and comes up with something. And one day you will come to a rehearsal and find something like that.

The actor brings a cardboard tree, a very basic prop, to the stage.

ACTOR: You discussed your character and his feelings with the director and he told you that you would have to approach the tree in that spot over there. So you approach and ... *(he points to the tree)* and how to act it? You *have* discussed and talked about it with the scenographer. Let's imagine that the play is about a man and a woman, about life, about

how this man and woman got children and the children got their own children as well. Generations replaced one another. Men would go to war and women would wait for them. And that tree was standing there all the time. You discussed the significance of that tree with the artist – it was to symbolise eternity. You see, everything changes but the tree – the tree is still standing. Perhaps it could even be someone’s genealogical tree. In any case, the director, whom we will discuss later, wanted to invest it with meaning and symbolism for some reason. And the scenographer simply put some cardboard and paint. Witness the grandiose, extraordinary scenography. OK, I admit, an artist is very important in the theatre. I mean a good artist...

Without even finishing on the scenographers, the actor hurries to tell about composers. It’s evident that the actor has much more sympathy towards composers than scenographers.

ACTOR: Just like music is important in the theatre. Music is an altogether different matter. Almost every play has music in it. The audience loves music because you don’t need anything to understand music, you just feel it. And it takes hold over you.

The theatre has these people – composers who write music for the play. They are just like the scenographers – they come and sit during rehearsals, only they are much better because they have not intention of taking your space on the stage. They watch the rehearsal, understand something and talk about that something with the one whom I will tell you about a bit later. They talk and then one day they bring a CD. And that’s just wonderful because they are not born on the stage but on a CD.

There is calm music in the background (a different tune than before).

ACTOR: And every play has music. The audience loves music because you don’t need anything to understand music, you just feel it. You can talk any language of the world – you don’t need anything to understand music. You hear the music and you understand everything instantly. And all the music in the theatre is controlled by the sound operator.

The sound operator is the guy who sits behind you all the time and has a table there with lots of buttons and he loves them all insanely. That's the guy who always watches the play and gets to see all of them... *(the music grows louder)*... who notices all the actor's mistakes and enjoys it quietly because he's just a technician... *(the music grows louder still)* that's the guy who has long been bored of the theatre because he is an evil person... *(the music grows so loud that the actor cannot be heard anymore)* that's the guy who...

The actor realises that he cannot shout louder than the music. He stands and looks at the sound board operator. The latter turns the music off.

ACTOR: *(to the audience)* I am terribly sorry for the inconvenience. As you may have noticed, sound is very important in theatre. It creates an atmosphere. It basically creates everything.

Suddenly it grows completely dark in the hall.

ACTOR: Well, all right – not everything.

The lights are turned on.

ACTOR: *(The actor is angry that the technicians are ruining his play and talks to them directly)* The light is also very important in the theatre. Over there you have a light artist and the sound director. See, the two of them just sit there together and create – we don't even need an actor on the stage, do we now? There could be just light and music.

TECHNICIAN: *(from his workplace)* get out.

ACTOR: What?

TECHNICIAN: Get off the stage.

ACTOR: What do you mean? I am not going anywhere.

The lights are turned off on the stage.

ACTOR: Common guys, stop that. Stop this nonsense. Well alright, alright I am leaving.

The actor returns shortly after with a flashlight. He casts light on his face.

Dear spectators, you see that an actor must be ready for any situation. I know them and I was ready. I don't really understand how such people get a job in the theatre in the first place.

TECHNICIAN: I don't understand what you got you actor's diploma for.

ACTOR: Listen, guys, let's just stop this nonsense. I'll go to the theatre manager tomorrow and give him a report on this.

TECHNICIAN: Well alright then. Act.

The actor is standing and looking at the technicians resentfully.

TECHNICIAN: Act.

The actor is standing.

TECHNICIAN: I asked you to act.

He turns the light on.

TECHNICIAN: Act.

ACTOR: Act. What do you know about acting anyways...?

The actor notices the audience again.

You see, dear audience... You see how important it is to know the place you are born in. It is really important to get along with the team, with the community in which you suddenly find yourself.

ACTOR: (*ironically*) And our theatre is very friendly indeed. All the colleagues are very friendly and they never spare you some wonderfully useful advices. And our technical personnel and technical infrastructure is nothing less than unique.

ACTOR: It's weird but there wouldn't be contemporary theatre without the scenographers, composers, sound and light operators and, naturally, there wouldn't be any theatre without you, without the audience, the people who come to the theatre, the people who love it. You must understand how important you are to us.

The actor stops and thinks very briefly.

ACTOR: Then again, if we talk about the audience, about the people who come to the theatre, then ... lots of different people come to the theatre. There are people who are, so to say, born for the theatre as well. They watch an amazing number of plays. They know almost all the actors, their faces and names. They have been to almost all the theatres in our country. And if they are lucky, they travel around the world to watch what goes on in other theatres of the world. And they know absolutely everything about the theatre.

The actor glances over the audience in search for some theatre critic.

ACTOR: I mean the wonderful and indispensable critics of our theatre.

The actor bows politely.

ACTOR: (*he speaks very tenderly, as if he wanted to be a theatre critic himself*). They are vital to our theatre, although it is not always clear whether they need the theatre any longer. Because they know very much – sometimes it even looks like they know everything. They

travel the world to attend the best festivals. They watch everything. They notice everything. And you sit in your theatre and think about your role and your performance and see nothing. After a painful half a year of creating and suffering, you finally stage a modest play. And then the theatre critic, who's just back from his routine trip to the Avignon Theatre Festival, spots an ad at a bus stop or reads on the internet about the current plays and comes to the theatre.

And he likes it here a lot. Who wouldn't like to come to the theatre and feel the whole theatre prick up their ears? Suddenly, the management is doing a great job. Suddenly, the director of the play emerges in the corridor, greets you casually and offers a cup of coffee. You decline it politely, according to all the European standards, saying "Thank you, I've already had it today", even though you think that it would have been nice to have some coffee to keep you awake during the play. And then you sit somewhere in the corner, as if to be alone, and absentmindedly open the programme of the Avignon Festival that somehow stayed in your bag, so that all those who understand and those who don't understand notice it.

Suddenly all the actors get the news of the arrival of the famous theatre critic. Everyone grows tense and begin preparing for the play for real, doing yoga exercises and so on. When the lights in the hall go down and the play begins, all the actors start searching the hall with their eyes for you and the play is acted out in your direction ...

The actor turns and continues acting sideways to the audience.

ACTOR: ...just so that you can get the best view of everything. Everyone's acting and sweating like there was no tomorrow. Suddenly everyone starts stumbling over the stage props; everything keeps dropping out of their hands. And you think "why are they trying so hard, the actors are clearly exaggerating, just overacting; they should just act simply, neatly and accurately, like those French in the Avignon Festival".

The play is over and the theatre critic leaves the hall in peace.

The actor leaves for the backstage and storms back immediately.

ACTOR: (*actively*) And then everyone in the theatre starts waiting – one, two, three days, a week. They skim all the newspapers and check all the internet pages that may have an article on their performance by some chance. If not an article, then at least a paragraph or two. But it's not there. Sometimes it is there – a tiny article that goes something like this “dear theatre lovers, there's a play going on, go see it”. And everyone quietly rejoices – “see, they wrote about us; they could've written more and analysed the play – maybe next time they will, at least they didn't crab us”.

Of course, it's not like there are never any good, professional article. There certainly are. Sometimes they are really good. They almost never write about Nekrošius, Tuminas and Koršunovas or Vaitkus anymore. But theatre critics all around Europe are now writing about them.

The actor is feverishly searching for words. How to put everything just like it is? How to summarise everything?

ACTOR: ...and so you get this picture that we don't have a European-level theatre in Lithuania but only European-level theatre critics. And that is excellent, just splendid – the European standards are just what we need now.

He remembers something and gets scared.

ACTOR: Oops, the director told me not to tell this to anyone – not this. Ah, I haven't told you about directors yet. Here's what...

The actor approaches the ramp and fixes himself.

ACTOR: I'll make a little detour so that you understand. Do you know what a "boa" is in Latvian? A jungle rope. Do you know how they say "actor" in Latvian? Stage skipper. And do you know what a "director" is in Latvian? The stage skipper's screamer. So much for directors.

The actor grows tired.

ACTOR: there are lots of other things in the theatre as well. Lots and lots of them. There are playwrights for example. They are extremely rare in Lithuania and it's hard to find one in theatres. There's also the management – the people who advertise and collect tickets... There are the stagehands... Then there are the prop masters who make various props, for example, fake knives and such... Then there are the cleaners... who probably have the best understanding of the theatre because they clean this stage after each performance. Imagine: the play is over. You go away, leaving piles of papers and bottles. Then a person comes. As a rule, it is an elderly person ... He gets onto the stage... And, believe me, all kinds of things accumulate on the stage after performances... He brings a brush, a bucket of water and a rag and starts cleaning everything. And when one cleans something ... it's strange ... but that something becomes dear to you. Even if you are getting paid for it. It's like when you are cleaning your new car or your home, you are cleaning it because they have value for you. Or when you are polishing your shoes... Or when you are polishing your son's or daughter's shoes. You polish them so that they look good. And you want them to look good because they are your shoes. Your children. Because, in a way, they are you, they're a part of you. And so that's what you are.

Plays are born and die in the theatre; actors are born and die in the theatre too but ... for some reason, I grew tired of explaining this to you, I don't know why. Shakespeare said "the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure..." And so what of this Shakespeare? I don't give a damn about all this history, about Stanislavski, Grotowski, Brook, and Nekrošius –

all this theatre history. The theatre does not have a history – the theatre is born here and now. That I am standing in front of you and you are sitting in front of me. It is this moment...

The actor merely stands and looks at the audience.

ACTOR: Perhaps this very moment is the theatre. And I have been struggling here for a full hour to get your attention. I came up with those tricks with the lighting and sound technicians, just so that you don't get bored. Because I appreciate that you are here today, that you came to the theatre. And I am just trying to explain to you and to myself logically and otherwise – what is the theatre? Why is the theatre?

It becomes unclear during the monologue whether the actor is telling all that to the audience or to himself; his speech may even grow somewhat incoherent at times.

ACTOR: But it's not even the theatre that is important. At a hospital, you treat a patient not just because you get paid for it but because that person is sick, because he needs help. At sea you catch a fish because somebody on shore needs it. You feel needed. You know why you exist: "I catch fish because somebody needs it". In theatre, you show a play – and that's not a thing that will make you a millionaire – but if you make people think or smile for a moment... If you manage to brighten their lives for even if just for a while, that means ... that you brighten the world as well ... Because whatever I have told you until now ... is just plain nonsense, apart from ... I really did ... except for the bit about the director – that was pure truth. Because the director is the stage skipper's screamer...

The actor turns away from the audience and it is difficult to understand whether he is crying or laughing.

The actor turns around and smiles to the audience.

ACTOR: Never believe actors. They are lying to you. That's their job. Because there is no difference between the truth and a lie in here at the theatre.

Thus, my dear audience, allow me to introduce to you yet another, the final and perhaps the most important composite part of the theatre – the actor.

The actor steps over the tap; majestic music is playing; the actor stands in the light of a single projector.

ACTOR (*elatedly*): The actor is the most important in the theatre! The actor is everything! He is the one who gets the plot going on the stage! He is the one who makes the audience quiver! He is the one who filters through all his characters! He falls in love. He betrays! He is born! He dies! He turns into a hero! He turns into a coward! He turns into a king! He turns into a beggar! He turns into the devil or the god! He is the grandmaster of illusions because he can do anything on the stage!

The actor steps back over the tape, the music stops and an ordinary light is back.

ACTOR (*casually*): Anything what audience demands and what the audience does not expect.

The actor bows. The lights grow dim.