



Interview with Fabio Andina

Interview by Vincent Tram

Fabio Andina is a Swiss author who came to SFU as a part of an event hosted by SFU's World Languages and Literatures department titled, "An Alpine Imaginary: Workshop and Interview with Swiss Author Fabio Andina". Fabio's style is said to illustrate clear features of the Alpine environment and he describes himself as a person in constant search of minimalism which reflects in his method of storytelling and everyday life.

The concept of "spontaneity" is valuable and necessary to Fabio's writing as he describes his method to be living in the present moment and letting ideas foster in his imaginative space until they are worth expressing. Fabio emphasizes that his unique method is based on allowing the mind to grow ideas naturally and freely before taking them onto the page. Although Fabio acknowledges that many authors require structure and organization in their work, he is content with this method. Fabio does **not** force himself to write and exhaust the production of ideas within his mind because of his belief that writing is an expression of oneself to experience pleasure and pure emotion.

Fabio Andina: “When you write, it is because you want to express. When you write something that you would like to read it means you gave yourself pleasure in both writing. While you are writing and you don’t like reading it, you don’t feel pleased about it, and it is hard to go on with the story, it means that you are not expressing yourself in a good way.”

Letting the mind and imagination go free and run vague ideas before these visions grow into concrete visions. Fabio contends that many writers experience points of feeling stuck and he believes that this is due to being rooted to perfecting a single page without letting their ideas develop long enough. Fabio’s projects are a passion to him that is about communication with characters and asking them, “Can you take me to where you are going?”

To ask the character rather than embody his character means to distance himself as a way of finding genuine human emotion within his story. To be surprised by his own writing could mean a way for readers to be surprised too. Fabio’s critique on following structural storytelling is that in its schematic approach, the absence of the element of spontaneity could mean that the work is well-written but is deprived of an emotional aspect.

FA: “Before you are a writer you have to be a watcher and listener. You have



Photo: Fabio Andina

to understand psychology and someone else’s psychology. You know how to put someone’s psychology and put it into pages. It’s a process of building and putting together letters in order to make something chaotic. It does not mean that I am chaotic or I feel anxiety. It is like a sculpture. It’s a craft and in its work and you have to go out and hit the hammer. I have to know how to put the words together and reach the goal of giving the reader anxiety. When I write that I am calm and peaceful, but I wrote something chaotic.”

Fabio has a background of studying cinema within his academic career and this shines through his style of embodying the camera to follow the main character to just observe their existence through the imaginative space. Just as with his style of writing, Fabio is a seeker of human emotion and expres-



Passing On by Hugo Xiao

sion in his works. The value of the artist means to be one that can express their emotions within their work and allow others to watch or read the peace and feel something.

FA: “If you think about yourself as a camera, you automatically put a barrier between you and what you see. The lens, the filter. But sometimes to tether, and build a char-

acter, I also have to use my imagination. I don’t want to only see the reality. For example, I see you, I can describe you in a way but then I don’t like this part of you I can make it up and change it or take my part of mine and put it into your place and it is a way of playing. I always think about sculpting when I write. You have to build something, build characters, build emotions, build structural sentences. It’s a craft that will come naturally.”

Q&A FROM THE EVENT

AUDIENCE: We live in a digital universe, today and there are stories everywhere. Hundreds, thousands, millions of them. We are surrounded by stories. Each one of these people is feeling very much as you described, “I got something to say! I want to write! I got a story in mind!” and sometimes I asked myself, “Okay, I want to write but what will separate or what will distinguish what I am doing from the tens of thousands of stories around me. Sometimes I read them, and I think, ‘These are wonderful, I can never write this good’. The question boils down to “What gives you the confidence to work for a year or two on a novel and at the end of that time say, ‘I got something here, this is good’”.

FA: It is because I like it because I want to. When I was 20, I read a lot and when I started writing, and found that was my career, “I want to become a writer” and I

believe that strongly and when you really believe it, then you don't care that there are thousand other writers. It is a jungle out there, everyone wants to publish in English, and everyone wants a slice of the pie. You don't have to care about that. You just go on your own way, and you try and write something, and you send it to publishers. Of course, you send it to a publisher, and it doesn't work, then you send it to other hundreds of publishers, but you go with it because you love it. If you think "I want to be a writer because I want to have money, go to Canada and travel the world" that does not work. If I start to write it is because I need it. I need to write almost every day. When you find a good story, it catches you and you are into it and then you will finally finish the story, you want another one.

AUDIENCE: I like the way that you describe your writing process. It almost sounds like a romanticist flourish with no sort of previous disposition toward what a published book, a discrete aesthetic object which will quietly unfold itself for readers forever more in a different setting from which it was constructed. When you talk about the brevity with which your process begins, I want to tease that a bit because there are many famous stories about books written in a hurry, which has also led to scholars showing that their process thereafter takes years and months of editing and honing and reflecting on the automatic and romantic flourish on which it was con-

structed. My question to you is, "Once you throw out this novel onto the page, what is your process thereafter?"

FA: I usually edit the story by following the main character. If the main character is very minimalistic and poetic, I would have to write and fix my story in a minimalist, poetic grammar, or syntax way of writing. To rewrite, fix, or edit this story [*La pozza del Felice*] took me one year and a half because every detail was important. Minimalism was the key so take out, take out, take out. To rewrite and edit this book [*Ursine Fuori*] took me one or two months, because the protagonist leads a chaotic life, and my first draft was already chaotic, so it was ready. I could have published already from the first draft, but I had to fix little things. I like to give the book the same taste or spices the main character has and that's nice because every book is different and I try not to be the same kind of writer, changing the way I write, changing the structure, changing everything. I like to write in a way that the reader should never stop reading until the end. The reader should be able to turn the page because they should be curious to see what happens after.

AUDIENCE: During that preliminary period where you resist the urge to write, do you note anything down or do you just make peace that you don't remember everything along the way?

FA: If you forgot something it means that

it was not a good thing to remember. If you take notes, you can take bad notes and you must be obligated, forced to use every note you take. In my experience when I think of something and that thing sticks, it means that it is a good idea, good title, good location or that sort. I never take notes and if you believe in that and try that, you can see that it would work. Even during the night and I like to get an idea, I think for a few seconds, a few minutes. If I wake up and the idea is still there it is a good one, if the idea is gone it was not worth it.

AUDIENCE: In your talk, most of what you are saying, this spontaneity comes from within you. I am wondering about how important is the Alpine space where you come from? How can you relate to those cultural concepts in your writing?

FA: First, I write the way I speak without filters. I never try to write the best Italian like most book authors do because most of the big publishers have this editing process and I ask them not to do any editing because I want the book to be mine. So, by writing the way I speak, I can really relate to the region where I live because some words or expressions are related to the region where I live. To me, living up in the Alps is about my little village, surrounded by nature and the 85 people there. To me, it is an inspirational place to live and work because to write, I need to be as peaceful as can be. I really need to be in a

silent place I need to be very close to the mountains. Sometimes I don't really want to write anything, I go out for a walk, and I can think. I lived in cities but in the end, I decided that the best place for me is a place without anything. So, to me this monk-style of life, I live by myself, with a few friends in the mountains, and I go to the city once a week. To me, the environment is very important.



Twisted by Daniel Cheung