

Spectacles Selection

By Annick Drogou

April 30th 2013

« An Address to the Academy », by Franz Kafka.

Directed and adapted by Jack Garfein. Featuring Erik Stouvenaker and Hassam Ghancy. Théâtre des Mathurins (8^e). Until the 25th May 2013.

What makes some plays timeless is when their meaning is disconcerting. Kafka's extraordinary adventure, told by a man in front of a panel of Academicians, belongs to that category.

Ape. That is what that man used to be before he was taken from his jungle by inhuman humans looking for circus-like distractions. What better way to escape his cage than by imitating his grinning jailers, learning how to shake hands, drinking nauseating alcohol beyond reason? With great insight, the primate wears his persecutors' rags and finds the necessary weapons to gain his freedom through the use of words and social behaviors.

But he pays a price: visible and permanently deep wounds. Using very proper language and perfect reasoning, the everlasting hybrid expresses, without emotion nor prosecution, the deceitful behavior the abduction has condemned him to. Is he at last a man, has he surpassed the ape? The endless solitude, the fruits and the chimpanzee partner of his dreams let us guess at the hopeless wound of a being condemned to being forever a *half*.

The ape-like portrait on the easel is a mirror witness of this self-imprisonment and forbids any way out, as much for the public than for the orator. Whereas the Academicians are left in the darkness, we, the public are forced to reflect on our so-called civilizing behaviors. And it is not the human's shy and clumsy smile (played by Hassam Ghancy) in one of the two epilogues that is going to rid us of the essential ambiguity. Erik Stouvenaker transmits both in a physically clearly and a quietly deranged way, the gripping directness of this affectless tale. Thanks to him, Kafka is more modern than ever with his sharp lucidity on superficiality and intolerance.