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By Audrey Jean

AN ADDRESS TO THE ACADEMIE

There are only a few days left to see Kafka's greatest work « Address to an Academy ». This text is part of Kafka's reflection on the human nature and has often been interpreted but Jack Garfein's version differs from the others by including two short epilogues that the writer had written afterwards. This play combines a new insight and the perfect interpretation of actors Erik Stouvenaker and Hassam Ghancy which make it a must see at the Theatre des Mathurins!

Red Peter recalls his ape past in front of an assembly of academicians. He was captured on the golden coast and his only way to survive was by becoming a man. He first achieves this unrealistic feat through hard work and perseverance by imitating humans then with his great intelligence. He then analyses his incredible journey with lucidity and coldness thereby inducing the spectators to reflect upon the human nature.

How to define a man? Where does the limit between humans and animals lie? Kafka has always worked on the relation between man and his roots by staging fantasy pieces where the characters are confused, lost in a society they do not understand. This text is a perfect example of his reflection. When he is hunted down as an ape, Red Peter has no choice but to try becoming a man. He observes men's behavior from his small cage and it does not seem all that complicated: spitting and drinking hooch are well within his reach. Then, little by little, with a will born from despair, he starts marching towards his new life. But never has he aspired to this new life nor envied nor admired men.

The conclusion is beyond dispute: Red Peter will not be any happier as a man, nor will he find freedom in knowledge. On the contrary he will miss his land and hate the human smell that sticks to his fur. All the contradictions found in men are illustrated in the direction by Jack Garfein. Indeed, there is no need for excessive embellishments or for imitating animals to illustrate the complexity of what Red Peter is going through. Erik Stouvenaker declaims his text with precision, making every word, every feeling count. He only hints at animal moves that remind us where Red Peter is from. The two prologues perfectly conclude this piece by leaving a mark for good on the spectator, making him (or her) reflect upon one's responsibility in the nature of the species. Hassam Ghancy, acting with precision and sobriety is also remarkable.

Brilliant!