

By Amelie Blaustein Niddam

**« AN ADDRESS TO THE ACADEMY », the full text written by Kafka can be seen at the Mathurins Theater**

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*You have to take the long staircase leading down to a small room at the very well known Théâtre des Mathurins in order to hear the more than scholar Red Peter give "An Address to the Academy" in its full version.*

Why speak in public? What does this man have to say to high society? He stands in his XXth century suit, in a room filled by wooden furniture from the heavy table and the painting to the stair rail. What he has to say is precisely that he is a man. That would seem obvious but just 5 years ago, Peter used to be an ape...

Directed by Jack Garfein, actor Erik Stouvenaker tells of his "Metamorphosis", tempting use of expression, but also and beyond that, of what prompted his project. Why did he want to change? To be free? No, the human nature disgusts him. Just to "find a way out".

The expressive direction makes us grasp for the first time the depth and the meaning of the complete version of the rarely shown text.

We observe the obsessions of Kafka; strange prophet. It is the other way round as "The Metamorphosis" written two years earlier, it is the man that takes over the animal, or more precisely, it is the animal that chooses to become a man in order to escape his condition as a circus animal. He is locked up in a cage on Karl Hagenbeck's ship and is the sailor's mascot. They spend their time teasing him. The eternal will to escape is accompanied by an eternal return to what he truly is. To become a man he had to learn to drink and spit which no one would envy, not even an ape!

"I had to pretend, I didn't have any other choice"

Everything in this text is pretence. You think you are seeing a man? He is more bestial than an ape. *An Address to the Academy*, written in 1917 echoes strongly to our ears which are used to hearing of totalitarianism. "Find a way out" says the ape-man but Kafka has thought for a long time that none exist. The ape that has become Peter will only learn one thing... disgust and cynicism.