

## ANDREAS

A nameless man, a wandering lady, a street corner; the starting point of *Andreas*, adaptation of the first part of *To Damascus* by Jonathan Châtel, brings together the conditions necessary for a potential new beginning for the Stranger invented by Strindberg. Exiled in a strange country and cut off from all social ties, he waits, unknowing. Will he disappear? Will he come back to life? His encounter with the Lady awakens in him the hope of finding his way back to childhood, and thus to a potential future, but the past and its spectres threaten to drag him down different paths. Which should he take, if he wants to lose or to find himself again? Translating and adapting August Strindberg's epic, in which he sees an attempt by the writer to reinvent himself, Jonathan Châtel emphasises the mirror effect between the characters surrounding the Stranger. Seen again and again under different guises, the feeling they instill is reminiscent of those dreams in which different figures share the same face. By playing with the notion of dream, Jonathan Châtel is able to reveal the forgotten name of the Stranger, Andreas, to give form to his confrontation with the Absolute, and to question the struggle of a man against his own demons.

*The show will premiere on 4 July, 2015 at the Cloître des Célestins, Avignon.*

## JONATHAN CHÂTEL

Trained as an actor, with a degree in philosophy and in theatre studies, Jonathan Châtel works as an actor, a playwright, and a director, before leaving for Oslo for three years. Upon coming back, he founds with playwright Sandrine Le Pors the company ELK, before translating, adapting, and directing Henrik Ibsen's *Little Eyolf* in 2012. Jonathan Châtel also works as a bande dessinée writer (*Kirkenes, Les Enfants rouges*), co-directs documentaries (*Les Réfugiés de la nuit polaire (The Refugees of Polar Night)*), and teaches theatre studies at the university level (UCL, Belgium), multiplying his experiences to feed his dramatic creation. The French-Norwegian director may have inherited from the north a more acute sensibility to the changes of the light, to the power of natural elements, and to their influence on voices and on the movements of bodies. His original passion for drawing may also be what drives him to seek the intensity of the theatre in a stripped-down, clear style.

## AUGUST STRINDBERG

Born in 1849 in Stockholm, August Strindberg first knows success in his work and happiness in the first few years of his marriage until in 1883, driven by critics and by his own neuroses, he begins a period of wandering that will last years. After several trials and divorces, during a painful time of crisis he will later describe in *Inferno*, he gives up on writing, lives like a recluse in Paris, and devotes himself to alchemy. But in 1898, Strindberg writes the first part of *To Damascus (Till Damaskus)* in one go, which marks his reconciliation with the theatre, and with life. In 1907, he founds the Intimate Theatre he'd been dreaming of.

*Le Chemin de Damas (To Damascus)* by August Strindberg is published in French by L'Arche Éditeur.

## INTERVIEW WITH JONATHAN CHÂTEL

### **What was the central idea of your adaptation of August Strindberg's *To Damascus*, which you have titled *Andreas*?**

Jonathan Châtel: *To Damascus* is a text that has been a part of me for a long time. August Strindberg wrote this play at a time when he had completely given up on the theatre. He was going through an intense personal and artistic crisis. Yet the need for theatrical creation once again caught up with him and he wrote the first part of *To Damascus* in one go. I based my adaptation on the first part, because I think it contains within itself the expression of this original need for writing. I like the structure of this first part, which revolves around the insane asylum, as well as the fact that it begins on a street corner, a crossroads, a space where everything seems possible, and ends there as well. This mirrored composition is a frame for the energy and the loss present in the text. There's also the fact that I wanted to give an intimate version of this three-part epic, in the sense that Strindberg himself gave to the word, dreaming of a theatre modelled on the ideal of chamber music. While I was translating and rewriting the text, I read a Norwegian novel which is precisely about that, too: Karl Ove Knausgaard's *My Struggle*. It's about a man broken by the split between his desire for absolute in art on the one hand, his desire to write a book that would be the end of literature, and on the other hand the triviality of his everyday life. *To Damascus*, which I have thus chosen to call *Andreas*, talks about that, too.

### **As the play opens, couldn't the Stranger have already disappeared?**

Yes. The play is like a circle, a game in which things appear and disappear. In the dust, a man materialises temporarily, a story is told, then everything vanishes again. *To Damascus*, in my adaptation, is the story of an amnesia, a drama of memory and time. A man is about to disappear because he cannot, or will not, remember who he is anymore. I turned the character of the Beggar, a double of the Stranger, into an amnesiac writer, who lost his identity, and who we understand left his family and destroyed his own life because he was obsessed with writing. Which leads us to wonder, who haunts whom? Is the Stranger haunted, visited by apparitions, like Strindberg when he first started writing this play, or is he the one who haunts the living?

### **Did you choose to have actors play two roles to highlight this ambiguity?**

Strindberg himself says that some roles can be played by the same actor. I only clarified and amplified this idea. This assimilation of the different characters that surround the Stranger, works the same way it would in a dream, where one face can play several different parts.

### **At first glance, one might think that the Stranger is trying to set himself apart from the rest of the world, to dominate it. What do you think of him?**

The Stranger is a kind man, lonely, desperate. The first scene of the play ends with a strange pact. "To fight trolls," the Stranger says, "to free princesses, to slay werewolves, that is living," and the Lady says, "Come, my liberator." This fantastical pact is very important, it is the foundation of the rest of the

play. They venture into the world motivated by this declaration, this struggle. A struggle that is the struggle of the writer first and foremost, a struggle with oneself, with one's demons: those "trolls" who are, for Strindberg like for Ibsen, those of "the heart and the soul." Of course, the Stranger uses the Lady, seducing her because he needs her to tell a story. But the opposite is also true. It isn't that clear cut, with victims on one side and tormentors on the other. It's a collective madness, a game, devoid of any irony or cynicism.

**This circle that leads from the crossroads at the beginning to the one at the end, from one possibility to another, could it also be read as one that leads from a tired childhood to the reunion with the mother?**

My adaptation is based on this impossibility for the Stranger to call his mother "mum," on this belief that he was switched at birth, that he is the son of trolls. *Andreas* is a study on a mother. It is a sort of underground yet very clear move which happens between the first and third parts in the original play, in which the Lady eventually turns into a Mother who brings a form of peace, who is able to wipe the anxious brow of the Stranger, her son. It echoes the gesture of writing itself. To write is to try to find one's lost mother tongue again, and then to finally be quiet. The third part of *To Damascus* tries to articulate this dream of the end of language, of a world without words, where the only communication is telepathic. It's beautiful, a return to silence. My adaptation uses this fantasy of disappearing, notably with the character of the Beggar, who acts as a tempter. By advising the Stranger to enter the monastery, he expresses the dichotomy at the centre of the play: you can either be with others, that is, in the language, in life, or be alone, in quiet contemplation, in communion with a community of specters.

**How do those nuances and specters manifest themselves on the stage?**

If I had to sum up this show in one picture, it would be with clear, luminous forms that could nonetheless fade, like a line in the sand. I work towards a certain simplicity, I try to draw clear lines. Strindberg's play is like a series of steps. It's all there in the title: *Till Damaskus*; *To Damascus*. There's a tension in that title, it hints at a series of breaks, of leaps. I like to work with concrete materials, like stone, wood, metal. Bodies, too. As to the question of the dramatic space, we're working with the motif of the panorama. We use lights to create vibration. In the end, what I find most fascinating with Strindberg, it's the focus he requires, the way he asks you to really listen to him.

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Interview conducted by Marion Canelas / Translation Gaël Schmidt-Cléach

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THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Site Louis Pasteur de l'Université, free admittance

- 6 July at 05:30 pm, *Dialogue artists-audience* with Jonathan Châtel and the artistic team of *Andreas*, encounter hosted by the Ceméa

- 11 July at 03:00 pm, Encounter Research and Creation: *Fictions, interpretations and politics* with, among others, Jonathan Châtel, organised with the ANR

ENCOUNTER FAITH AND CULTURE

with Jonathan Châtel

7 July at 11:00 am, Chapelle de l'Oratoire, free admittance

CINEMATOGRAPHIC TERRITORIES

*Les Réfugiés de la nuit polaire* directed by Jonathan Châtel and Charles Emptaz

Screening followed by an encounter with Jonathan Châtel

9 July at 02:00 pm, Utopia-Manutention

THE NAVE OF IMAGES

*Mademoiselle Julie* by August Strindberg

Direction Frédéric Fisbach (2011) / Realisation Nicolas Klotz

23 July at 2:30 pm, Église des Célestins

TOUR DATES OF *ANDREAS* AFTER THE FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON

– from 25 September to 15 October:

La Commune, Centre dramatique national, Aubervilliers, Festival d'Automne-Paris

– from 4 to 6 November:

Hippodrome, Scène nationale, Douai

– 10 November: Manège, Scène nationale, Maubeuge

– 18 and 19 November : Comédie de Caen, Centre dramatique national, Les Boréales Festival

– 9 and 10 December: Espaces Pluriels, Pau

– from 12 to 16 January 2016:

Théâtre Olympia, Centre dramatique régional, Tours

– 20 and 21 January: Théâtre des Treize Arches, Brives

– 3 and 4 February: phénix, Scène nationale, Valenciennes

– 26 and 27 February: Théâtre du Bois de l'Aulne, Aix-en-Provence

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EDITION

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