

Reckless Sleepers' *Spanish Train*

Leeds Met Studio Theatre, October 2006

Frances Babbage

Spanish Train begins simply. Two performers stand facing us in the black box studio, the space unadorned apart from a small heater at the back ("It's cold in here") and, intriguingly, a line of tomatoes laid out in front of the back curtain. Mole is dressed as a bear. Leen wears a white dress, bright red lipstick and one red shoe. They talk to us naturally - in so far as theatre allows this - about the piece they will show, how we can raise our hands if we feel uncomfortable and they'll come and try to help us. *Spanish Train* is offered at first as if it's a work in progress. We are shown it in bits, in a confused order - "that was Part 6, now we're going to show you Part 3" - as if there were no whole, just a series of ideas and performance fragments:

"This is the part where you have power over me."

"This is the part where you make me dance."

"This is the part where I laugh a lot."

This is a piece of theatre about making theatre. We don't understand how its different sections fit together, and neither - so it seems at first - do the actors. There is just a girl and a bear, and confrontation, dancing, laughter, power games. There is also fear: "I don't want to take the train. I don't want to take the bus. I don't want to go out today..." - *Spanish Train* is haunted by the Madrid train bombings, has the spirit of excitement that colours new journeys but is touched also by the anxieties these bring.

Spanish Train is aesthetically inventive: a more or less empty space is gradually filled with 'forest' or 'cave', and the tomatoes, rolled across the floor, become rubies, or bloodstains, or broken bodies. And as Mole spins round in his bear costume, the feathers Leen has stuffed it with fly from it in all directions - and the stage turns into a snowscape, an illustration from Hans Andersen or Grimm - or perhaps Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (*Spanish Train*'s folktale world has something of Carter's sense of cruelty, humour and sensuality). "I'm trying to make this area a place of outstanding beauty", says Mole at one point in the piece, gesticulating enthusiastically - in his mangy costume - from a corner of the studio. It seems like a weak joke, when uttered: but by the end of the performance, it felt achieved.