

stage@leeds company premiere 'Poison' at Northern stage

Poison (a dialogue about translation)

by Wan Fang (additional dialogue Steve Ansell)

Directed by Steve Ansell

Northern Stage

Thursday 8 May 2014

Cast

Holly Bowman

Mathilde Davies

Ben Green

David Ley

Marcus Marsh

Designed by Helen Russell-Brown

On Thursday 8 May members of the stage@leeds company travelled to Northern Stage Theatre in Newcastle to perform the English speaking premiere of 'Poison' by Chinese playwright Wan Fang. The production was commissioned by the Staging China network and performed as part of a two day network event led by Newcastle University focussing on the challenges of working with translated text. Steve Ansell made the decision early on in the rehearsal process to bring the questions and issues raised in the rehearsal room on to the stage. This was an attempt to open up and articulate the challenges and pitfalls facing companies tackling translated texts. The final performance of 'Poison' was a play within a play where actors were seen to break out of character and stop the action to ask the questions they had asked in the rehearsal room. At one point the action is stopped so that the actors can discuss the decision to give the plays characters English rather than Chinese names. This theatricalised moment mirrored a conversation in the rehearsal room that resulted in the translators at Newcastle University agreeing to use the original Chinese names given by the author. The decision to breakout of the text and discuss, as part of the theatrical production, the issues of translating and interpreting text was risky but playwright Wan Fang, who travelled from China for the event, described the production as 'outstanding'. After the performance the audience had the opportunity

to speak to the cast, director and playwright about the production and the particular challenges of working with translated text and the decision to articulate some of these challenges theatrically provided a foundation for discussion.