

years, years: a reading
by Augusto Corrieri

The house lights fade. The five performers solemnly tune their individual instruments. They then walk on stage and begin playing. Confident and naive, the performers don't seem to notice just how badly the notes grate against each other, and this causes some audience members to chuckle.

Normally, the joke would end here, so as to allow for the show to start.

But the song keeps on playing, past the point of being funny; and the performers keep looking straight into the audience, without embarrassment or pretence.

From the outset, we know that what we are about to watch will somehow involve us.

'years years' is a landscape that one can get lost in. There aren't any hints as to whether it conceals a clear moral, or message, or story, that we as an audience have to supposedly "get": the actions taking place before us obey an ambiguous logic which defies cause and effect; encounters and discoveries seem to penetrate each other and repeat; as a performance it never draws a full circle, it doesn't come to a full stop.

And precisely because it doesn't provide us with easy routes, there is enough space here for each of us to try and find our way through, and make it our own.

To encourage this, the performance opens up time, extends it, finds a way of making it last longer than usual. Deer Park's particular dramaturgy - somewhere between theatre and dance - makes it possible for there to be enough time to watch, to contemplate, to think - to exist without the attachment of knowing where to go next.

And any *meanings* that we find here will be inseparable from the show's collective and intimate unfolding before us: the way we, as an audience, are affected by it, respond to it, make it our own.

The first half of the show takes lightness as its element.

An arrow shoots up in the air - it falls to the ground - a performer screams: the elements from a hunt in the woods are mixed and choreographed to produce a strange game of journeys from one side of the stage to the other. A man unexpectedly strips naked out of frustration with a 19th century coach man who speaks through slides, and the tension is slowly released through a Scottish song about home sickness.

The performers paint and inhabit an upside-down fairy-tale world in which echoes trigger the call, and departures and arrivals become exchangeable.

With unexpected turns and sudden shifts, there seems to be the potential for anything to happen; and within its own mysterious logic, everything that happens seems to have its place. Every new element, no matter how different from what came before it, is introduced, established slowly, and allowed time to breath and develop, and therefore becomes an essential part of the show.

Then a presence, or an absence, arrives unexpectedly, inevitably.

'Evils Spirits': like a sudden imperceptible thickening of the air around one.

A dark fog descends: everything is exactly the same, and yet completely different.

A sense of disquiet makes itself felt: something that belongs to no one, beyond our control; unnameable, for it is everywhere and nowhere in particular.

As in the tradition of fables, the descent of night engenders the transformation of the laws which govern the living. The norms of value and exchange are clouded by a dark fog, and a new space of possibility is created: a state of suspension, a limbo of potential and attraction. And because there is no light to clearly separate things from each other, people, animals, trees, and objects all start coming together, merging, embracing. And so a bird becomes a vessel to drink the others' sex; a girl narrates her amazing encounter with horses that were strong and good; a performer moves around quietly like a dog whilst another strokes him on the head; half-bird and half-man, a performer walks slowly across the stage, and dies.

Always envisaging the pleasures ahead, the performers switch between being controlled and in control; in the thick of the dark forest, submission becomes an ambiguous but innocent experiment in which masters and victims are constantly swapping roles: leadership can be taken by another performer, or by a child, or a bird, or a horse, or a woman, or a man, or a tree.

A silent perversion, a sense of danger, accompanies every gesture and every word; the performers move as if under the pressure of an imminent violence, always on the brink of announcing something which doesn't come.

Slowly light returns to announce a new morning, and the darkness passes.

Something fundamentally untamed makes itself felt through 'years, years', something scary which stops us in our tracks and upsets our cosy nesting habits. It is difficult, and perhaps worthless, to try and precisely describe what it is, but we can say this: it points outside the limits of what we call our territory. It awakens us to the feeling of something new and precious; it tears open the trap door that leads down to forbidden rivers.

There is so much in us, knocking at the doors of perception, of knowledge, of awareness, that we know nothing about. We are made of countless others, of infinite spaces, of unmapped forests, of beasts and migratory birds. We exist on the edges of awareness, somewhere between the real and the imaginary: where it is night, always night.

Originally published in the *years, years* booklet (2005) to accompany the show.

Years, years was created and performed by Deer park performance company. Performers: Joanna Brown, Antoine Fraval, Simone Kenyon, Mary Southcott, Swen Steinhauser.