

reviews

■ THE WINTER'S TALE

Where: Eleventh Hour Theatre,
170 Leicester St, Fitzroy, until
October 7

Reviewer: Chris Boyd

SEE this is the time that the unjust man doth thrive . . .

In Shakespeare, words are more likely to pierce the heavens — to provoke some supernatural intervention with a prayer or a curse — than they are to pierce the heart of a jealous man.

No matter how chaste the accused really is, no matter how eloquent her defence, she will not escape the madness, the folly, the psychosis of her man.

Yet words are sacred. Magical. Especially so in Shakespeare. Anne Thompson's production of *The Winter's Tale* for Eleventh Hour takes that idea and uses it to frame the play.

The action is conjured in the mind of a girl (a winsome Tamara Searle) — maybe in the 1950s — reading in bed.

She invokes the characters, calls them into life, like figures in a pop-up picture book.

The Winter's Tale has long had a special resonance for young women. It's as dark and anguished and harrowing as a good Bronte novel. But, really, it's a play about the rule of law. Due process. Fair trial . . . and obsessive love.

Though Hermione argues her defence a little more strongly than, say, Cordelia or Desdemona, her champion is Paulina.

Like Karen Hughes in the court of George W. Bush, Paulina is the only one willing to step up to the propeller.

To walk into it, if she has to. Paulina is the only one to dare to call the king's actions tyranny.

Jane Nolan is an amazing actor at the worst of time. But, here, as Paulina, she stops the hearts of all who hear her, on and off the stage.

Her grasp of the language, the dynamism of her delivery, the control over every physical aspect of her performance are all marvellous.

Felicity Soper (as Hermione) and Mark Winter (in various boy roles) also impress. Winter has a rare grasp of the language for one so young.

But it must be said, he acted from the head rather than the body.

In a luxury cast, Greg Stone and David Tredinnick play rival kings. Richard Bligh plays their Horatio-like confidante. (As Leontes, Stone gets to say: "Does not the stone rebuke me/ For being more stone than it?")

The Winter's Tale is yet another supremely accomplished production from Eleventh Hour.

It's elegant, thoughtful, polished and well acted. It's also delightful and deeply moving.