

Creative reading of Tale's bear facts

THEATRE

THE WINTER'S TALE

By William Shakespeare, adapted by Eleventh Hour Theatre, the Eleventh Hour Theatre, 170 Leicester Street, Fitzroy, until October 7.

Running time: 165 minutes.

Cameron Woodhead Reviewer

The Winter's Tale is one of Shakespeare's less frequently staged works, and not just because it calls for one character to be pursued and eaten by a bear. The late romance is fraught

with clashing conceits and makes steep demands on actors as well as technicians.

The Eleventh Hour has realised this formidable fantasy in a vivid and elegant production. Director Anne Thompson sets the play in a young girl's bedroom in the 1920s. As the girl reads, the characters are given life by her imaginings until she is eventually dragged into the action in the role of Perdita.

This idea allows some ingenious outs — what to do about the bear, for instance — and ties in

nicely with the play's emphasis on the power of the irrational.

Although the use of a small cast overburdens some of them, each actor dazzles in at least one role. Greg Stone is full of slick songs and oily charm as the rogue Autolycus but flounders as Leontes. Felicity Soper is exquisitely moving as Hermione, and Jane Nolan excels as the fiery Paulina — but neither is suited to playing shepherds.

David Tredinnick gives an accomplished performance as both Polixenes and the ill-fated

Antigonus, as does Richard Bligh as Camillo — and Mark Winter is dashing as the two princes. Tamara Searle didn't inspire confidence as the girl in whose head these phantasms appear — but made an entrancing Perdita.

Andrew Bellchambers' elaborately designed set evokes the 1920s and provides luxurious levels and spaces.

The Winter's Tale is too big a play for any production to trap in amber. But this rendering is visually lush and imaginatively complete.