



I've just come from the Pleasance Theatre where I saw the Weaver Hughes Ensemble production of a new play by Laura Stevens, [Thin Toes](#). I say keep your eye out for more from this talented playwright and from Helen Millar, the lead in the cast of three women.



Ms. Millar has appeared in television and film, and can be seen in the film [Chemical Wedding](#) due out this Autumn. In [Thin Toes](#) she plays Andrea, a talented acerbic young woman hell bent on destroying herself through anorexia. Her performance was engaging, moving, riveting and nuanced.

Sitting in the small performance space with only about twenty or thirty other people, the theatre in the round presentation meant that we all were within feet of these actors and yet they neither dialed down their performances nor acknowledged the audience in whose laps they were nearly sitting. In such an environment it is easy to detect small flaws that a more typical theatre setting might disguise.

The script is artful, with realistic and complete dialogue, an unromantic treatment of the disease and the damage it does to friends and family — in this case the caring, almost clingy friend Lucy, deftly played by Elizabeth Bichard and Andrea's mother Meg, a self-centred artist well played by Camilla Simson.

It is Millar's performance, however, which rises from the good to the sublime. She grabs your attention and while she is on stage you cannot look away. As her character wastes away she makes you believe it — six months of emaciation in 90 minutes — and her bold, in your face depiction of a destructive young woman seeking power over her own life puts me in mind of the stellar performance of Katrin Cartlidge in Mike Leigh's [Career Girls](#).

But she is possessed of an intensity far greater than Cartlidge ever achieved in her short career. I'm made to think of a young Jodi Foster, both by the virtuosity of her performance and her visage. A particularly moving scene is one in which, while Lucy forces Meg to face

that Andrea may well die, we see Andrea sitting cross-legged cutting paper dolls. She silently cuts a linked pair of dolls, and then carefully trims away all but the thinnest remains of the arms, legs and torso of one. She is left holding up this pair of dolls, one normal the other anorexic (see photo at top). This all unfolded with Andrea sitting a mere 3 feet in front of me.

Update: [Here is a CNN story](#) which features this play, and includes some video of it.