

EAST LYNNE

Writtle Cards

22.07.11

Jim Hutchon was at the Village Hall

Director Daniel Curley's version of this Victorian melodrama relies on a sense of carefully contrived claustrophobia for its mood. A destitute gentlewoman marries for security but, unhappy at home, is seduced by a charming cad and decamps with him. Deserted and again destitute, she returns to her marital home in the guise of a servant. It is not a bundle of laughs; the genre has been so parodied over the years that it was never going to be a tear-jerker, but it still needs a real sense of the gentry brought low for its effect.

The gentlewoman, Laura Bennett, didn't get into character much, so her spiralling downfall wasn't too effective. The baddies always have it best in these pieces, and a spiteful sister in law – played convincingly by Liz Curley, and an equally unsympathetic cousin – Josephine Curley, did a lot to point up the lady's misery. The cad was Ben Fraser who sleazed his way throughout with unctuous oiliness. The boring, safe husband was Andy Millward, who had impeccable timing in his delivery.

The set was unimaginative – a well-decorated provincial drawing room which doubled unconvincingly as the Boulogne sea front and public gardens in Grenoble, but the style of the production was shot through with imaginative touches, good use of period music and stylised tableaux which added strength to the plotlines.

And despite an, at times, almost inaudible delivery, Laura Bennett deserves my undying admiration for delivering the line - "Gone, and never called me mother!" without missing a beat.