



[Dear Daughter](#) at [Bolton Little Theatre](#)

Written by [John Waterhouse](#) , Directed by Alastair Zyggou

Reviewed by [Yvonne Cawley](#) April 2014

Nestling in a quiet backstreet in Bolton, the **Bolton Little Theatre** (BLT) is a real gem. This was my first visit to this wonderfully inviting venue and was really taken with the warm friendly welcome I received. The play was being performed in the smaller of the two theatres that the BLT has to offer, with a 60 seat capacity, just 20 seats on three sides around the central stage area, giving it an extremely intimate feel and ensuring no matter where you are seated you manage to get a fabulous view.

Dear Daughter, based on the memoir written by **Flora Jewsbury** about a difficult adolescence in North Manchester before and during the First World War, whisked us back in time to 1910 where we are introduced to her life as a young child. We see

Flora

(gracefully played by

Carole Bardsley

) as an old woman with a constant presence on stage, guiding us gently from scene to scene in the story she so personally illustrates.



Flora's early family life was punctuated by an alcoholic father, four brothers, and a mother trying to do the best she can with no money. When a childless couple **Marian (Gemma Byrne)** and **Tom Crossley**

(
Michael Loftus

) offer to look after Flora for a short while to help out, Flora's mother reluctantly agrees seeing the practical sense of it. We see the dynamics of the new household and how the internal

relationships change once Flora's presence becomes a more permanent fixture. 'Aunt' Marion's attitude to Flora sees a dramatic change, and we watch as she basically uses Flora as an unpaid skivvy and dishes out regular punishments.

Emily Morley who plays Flora as a young girl, gives us a truly wonderful and believable performance, whilst **Sophie Anne Ellicott** brings to life Flora's mother. **Caitlin Fitton**, a delightful young actress plays Laura's friend, **Hilda**, with real gusto and charm who then demonstrates a mean and manipulative streak as the two share more time together on Hilda's home territory. We witness more house moves and different characters sharing Flora's life, including an exceptionally jolly policeman, who brings a little bit of fun into Flora's life.

Despite the constant turmoil and house moves, Flora loves school and excels in class, idolising the Headmistress who can see Flora's potential and is always kind and praises Flora's academic achievements. The Headmistress is played by **Gemma Byrne** who also plays her unloving Aunt and I found this contrast of the two characters played by the same person in different scenes a brilliant touch, allowing Gemma to show us a range of emotions. The greater importance of the church and belief in this period was an interesting reminder of how society has changed and in many ways lost a wider social network where people worked things out for themselves and between themselves. The often absurd regulations around managing children's lives now seen a world apart from Flora's experiences.

