

**THE** National Theatre's renewal of the basic repertory continues, after 'Hedda' and before 'Hamlet', with a **Juno and the Paycock** (Lyttelton) notable for lucidity and lightness but consistently ignoring the dark heart of O'Casey or the bitter tragedy of his great play. Peter Gill directs three exceptionally gifted gut-actors — Linda Bassett (Juno), Tony Haygarth (Boyle) and Tom Hickey (Joxer) — to handle their lines as delicately as possible, for fear of taking them, us and the play over the top. All three appear constrained.

Gill is much kinder to the Irish than O'Casey or the Irish themselves, and the result is not only less black than the recent Dublin production but also — the connection between comedy and despair in Ireland being what it is — less funny, too. Boyle is a gentle charmer,

**THEATRE ■ Michael Ratcliffe**  
**'Juno and the Paycock', 'Polygraph' and others**

smoking a Popeye pipe; Joxer is almost without viciousness; Juno a simple, fastidious woman with the stretch of a Degas laundress. There is no chill in the knocks on the door from the men who come to kill Johnny.

Deirdre Clancy's designs reflect the texture and scale of the performance: the smells of carbolic and frying sausage are strong but the claustrophobia and intensity of domestic naturalism are out. The tenement has no windows or doors and stands in a space that leads without interruption to a staircase-landing and a large, sooty etching of Georgian terraces at the back. The play leaks away. It is an amusing, intelligent and explanatory evening, in

which Catholic devotions are unusually well defined, but it is 'Juno' without unreason, and 'Juno' tamed.

'The story you are about to see,' says David the pathologist (Robert Lepage) in Lepage and Marie Brassard's extraordinary **Polygraph** (Almeida, until Saturday), 'is an autopsy on the living which lets the dead rest in peace.' 'Polygraph' is the tale of the pathologist, the violent waiter François (Pierre-Philippe Guay) and the delectable young actress Lucie (Brassard) with whom the awkwardly donnish David falls in love. All three are haunted by the unsolved murder of a girl in Montreal six years before. The tale is told in short scenes like a movie, with titles and holo-

## Ratcliffe on Paycock

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