

Theatre

# Bonfire Night damp squib

**The Changeling — at the  
People's Theatre, Newcastle,  
until Saturday.**

**WELL, I don't know how  
you spent Bonfire Night**

— but I was in the company of a few dozen other poor souls watching amateur actors trying to ignite this sodden Jacobean squib.

After two-and-a-quarter hours they finally gave up, and we all tramped off into the night.

Why do they do it? Why do amateur companies imagine it is a sensible notion to revive period pieces to which even the most polished of professional companies might find difficulty in giving the kiss of life?

Thomas Middleton and William Rowley put this miserable little piece together in 1622. — I first saw it in about 1975 and richly entertained hopes of never seeing it again.

But if the prospect of the People's production was not one that I approached with the happiest of hearts, it became clear after about 10 minutes that there was worse to come than I might have imagined.

Sue Hinton has directed the play with a heavy hand. The actors approach the production as if it were some kind of recital and only one — Christopher Goulding — invested the evening with any sort of real character.

There is no conception of melting one scene into another so as to facilitate the action, the lighting comes up and down without obvious purpose, and the playing is mannered and remote.

**DAVID ISAACS**