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Title	Paperback review of 'Strumpet City'
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Publication Date	2006-04-15
Publication Information	Kenny, J. (2006, 15 April) Paperback review of 'Strumpet City', by James Plunkett. 'The Irish Times', 'Weekend': 13.
Publisher	The Irish Times
Item record	http://hdl.handle.net/10379/853

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Strumpet City

James Plunkett

Gill & Macmillan, €10.99

This is a very tidy paperback of Plunkett's lengthy 1969 novel about the Dublin Lockout of 1913. One of our major efforts at a nineteenth-century-realism kind of historical novel, its popularity owes much to Hugh Leonard's masterly adaptation of its documentary detail for the RTÉ version of 1980 (recently remastered in a collector's edition), a debt acknowledged here by the cover which has David Kelly as 'Rashers' Tierney and Brendan Cauldwell as 'Toucher' Hennessy sitting against an O'Connell St. background. The novel has also retained a literary respectability, motivated as it was by Plunkett's ambition to find a panoramic form that would accommodate a treatment of all social strata, especially the two Dublins of O'Casey's slums and Joyce's middle class. While no triumphant stylist, Plunkett impressively combines a resolute empathy with the working classes, an emphasis on dramatic characterisation, a snapshot attention to societal detail, and an equally honest and humane sense of the broader movement of history.

John Kenny