Brink Productions like their theatre gutsy. Whether it is the visceral Jacobean narratives of Howard Barker - with whose Wrestling School they linked arms for last year’s Festival success, The Ecstatic Bible - or the hoodlum comedy of Koltes’s Roberto Zucco, or the antics of those reservoir poodles in Jez Butterworth’s Mojo.

It is not surprising, then, that they should get around to Tracy Letts. Killer Joe has been a hot property since its Chicago debut back in 1993. It has played widely in the UK and has seen a number of productions already in this country. In fact it was a Perth season several years ago that prompted the suggestion that Brink might find it their cup of TNT.

Set in a trailer park outside Dallas, the play is a mordant nightmare of underclass predation. The Smith family is not doing at all well. Then Chris has a plan to get ahead. Have his mother killed for the insurance and share the payout with Ansel, the ex-husband, Sharla his step-mother, Dottie, the kid sister, and, of course, there’s a big slice for Homicide detective and part-time hit man Killer Joe Conway. It is the gruesome logic of bodies in barrels -some people are just worth a lot more dead than alive. But with Killer Joe, Chris has made a deal with the devil and no spoon is long enough for the supping. When the wheels fall off their not-very-cunning plan Joe takes twelve year old Dottie as his “retainer” and life indoors becomes hell on blocks.

Designer Gaelle Mellis has peeled open the trailer as if with some giant tin opener, a rather obvious metaphor for perusing the contents within. The play is, after all, the kind of naturalism Zola would recognise, and the literal squalor of the set with its piss-yellow walls, dead TVs and ankle deep garbage is emphasised by Mark Sheldon’s suitably murky lighting.

Director Hannah Macdougall initially allows the performances to get far too shrill - especially Lizzie Falkland as Sharla - but things steady with Rory Walker’s coolly reptilian Joe. His scenes with Michaela Cantwell, also excellent as the naif Dottie, are as accomplished as they are distressing. As Chris, William Allert brings real focus to the final scenes and David Mealor’s Ansel is creepily spineless.
They are not a pleasant bunch in Mr Tracy Letts’s play but Brink’s version, with production support from State Theatre, takes us from Jerry Springer stereotype to a morality drama that is comic, shocking- and surprisingly full of feeling.