



# UNDER THE WHALEBACK

BY RICHARD BEAN



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.

UNDER THE WHALEBACK  
Copyright © 2013, Richard Bean

All Rights Reserved

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that performance of UNDER THE WHALEBACK is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth), and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission for which must be secured from the Author's agent in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for UNDER THE WHALEBACK are controlled exclusively by DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC., 440 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance the written permission of DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC., and paying the requisite fee.

Inquiries concerning all other rights should be addressed to United Agents, 12-26 Lexington Street, W1F 0LE London, England. Attn: Rose Cobbe.

**SPECIAL NOTE**

Anyone receiving permission to produce UNDER THE WHALEBACK is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author. The following acknowledgments must appear on the title page in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play:

UNDER THE WHALEBACK was first presented  
by the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre.

UNDER THE WHALEBACK received its North American  
premiere at the Wilma Theater in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

UNDER THE WHALEBACK received its North American premiere at the Wilma Theater in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on March 6, 2013. It was directed by Blanka Zizka; the set design was by Matt Saunders; the costume design was by Oana Botez; the lighting design was by Allen Hahn; and the original music and sound design were by Daniel Perelstein. The cast was as follows:

CASSIDY/DARREL .....	Pearce Bunting
DARREL .....	Brian Ratcliffe
NORMAN/PAT .....	Keith Conallen
ROC .....	Ed Swidey
BAGNALL .....	Ross Beschler
BILL .....	H. Michael Walls
ELLY .....	Gaby Bradbury

## **The Kingston Jet**

CASSIDY: A deckhand, aged 55

DARREL: A deckie learner, aged 17

## **The James Joyce**

DARREL: A deckhand, aged 24

NORMAN: A deckhand, aged 28

ROC: A deckhand, aged 31

BAGNALL: The third hand, aged 36

BILL: A deckhand, aged 55

## **The Arctic Kestrel**

DARREL: Aged 54 (to be played by Cassidy from Act One)

PAT: Aged 29 (to be played by Norman from Act Two)

ELLY: Aged 9

## **SET**

The crew's quarters in the forecastle, under the whaleback of a '50s-built 800-ton sidewinder trawler. Eight bunks are arranged on two tiers, stage left being the starboard side and stage right the port side. The bunks are made of varnished plywood. Each has a curtain which can be drawn across. Centre stage is a table fixed to the floor and around it, and again fixed and built in, are upholstered benches. There are telltale differences for each ship but the basic structure is the same.

# UNDER THE WHALEBACK

## THE KINGSTON JET

*1965. The forecastle of The Kingston Jet. On the bulwark is a large black-and-white centrefold pin-up. The ship is in dock and there is a slight list to port. The sound of a ship's horn off. A different ship's horn replies, long and mournful, a different note. A third horn, very deep, joins in. Pause. The first horn sounds again in two short blasts. The second horn sounds in one short blast. Pause. The third horn sounds deep, long, and mournful. Voices off.*

CASSIDY. *(Off.)* Eh Ray! Where we going?! Where are you taking us this time you shitehawk!

RAY. *(Off.)* Mind your own fucking business, Cassidy!

CASSIDY. *(Off.)* Godshaven! Greenland! Get myself a nice little tight arsed Eskimo. Show this lad the northern lights! Ha, ha!

RAY. *(Off.)* Where's that dog of yours?

CASSIDY. *(Off.)* She's not coming this trip.

RAY. *(Off.)* No dog?!

CASSIDY. *(Off.)* No dog! No fucking wuff, wuff, wuff!

RAY. *(Off.)* Get yourself under that whaleback, Cass, you're pissed.

CASSIDY. *(Off.)* Get off me Ray!

RAY. *(Off.)* Alright! Eh, Snacker, give him a hand down that companionway. *(Cassidy falls down the companionway with a crash.)* You alright, Cass!

CASSIDY. *(Off.)* Yeah! I'm dead!

DARREL. *(Off.)* He's alright, sir. *(Enter Cassidy holding a tube design kit bag, sea boots, and a mattress. He is a fifty-five-year-old man. He wears a suit and a lemon-coloured shirt, the collar of which is over the lapels of his jacket. The shirt and cuffs are covered in blood. He is drunk.)*

CASSIDY. Dead! And gone to a better place. Ha, ha! (*Enter Darrel. He is seventeen and dressed in the fashions of the day. He has the same gear as Cassidy, but his is brand new.*)

DARREL. Have you hurt yourself?

CASSIDY. Banged my fucking head, didn't I.

DARREL. You're bleeding.

CASSIDY. Aye! Look son, you can call me Dad. Father and son. They'll all take the piss, but let them, I say, you can't break the bond of blood, blood is thicker than water. Call me "Dad." And I'll call you — son. Don't call me Daddy.

DARREL. I'd prefer Darrel, or Daz. My mates call me Daz.

CASSIDY. Blood! Blood's different. I'll call you son. And I'll learn you all I know about fishing. Distant water. Right, for starters, them stairs out there, them are not stairs, alright? — that's fishing for you, and ships, everything's got a different name. "Companionway." Remember it by thinking of your "companions" using it as the "way" — down or up. Now, the right way to come down a companionway is facing the steps with your toes in the gaps. (*He mimes it.*) If you try and come down facing forrard, forward, forrard, yeah? Are you with me?

DARREL. Forrard.

CASSIDY. — You'll likely as not go arse over tit.

DARREL. Like you did.

CASSIDY. Brilliant! That's my boy. Two. If you're carrying anything, one hand only, and leave one hand to hang on with. "One hand for you, and one for the ship."

DARREL. "One hand for you, and one for the ship."

CASSIDY. Oh lovely, you're getting the hang of it now. (*Cassidy takes a bottle of beer from his kit bag.*) Next! This ship, right, it's a fucking shit ship, alright? It's like a Grimsby ship. Shit. (*He puts the bottle of beer on the table and it rolls to port {stage right}.*) It's got a list. (*He opens the bottle and drinks.*) Here we are in Hull, in dock, a thousand miles from the Arctic and we already got a fucking list. (*He takes a second bottle from his bag and hands it to Darrel.*) Here, have a go. (*Darrel puts the bottle on the table — it rolls to port.*) That is a list to port. That's port, over there, and that's starboard. That's forrard, and that's aft.

DARREL. (*Pointing.*) Port, starboard, forrard, aft. (*Cassidy goes towards him and hugs him.*)

CASSIDY. Oh my son, my son! Ha, ha! I knew it! You got the salt

in your blood. You have to be born to this, you know. It's the worst fucking job in the world and only those who are born to it, who have got it in the blood, can do it. It's a terrible, terrible hard life and no-one should ever ask a man to go through what we have to go through but, you know — (*He burps.*) — someone's got to do it. (*Cassidy opens the second bottle and hands it to Darrel.*)

DARREL. Are we allowed to drink?

CASSIDY. No! Definitely not! Very dangerous. No spirituous liquor allowed on board. (*Cassidy drinks. Darrel drinks.*) Or swearing. Merchant Shipping Act of 1894. (*Tenderly.*) Look at you. You look a deckie. Put your collar over your jacket. Go on, son.

DARREL. I'm going to take my jacket off.

CASSIDY. No, no. Go on, son. Go on. Just give it a go. For me. Your collar. (*Cassidy arranges Darrel's collar over his jacket.*) There. You look good. That looks good. Here. (*Cassidy offers Darrel a cigarette.*)

DARREL. I don't smoke. Makes me feel sick.

CASSIDY. (*Laughing.*) No, no, no. You have to smoke. Here. Take it. (*Cassidy lights the cigarette and gives it to him. Darrel takes a drag.*) You're a natural, born to it. I'll bet your mam didn't want you to go, but if you've got it in the blood, huh, que sera fucking sera. Whatever will be will fucking be.

DARREL. She cried.

CASSIDY. The women, eh?! They say they don't want you to go to sea, they'd rather you got a job, I dunno, making fucking caravans out at Brough. Caravans. Ha! What sort of a man is proud to stand up and say "I make caravans for a living." A puff, that's who. A caravan puff. She doesn't want you to go to sea, does she?

DARREL. I said, she cried.

CASSIDY. Ha, ha, ha! Don't believe a fucking word of it, son. They can't get shot of us quick enough. At home, what, we're under their feet aren't we? Houses — I don't trust them, never have. I like a floor to move. You know you're alive then.

DARREL. Which bunk can I have?

CASSIDY. I'll learn you everything, son. Give me a chance to make up for, you know. I'm fucking sorry, kid. I haven't been much of a dad have I? I've tried, son, I did try. But ... I have to go to the pub, you see.

DARREL. (*Indicating a bunk.*) Can I take this one?

CASSIDY. They call us drunks, but who can judge us, eh? No fucking body! Three weeks gutting, gutting, gutting. Cold, fucking cold,

eh! There isn't a word for how cold it is. There's one for you. When your hands is frozen, when you can't fucking feel them no more, piss on them. It's hot, fucking boiling water, brings the blood back. Yeah, you're going to enjoy this trip. Piss on your hands. Write it down, that one. We're going to do this proper. Do you have a pen?

DARREL. Somewhere. I'm sure you're bleeding.

CASSIDY. Another thing! I'm not going to call you Snacker.

DARREL. What's a Snacker?

CASSIDY. Deckie Learner. Me, I'm going to call you son, and you can call me Dad.

DARREL. Please don't call me "son."

CASSIDY. Fuck 'em! I don't care what they say. Bastards. They'll call you Snacker, but I'm going to call you son. Fucking hell, I've got the right!

DARREL. I don't want you to call me son!

CASSIDY. Oh no. No, no, no. It's blood. It's love. My only son! *(Cassidy approaches him as if to hug him again. Darrel backs off and holds him at arm's length.)*

DARREL. *(Angry.)* Don't touch me! You're not my dad! I've never met you before in my life! I don't know you. I just met you out there, on the dock. You're not my father. You're drunk.

CASSIDY. Oh no, no, no, yes, yes, it's true, yes, I'm drunk but —

DARREL. You're Cassidy. I've heard about you.

CASSIDY. I'm really sorry, son.

DARREL. My dad's called Malcolm. He's a carpet fitter.

CASSIDY. A carpet fitter?

DARREL. That's his job, yeah. Malcolm Ascough. He fits carpets.

CASSIDY. What sort of carpets?

DARREL. Fitted carpets. *(Cassidy sits and laughs at this.)*

CASSIDY. I promise, on my mother's life, God bless her soul, I'm your father. *(Darrel turns away and throws his mattress into a bunk, and climbs in.)*

DARREL. I've heard about you.

CASSIDY. What do they say?

DARREL. Dunno.

CASSIDY. Headbanger? Headcase? I've heard the talk. Do they say I ride horses into pubs, eh? Yeah, well, I've only done that once or twice, maybe three times. I like horses. I could've been a horse jockey, but I was too big, and I was fishing — me whole fucking life. What else have you heard?



DARREL. They say, what I've heard is, that for a laugh you stick fireworks up your arse.

CASSIDY. I can't deny it. At sea you've got to make your own entertainment. Snowy Gordon took a photo last time but Boots wouldn't print it. Miserable bastards. I've got a Catherine Wheel in me bag as it happens. *(Darrel climbs out of the bunk.)*

DARREL. Everyone in Hull knows about you.

CASSIDY. You've got to understand one thing, son. Me father died at sea and his father died at sea, and his father afore him. Fishing, distant water.

DARREL. Your father, your grandfather, and your great-grandfather?

CASSIDY. All three of them, yeah. But my great-great-grandfather ... he's still alive. *(They both laugh.)* He's hiding. Ha! *(They laugh.)*

I like you.

DARREL. I'm not your son.

CASSIDY. What's the "carpet fitter" say about me?

DARREL. He says you're a one-man circus.

CASSIDY. Aye, I've got a few tricks.

DARREL. He says you live in Rayners.

CASSIDY. I've got a house, but our lass won't let me in. Rayners banned me once. The horse I was riding took a shit, in the snug bar. Fucking hell. It's not a big snug, is it, Rayners, and the horse was that big one of Northern Dairies, the brown Galloway with one eye. They banned me. Not for long. I started going in Criterion, didn't I, and I took everyone with me. So Rayner begged me to go back. He's changed the doors though. You can't get a horse in there now.

DARREL. Why do they call you Cassidy? Me dad says it's not your name.

CASSIDY. Because I'm wild like Butch Cassidy, but I haven't never killed no one. You heard of Butch Cassidy?

DARREL. No.

CASSIDY. He was wild but he didn't never kill no one, like me. He's in the cowboy books. Here. *(He slings Darrel a cowboy book from a pile propped up on the bench.)* You'll need to know me real name. It's Arthur Duggleby.

DARREL. I'm going to take this bunk. Will that be alright?

CASSIDY. Fuck 'em! My lad can have any bunk he likes. I coulda been a skipper, you know, son. Oh aye, I've got the ability but I'm colour blind, aren't I. Can't be a skipper if you can't tell red from green, you see. Ship's lights, innit. Red light's port, green light's starboard.

# UNDER THE WHALEBACK

by Richard Bean

6M, 1W (doubling)

The year is 1965. Aboard the Kingston Jet docked in Hull, England, a new teenage sailor, Daz, receives shocking information about his lineage from a legendary deckhand. Flash forward to 1972. A violent storm off the Icelandic coast thrashes the *James Joyce* and its crew of merchant fishermen, including Daz, with fatal consequences. Flash forward again to 2002. Daz is now 54, a father, and the curator of the *Arctic Kestrel* museum ship. A mysterious stranger unexpectedly enters after hours, making furious accusations and playing a dangerous game.

*"[Reminiscent] strongly of O'Neill's magnificent early sea plays ... If one function of theatre is to take you into other worlds, Bean's play succeeds in conveying the hermetic heroism of a dying trade."* —**The Guardian (London)**

*"[A] well-researched account of the coarse and perilous lives of English fishermen on the North Sea during the period of the industry's decline ... frank realism that is difficult to watch, and crude humor that is as much sad as funny."* —**StageMagazine.org**

*"[A] gripping look at a quaint foreign culture, full of foreboding and culminating in painful violence — much like McDonagh ... Heritage and legacy are the marrow of this play — not only the history of the fishing culture and its decay, but also the impact of individuals on later generations."* —**BroadStreetReview.com**

*"... an enigmatically-titled play of exhilarating power."* —**Variety**

**Also by Richard Bean**  
ONE MAN, TWO GUVNORS

ISBN 978-0-8222-2956-8



**DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.**

9 780822 229568