



THE LOW ROAD

BY
BRUCE NORRIS



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



THE LOW ROAD
Copyright © 2018, Bruce Norris

All Rights Reserved

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that performance of THE LOW ROAD 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 THE LOW ROAD 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 Harden Curtis Kirsten Riley Agency, 214 West 29th Street, Suite 120, New York, NY 10001. Attn: Mary Harden.

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce THE LOW ROAD 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, including printed or digital materials for advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. Please see your production license for font size and typeface requirements.

Be advised that there may be additional credits required in all programs and promotional material. Such language will be listed under the "Additional Billing" section of production licenses. It is the licensee's responsibility to ensure any and all required billing is included in the requisite places, per the terms of the license.

SPECIAL NOTE ON SONGS AND RECORDINGS

Dramatists Play Service, Inc. neither holds the rights to nor grants permission to use any songs or recordings mentioned in the Play. Permission for performances of copyrighted songs, arrangements or recordings mentioned in this Play is not included in our license agreement. The permission of the copyright owner(s) must be obtained for any such use. For any songs and/or recordings mentioned in the Play, other songs, arrangements, or recordings may be substituted provided permission from the copyright owner(s) of such songs, arrangements or recordings is obtained; or songs, arrangements or recordings in the public domain may be substituted.

THE LOW ROAD received its New York City premiere at the Public Theater (Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director; Patrick Willingham, Executive Director) on March 7, 2018. It was directed by Michael Greif; the scenic design was by David Korins; the costume design was by Emily Rebholz; the lighting design was by Ben Stanton; the sound design was by Matt Tierney; the music was composed by Mark Bennett; the production stage manager was Laura Smith. The cast was as follows:

PEG/SISTER ELIZABETH/DELILAH LOW Tessa Albertson
 FARMER/BROTHER PUGH/ED/FARADAY Max Baker
 GREASY-HAIRED MAN/MARTIN/
 ISAAC LOW Kevin Chamberlin
 ADAM SMITH Daniel Davis
 OLD TIZZY/MARY CLEERE/NTOMBI Crystal A. Dickinson
 DUKE OF B/BROTHER AMOS/
 PANDIT/FREDERICK Gopal Divan
 MRS. TREWITT/SISTER COMFORT/
 BELINDA/MARGARITA LOW Harriet Harris
 YOUNG JIM Jack Hatcher
 VIOLINIST Josh Henderson
 JOHN BLANKE Chukwudi Iwuji
 REDCOAT/HESSIAN/COURT OFFICER Johnny Newcomb
 JIM TREWITT Chris Perfetti
 PROSTITUTE/HIGHWAYMAN/
 CONSTANCE PUGH Susannah Perkins
 CAPTAIN SHIRLEY/RICHARD Richard Poe
 GUNNERY SGT. MANLEY/HESSIAN/
 ATTENDANT/COURT OFFICER Dave Quay
 REDCOAT/HESSIAN/COURT OFFICER Aaron Michael Ray
 MOHEGAN/HESSIAN/COURT OFFICER Joseph Soeder
 SLAVE MERCHANT/POOR TIM/
 HESSIAN/IVAN/LAGARDE Danny Wolohan

THE LOW ROAD was first presented by the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In the five years between the original production at the Royal Court (2013) and now, a number of changes have been made, mostly to the second act. These changes, I think, clarify and sharpen the play, making this my preferred version for performance.

The sharp-eyed reader may also note that the name of the central character has been changed to “Jim Trewitt” from the London version in which he was, in an unintentional act of foreshadowing, called “Jim Trumpett”... The unfortunate election results of 2016 notwithstanding, the play was never intended as a critique of any specific president, no matter how repulsive the resemblance might be.

—B. N.

CHARACTERS

ADAM SMITH
MOHEGAN MALE
SHADOWY FIGURE (GREASY-HAIRED MAN)
MRS. TREWITT
PEG
OLD ONE-EYED TIZZY
YOUNG JIM
CAPTAIN SHIRLEY
GUNNERY SGT. MANLEY
REDCOAT
HENRY SCOTT, 3RD DUKE OF BUCCLEUCH
JIM TREWITT
PROSTITUTE
FARMER
SLAVE MERCHANT
FEMALE SLAVE
JOHN BLANKE
HIGHWAYMAN/CONSTANCE PUGH
BROTHER PUGH
BROTHER AMOS
SISTER ELIZABETH
SISTER COMFORT
POOR TIM
HESSIANS 1, 2, 3 & 4
BELINDA
IVAN
ED
RICHARD
PANDIT
MARTIN
NTOMBI
ATTENDANT
MALES 1, 2, & 3
FEMALE
SECURITY POLICE
ISAAC LOW

MARGARITA LOW
DELILAH LOW
FARADAY (SERVANT)
LAGARDE
MARY CLEERE
FREDERICK
OFFICERS 1, 2 & 3
ALIENS 1 & 2
MOHEGAN SCOUT

NOTES

The set should be open and flexible and suggest the plain, white-washed interior of a New England meetinghouse circa 1790. Several doors open onto the stage. All other scenery—stairs, tables, etc.—should be introduced as necessary to establish a scene. When Act 2 begins, the visual change should temporarily erase the look of Act 1, then return to the original configuration for the remainder of the act.

The time is from 1758–1776, with a brief detour to the present.

As to accents—since no one really knows what anyone sounded like in the late 1700s, I'd suggest some distinction be made between the English characters (such as Shirley) and the thoroughly American ones. And if Jim's accent is anachronistically American-contemporary, all the better.

(N.B. "Trewitt" is pronounced "true-it.")

“Is it equitable that ninety-nine, rather nine hundred ninety-nine, should suffer for the Extravagance or Grandeur of one? Especially when it is consider’d that men frequently owe their Wealth to the Impoverishment of their Neighbors.”

—from a letter to the *New York Gazette*
signed “A.B.C. & c.,” 1765

THE LOW ROAD

ACT 1

Before house lights darken, a door at the back of the stage opens and Adam Smith—that Adam Smith—enters, walking stick in hand, dressed in a greatcoat and tricorne hat. He carefully removes these, hanging them on pegs, then shuffles toward a small lectern, clutching a leather folio. A sign reads: “Mr. Adam Smith, LL.D. and F.R.S.” and smaller, “Professor of Moral Philosophy, University of Glasgow.” He opens the folio to the first page, mutters to himself, squints into the auditorium.

SMITH. (*Pronounced Scottish accent.*) Lights, please?

The house lights dim. He clears his throat, produces a small atomizer, administers two squirts to his tonsils, clears throat again, then:

Chapter One.

Thunder, lightning, darkness. We hear a thin tune played on a Native American flute. Out of the darkness, a Mohegan male steps into a shaft of moonlight. He assumes a series of ritual postures as Smith relates the following.

The Mohegan people of present-day Connecticut believed their forefather to be a benevolent giant whose wife was a spirit of the trees, and that thunder and lightning were the result of the married couple quarreling in the sky. At the approach of a thunderstorm, they would beseech these magical ancestors to restore peace to the heavens and bestow blessings upon themselves and their grandchildren. Of course, as we now know, such blessings would ne'er come to pass. Quite the reverse; their lands were to be confiscated, some would be placed in internment camps, and, in subsequent

generations, their descendants would operate gambling casinos and sell discount cigarettes.

The Mohegan hears a noise from offstage and pulls a knife from his waist. A gunshot rings out. He drops dead and the flute music stops.

This particular narrative, however, does not concern them.

A mysterious man in a cloak and a broad-brimmed hat steps out of the shadows—a smoking pistol in one hand, a covered basket in the other.

Nor does it concern this man, though he will come to play a dramatic role in its unfolding some minutes from now.

The man places the basket in front of a wooden door, knocks, and exits again. The door opens to reveal Mrs. Trewitt, candle in hand, with Peg, a prostitute, and Old One-Eyed Tizzy, a hunchbacked African slave. Mrs. Trewitt kneels to inspect the basket, extracting a letter.

Rather, it is with regard to the individual within this basket that we shall confine the account, and the course of encounters that would determine his education, his progress, and his eventual undoing.

Another rumble of thunder. A title reads: "SOUTHERN MASSACHUSETTS, 1758." From the basket, the cries of an infant.

MRS. T. (*Reading letter.*) *To whomsoever Providence and I have delivered this bastard child: Circumstances force me to beg you care for him and bring him into manhood and should you be good enough to do so, in his seventeenth year you shall find yourself generously compensated. Signed "G. Washington of Virginia."*

She picks up the basket as Smith speaks.

SMITH. The woman was called Dorothy Trewitt, or Dolly to some. And as she had none of her own, and reasoning correctly that the child would occupy but a tenth the space of an adult and consume correspondingly little—

PEG. (*To Mrs. T.*) Shall we bring him in, then?

SMITH. —she took him in, as she'd taken in the girls of her establishment before him.

MRS. T. But only fer the night.

Festive music as we move inside what is clearly a brothel. Prostitutes in petticoats dance with old men and drunken British regulars. A half-naked prostitute screams as a soldier chases her through the room. Mrs. Trewitt sits with the baby as Smith continues.

SMITH. The tavern stood upon a crossroads. And as the ladies within had no marketable *skills* to speak of, they set about to purvey the only commodity available to them.

The music and debauchery conclude as lights change to morning and birds begin to chirp. Others exit, leaving Mrs. Trewitt and Tizzy behind with Sgt. Manley face-down on a table.

Mrs. Trewitt sat 'til morning with the child. But milk to soothe its hunger was not to be had, as cattle were scarce and even swine a luxury. And thus, lacking other recourse, she husbanded the labour of bees to supplement her income.

A door opens and a hungover redcoat stumbles downstairs, fastening his trousers.

MRS. T. (*Proffering a jar.*) Pot of honey fer yer family, sir?

REDCOAT. (*As he exits.*) Fuck off.

SMITH. And she discovered that if she were to place the tip of her finger into the honey pot and from there to the child's mouth he would suck it clean directly.

The baby gurgles. A title reads: "WHAT THE WIDOW TREWITT FORECAST FOR THE BASTARD CHILD."

MRS. T. (*To the infant.*) Shhh... What a greedy little fella y'are. Greedy, greedy, wee fella with no manners at all. But you'll grow up to be a gent someday, won't ya? *Oh yes ya will!* A right gent with servants to serve ya and shine the brass buckles on your best boots, and you'll wear a pointed hat with a feather sticking outa the top, and you'll sit atop the best white horse and ev'ry time ya ride past folks will look up and say *what a fine gent he is.*

Old Tizzy hobbles up on her cane, smoking a clay pipe.

SMITH. But not all in the household were in agreement as to his destiny.

TIZZY. (*Caribbean accent.*) Can't come to no good.

Smith withdraws.

MRS. T. What can't?

TIZZY. 'Tiz a *bad* child, miz.

MRS. T. What an awful thing to say.

TIZZY. Somtin' 'bout him.

MRS. T. How could there be any fault in a dear wee baby?

TIZZY. Got hisself the mark.

MRS. T. What mark?

TIZZY. Seen it dere on his backside. Iz a perfectly round spot like a copper penny been fastened direckly to his rump.

MRS. T. P'raps it portends a great fortune.

TIZZY. Nooo. Somtin' wrong with dat child.

A door opens and Captain Shirley—tall, English, brisk, polite—enters, swagger stick in hand.

SHIRLEY. Morning.

MRS. T. Morning, sir. I trust ya slept well?

SHIRLEY. Tolerably well—if not altogether soundly.

MRS. T. Tizzy, fetch tea fer the commander.

SHIRLEY. With sugar, please.

MRS. T. Will honey do?

SHIRLEY. (*To himself.*) Oh, *balls*.

MRS. T. 'Twas such a rain we had last night I hope we kept ya dry.

SHIRLEY. Adequately dry, though I must report the *bedding* falls something short of hygienic.

MRS. T. I'll give 'em a wash.

SHIRLEY. But if I might speak to you on an unrelated matter— (*To Manley.*)—look sharp, Sergeant.

Shirley raps smartly on the table. Manley awakens with a start.

MRS. T. (*To Old Tizzy.*) And tea for the sergeant as well.

SHIRLEY. Now Mrs. Trewitt. I'm sure I don't need to tell you we live in contentious times.

MRS. T. O, I *know*.

SHIRLEY. I mean, here we are doing our level best to conclude this business with the bloody French, while at the same time the lack of hospitality my fellows receive in the cities is positively scandalous—

MRS. T. O, it's *true*.

Peg—the prostitute from earlier—has entered and timidly crept up to Shirley.

SHIRLEY. —and I'd like to know on whose behalf they suppose we're fighting? (*To Peg.*) What's this?

PEG. (*Clears throat, then in a small voice.*) You ain't paid me.

SHIRLEY. Hm? Couldn't hear.

MRS. T. Not now, Peg.

PEG. But he ain't paid, miz.

MANLEY. (*To Peg, Cockney accent.*) Shut up.

SHIRLEY. (*To Manley.*) Steady on, Sergeant. (*To Peg.*) What's your name, child?

PEG. (*In a small voice.*) It's Peg.

SHIRLEY. Ah, yes.

PEG. I'm the one what sucked your cock last night.

SHIRLEY. And a cracking job you did of it. But: I *am* having a *bit* of a chat—

PEG. (*To Mrs. T.*) Why izzit they don't *pay* like the others, miz? 'Tain't right.

Manley roughly shoves Peg to the ground.

MANLEY. Shut it, ya bitch.

SHIRLEY. (*To Manley.*) Now, see here. We'll have none of that.

MANLEY. Aye, sir.

Peg creeps meekly away as the others continue.

MRS. T. It's just my girls ain't been paid in two months, and they got so little to eat—

SHIRLEY. Mrs. Trewitt. You provide commendable service to my men and in return we provide you with protection. Now, surely that's a fair exchange, yes?

THE LOW ROAD

by Bruce Norris

13 men, 4 women (doubling, flexible casting)

Abandoned as an infant, Jim Trewitt finds little affection for anyone or anything, except his own self-advancement. After a chance encounter with Adam Smith, Jim decides to put his faith in the free market, becoming America's first laissez-faire capitalist. Soon his path to riches becomes entangled with that of an educated slave, who knows from experience that one person's profit is another's loss. From Tony- and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Bruce Norris comes an epic parable about the cost of inequality.

"This latest offering from the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning Clybourne Park sustains the bustle, buoyancy and unblinking bawdiness of novels like Henry Fielding's Tom Jones."
—**The New York Times**

"...[a] rancid, rollicking picaresque... Its parody of the classic young-man-sets-out-to-make-his-fortune story is smart, well-crafted...[and] darkly funny... THE LOW ROAD is full of articulate fury, and articulate villainy too."
—**New York Magazine**

"In his sensationally prickly and entertaining new play... Bruce Norris follows the money as it takes him down twisting and treacherous paths. ...Norris aims liberating arrows of skepticism at a diverse range of targets. Colonial America, colonies of bees, slavery, charity, piety, hypocrisy, highway robbery, financial chicanery, income inequality: These are just a few of the concerns in which THE LOW ROAD invests its satire."
—**Time Out New York**

Also by Bruce Norris
CLYBOURNE PARK
THE PAIN AND THE ITCH

ISBN 978-0-8222-3907-9



DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.

9 780822 239079