

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## Whistling Psyche

Sebastian Barry

Almeida

(2004)

This small-scale two-hander is a real oddity in almost every sense. It is set in an ornate station waiting room that, it transpires, is some limbo "on the edge of perdition" but whether a prelude to Heaven or Hell is uncertain.

The two protagonists may be ships (or trains) that pass in the night but they are also outsiders with a shared destiny.

James Miranda Barry has recently been the subject of a novel (soon to become, it is rumoured, a Channel 4 Film) by Patricia Duncker. This dangerously cultured, Cork-born, shrimp of a man was constantly followed by his devoted manservant and poodle; the latter is the physical Psyche of the title. However, the play concentrates far more on Barry's psyche in the more common sense.

Never knowing his father, he followed his indigent mother until her commitment to an asylum. Then, at 13, he was taken up by a South American soldier, Captain Miranda and recreated as a putative army doctor.

Against all odds, he became a medical hero in the early Eighteenth Century on the battlefields and with his work amongst lepers and the mad.

**Reviewer:** [Philip Fisher](#)