

# Cultural Daily

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## Yacht Isn't Quite Seaworthy at MTC

David Sheward · Wednesday, June 6th, 2018

A wealthy parent confronts his son's economically strapped teacher over a failing grade for an essay on *The Great Gatsby*. As the scene progresses, the dad sits at the instructor's desk, questions her qualifications, her teaching methods, and finally slaps a handful of bills down. The teacher is appalled at the blatant bribe, but she hesitates for a split second, giving the obnoxious parent his opening. That's the arresting opening sequence of Anthony Giardina's intriguing, but ultimately uneven new play *Dan Cody's Yacht*, now playing at Manhattan Theater Club's Off-Broadway space at City Center. It turns out Kevin O'Neill, the arrogant briber, wants something besides a better score on his kid's homework. The teacher, Cara Russo, is the main advocate for a bill to merge two Boston suburban school districts: ritzy Stillwell, where Kevin lives and Cara teaches, and lower-class Patchett where Cara lives. Kevin offers the financially struggling Cara his considerable investing acumen in return for dropping her support of the measure.



Rick Holmes and Kristen Bush in *Dan Cody's Yacht*.

Credit: Joan Marcus

It's a gripping premise and Giardina has added several factors to up the stakes. For instance, both protagonists have children approaching senior year and their college future depends on the vote. In addition, the central theme is a compelling one, crystallized by the symbolism of the title. The titular watercraft is the fictional one Gatsby sees as a harbinger of the status and privilege he desires and ultimately achieves. Kevin invokes it as a glimpse of the world Cara cannot touch but sees all the time through the parents of her well-to-do students.

The theme of wealthy privilege versus idealist near-poverty is a worthy one, but Giardina adds too much freight to his boat and it sinks before the final fade-out. The main question of the school vote is resolved halfway through and more issues arise which are not fully developed. Kevin announces he's gay in the first scene, but we get no hint of any romantic attachment or how his queerness influences his actions. His son Conor is a handsome shadow, while Cara's daughter Angela is more complex and appealing (Both kids speak far more eloquently than any teenagers I've ever encountered). There are intense confrontations, but too many of the plot points are just not believable. Would Cara really recklessly invest all of her money with the impulsive Kevin? Predictably her rash decisions led to a bad outcome. This is a disappointment since Giardina's last major New York production, *The City of Conversation* was such an insightful and deep portrayal of political conflict.



Casey Whyland and Kristen Bush in *Dan Cody's Yacht*.

Credit: Joan Marcus

Luckily, Doug Hughes delivers a sleek and sure staging while Rick Holmes and Kristen Bush are capable and intense sparring partners as Kevin and Cara. Casey Whyland captures Angela's fear and confidence while Roxanna Hope Radja provides sass and spice as Cara's blunt-talking best friend. John Lee Beatty created the stylish sets suggesting the contrasting economic environments.

June 6—July 8. Manhattan Theater Club at City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St., NYC. Tue 7pm, Wed 2pm & 7pm, Thu—Fri 8pm, Sat 2pm & 8pm, Sun 2pm. Running time: two hours including intermission. \$90. (212) 581-1212. [www.nycitycenter.org](http://www.nycitycenter.org).

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