



THE BABYLON LINE

BY
RICHARD
GREENBERG



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



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THE BABYLON LINE was originally presented by New York Stage and Film (Johanna Pfaelzer, Artistic Director; Thomas Pearson, Executive Director) and Vassar College in the Powerhouse Theater (Ed Cheetham, Producing Director; Michael Sheehan, Producing Director/Education Director) in Poughkeepsie, New York, opening on June 26, 2014. It was directed by Terry Kinney. The cast was as follows:

AARON PORT Josh Radnor
JOAN DELLAMOND Leslie Bibb
FRIEDA COHEN Randy Graff
ANNA CANTOR Maddie Corman
MIDGE BRAVERMAN Julie Halston
JACK HASSENPFUG Frank Wood
MARC ADAMS Michael Oberholtzer

THE BABYLON LINE was originally produced by Lincoln Center Theater (André Bishop, Producing Artistic Director; Adam Siegel, Managing Director) in New York City, opening on November 10, 2016. It was directed by Terry Kinney. The set design was by Richard Hoover; the costume design was by Sarah J. Holden; the lighting design was by David Weiner; the sound design was by Rob Milburn and Michael Bodeen; the projection design was by Darrel Maloney; the hair and wig design was by Wendy Parson; and the production stage manager was Denise Yaney. The cast was as follows:

AARON PORT Josh Radnor
JOAN DELLAMOND Elizabeth Reaser
FRIEDA COHEN Randy Graff
ANNA CANTOR Maddie Corman
MIDGE BRAVERMAN Julie Halston
JACK HASSENPFUG Frank Wood
MARC ADAMS Michael Oberholtzer

CHARACTERS

AARON PORT

JOAN DELLAMOND

FRIEDA COHEN

ANNA CANTOR

MIDGE BRAVERMAN

JACK HASSENPFUG

MARC ADAMS

THE BABYLON LINE

ACT ONE

AARON. The End.

...

By which I mean what exactly?
Once, briefly, I loved someone who hated quotations:
she claimed they'd ruined her life.

Nevertheless:

"Death sanctions all stories,"

wrote Walter Benjamin.

By which he meant that not until people die
can we know how their stories end.

But do we, really, even then?

I am, myself, a lapsed atheist—

which is to say I continue to believe there is no God
but suspect for me He might make an exception—
and even *I'm* willing to think that that final ending
is, possibly, not so final.

...

But this is no kind of introduction.

All right, then:

The year is 2015 and I am eighty-six years old.

I look wonderful.

So much has turned out nicely.

...

And that's about that for 2015.

Listen:

There's a story I've been meaning to tell
and, I guess, avoiding
for a long time.

It's a simple story about a few events

that took place in late fall and early winter
forty-eight years ago
and I may not come off well in it.

But
if not now—when?

So.

Okay:

The year is 1967 and I am thirty-eight years old.

I look fretful.

So much has turned out badly.

*Lights on a high school classroom. Night. Aaron is with Frieda
and Anna.*

FRIEDA. We wanted

Anna and I

to take Contemporary Events and Politics

but that sold out like a shot

when they announced that Dr. Rose Franzblau might be

a guest speaker

which

I hear

is not the case—

So back to registration and they ask us if we'd like to take Flower
Arranging, instead.

It's taught by John Scorfutto?

You know,

he owns Hempstead Turnpike Bloomery?

(Oh that's right, you're not from here.)

Well, I never use them.

Everything there is carnations; so cheap.

Anyway, when it comes to Flower Arranging

I think *I'm* more of an expert

than John Scorfutto

Whereas *Anna*, whenever *she's* tried,

her flowers come out looking like gloves that nobody's wearing

So, no-thank-you to Flower Arranging

and they wonder, can we do Wednesdays?

As it happens, we *can* and writing was available so here we are.

ANNA. Actually, for me there was more to it than that.
I've always been a good writer
I won a writing award in high school.

FRIEDA. Which was before they invented the pencil.
You didn't have a dirty fingernail,
you had to recite from *memory*.
No I'm kidding,
However, my question is:
will we be, in this class, expected actually to write?

AARON. It's a writing class.

FRIEDA. Uh-huh.
Now that perturbs me a little.

AARON. Don't let it.

FRIEDA. I'm no James Michener.

AARON. I should hope not.

FRIEDA. I'm not claiming to be James Michener.

ANNA. Can we write about Current Affairs?

AARON. You may.

ANNA. Because that was the class we wanted to take.

AARON. I believe I knew that.

ANNA. Though this is exciting, too.

FRIEDA. But we haven't been formally introduced:

I'm Frieda Cohen

You may have seen my house on the way over.

It's the one with the well-known garden:

if you haven't seen it in person,

it was featured in *Newsday*.

My husband, Lou, is a chemist

and I have two boys

Todd is nineteen, Brian is seventeen—

they're the joy of my life

And now let me introduce you

to one of the most magnificent people you're ever going to meet:

This is Anna Cantor

who, for whatever reason, got started late in

the child-bearing game
and has two adorable five-year-olds, Seth and Abby,
who are twins!

ANNA. You don't have to tell him they're twins.

What? I have two five-year-olds
who *aren't* twins?

FRIEDA. I was just pointing out

ANNA. (*To Aaron.*) Twins are a lot more common than is generally
known.

Midge enters.

FRIEDA. Midge! I didn't know you were taking this class!

MIDGE. French Cooking was full.

FRIEDA. Anna, you know Midge—from the Sisterhood.

ANNA. I've known her twenty years, you introduce us every time
we meet. Hi, Midge. You look terrific!

MIDGE. Vitamin E.

FRIEDA. Mr. Port, this is another uncommonly superb person—

Midge Braverman. Her husband is a CPA.

Her son is, what, fifteen? Michael. And her other son, Stewart,
is a year or so older.

AARON. Nice to meet you.

MIDGE. (*Re: Aaron.*) He's a baby!

FRIEDA. Only comparatively—

AARON. I'm a lot older than I—

MIDGE. *This* is going to teach us to write?

AARON. I hope so—

Jack Hassenpflug enters, finds a seat.

FRIEDA. This gentleman I don't know, you're on your own with him.

AARON. If you'll excuse me. I have to...

He heads for his desk.

Marc Adams enters, pauses in doorway, tentative.

FRIEDA. Oh my God—I don't believe it.

MIDGE. Who is that?

ANNA. Marge Adams' boy, Marc.

FRIEDA. It's such a pity.

MIDGE. Which is Marge Adams?

FRIEDA. You'd only know her from the PTA, but she was before your time.

MIDGE. She's not Sisterhood?

FRIEDA. Marge *Adams*?

ANNA. He's not right, this Marc.

FRIEDA. He's not right in the head.

He had so much promise.

ANNA. A sports star

FRIEDA. A bully, though, kind of a mean kid—

MIDGE. What happened?

ANNA and FRIEDA. Drugs.

MIDGE. Ooohh. What drugs?

ANNA. Dope.

FRIEDA. And marijuana.

MIDGE. (*Getting it.*) He was a user.

ANNA. This brilliant kid, isn't that terrible?

FRIEDA. On course to be valedictorian.

ANNA. Now all he does is take long walks and smile at everybody.

FRIEDA. Hello, he says. "Hello! Hello!"

ANNA. It's—the loss—

FRIEDA. The loss.

Marc sees them.

MARC. Hello! Hello!

He finds a seat.

ANNA. In a way, he's pleasant.

MIDGE. Such a shame

ANNA. It happens.

MIDGE. These times.

FRIEDA. And he's taking this class. *Guttenyu.*

THE BABYLON LINE

by Richard Greenberg

3M, 4W

Levittown, 1967. It's the first night of an adult-ed creative writing course in a classroom at the local high school. The teacher, Aaron Port, lives in Greenwich Village and reverse commutes once a week on the Long Island Rail Road's Babylon line. His students are a mixed bag: Frieda Cohen, Anna Cantor, and Midge Braverman, housewives all, embrace each other on arrival, and update their running checklists on each other's kids, husbands, and lawns. Their opening gambit is to tell Aaron in no uncertain terms that they are only there because French Cooking and Flower Arranging are full. The two men in the class, Jack Hassenpflug and Marc Adams, sit silently at their desks. One final student, Joan Dellamond, rushes in late—but she actually does intend to be there. An aspiring writer troubled by a failing marriage, Joan has little in common with her neighbors. And yet, she does seek connection. Maybe this class will bring her, and Aaron, something that neither quite expects.

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"THE BABYLON LINE is by Richard Greenberg; barbed repartee, shiny epigrams, and baroque arias of loss and longing all come with the territory. ...when Greenberg's creations babble on, you can't help but lean in."

—**Time Out New York**

"...the quiet, funny script resonates with the evergreen themes of community, desire, and self-discovery. It's a memorable ride."

—**Entertainment Weekly**

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