

MAXINE GADD / Two plays and Babylon is Gone, I Weep for Babylon

Pre-remains, a play

PERSONAE

Cole

Amaryllis

Trillium

Jack Tar

Great White Slug

COLE: Amaryllis yu survive pellucid, pertinent to yr field, glad to be alive over winter in spite of the sad stick brown of sleepers and the dead.

AMARYLLIS: (looking in a mirror) Get away from me, Cole, you giddy moth. I will slap yu back into the Blackhole and still feel remorse for yr bad-ass bravery. Oh, yeah, I'll be bleeding milk for all the molds, the earthworms that ignore me and my immortal corpse, sandy mind of some lady.

COLE: Enter elements of the fat starved, the happy hikers, the bicycle with the wratched naked rim, Kelvinists, Enochians, parchments of soaked and sun-dried grass on the river bank, its salacious and despondent muds and their mudders, elephants tyrannosaurids, sunken fork-lifts, lined dependencies, quarked and desperate markets, cores of uncles made an unmade again. We saunter along longing for parched canyons outside of poisoned botanical caves. I see yu sinking past the Solstice. I'm sick of pity as yu are; yr only chance is to blat out yr prologema. Can I make a dying flower sing?

AMARYLLIS: Not a chance in a million, ancient cohort. Not one of yr local hills or dales meet me long enough for anything but water bane. Where the hell can I find a channel?

ENTER TRILLIUM.

COLE AND AMARYLLIS SHRIEK: Trillium!

TRILLIUM: So you think you're nicer than Jesus.

AMARYLLIS: (sings) I keep people alive in winter
and part of the summer too-oo
And the only only thing
I ever did wrong . . .

ALL THREE: Was to keep her from the froggy froggy dew.

COLE: Let's get bloated, shall we; I have brung a long dead duck such as my
Neanderthal ancestors did in, hanging in a cave for the bats to shit on, for the
decimated Saber Tooth to die for.

AMARYLLIS: Cole is so sourly dour.

COLE: Some one buried my river in tar.

TRILLIUM: Jack Tar stops the sailor from slipping and falling to the reeling,
yawing awful boat on an ocean. Yu should rejoice in Jack Tar eliminating all
those ugly ducks.

COLE: How hard it is for the delicate to wallow. Somewhere there must be
old loves to give yu an electronic kiss. Enough Martian sunlight. A lifetime
membership in plexiglass, vinyl to whine up into stringed blues. In Chinatown
I've observed marble lilies, silver white, persistently. . . . But the tide is coming up
Reefer Street and soles or souls of the ocean are pushing me with their martini
cool heels. There's a HERizon to be on, Amaryllis . . .

ENTER JACK TAR.

JACK TAR: Yu mean whore-izon, yu tarts.

COLE, TRILLIUM AND AMARYLLIS SCREAM.

ENTER THE GREAT WHITE SLUG, HUMMING AND HAWING AND LOOKING FOR A PAIR OF GLASSES IN THE BUSHES WHICH IT DOES FIND USELESS AND SLIDES OVER and then slimes Jack Tar and glides away entrancing the audience out into the sunshine of another devastating day or even a dusty old corridor.

A ballet ensues in which everyone is one's favorite spineless creature. Some rub their wings together and make an awesome music. Others dissolve into cosmic goo.

Pash Play

PERSONAE

Postula

Miss Press

Trot

Deedee

Doris Day

Chief Cathy

Diva, the God of Wine

POSTULA: Oh I've quite lost all decency since this agley spate of novels; de-sensey is also gone, density trying to mingle and really, my dear, not making it.

MISS PRESS: Sorry darling, I bethought I espied alley-mist.

TROT: That is not a thot that can be had except you had it. Why, by Chance?

DEEDEE: Dare you invoke that august name? What are your credentials?

TROT: Why I have not. My name is "Trot."

POSTULA: Surely not Mistress Trot from the castle laundry?

TROT: My great Gran, man.

MISS PRESS: Yu mean, ma'm, wham bam.

TROT: I appreciate your comment. Indeed, miss, it goes up by the hour.

POSTULA: So you are her great grant daughter.

TROT: Alas it is so. What can Trot do but dot thots an laugh down the dam with the boys, all through the night the ripening of that newly set concrete, sighing under the river.

DORIS DAY: My, what a fine clean poem you have here and many a debble den up there in the Dracula mountain! Chief, GET IN HERE AND SETTLE THE NATIVES.

CHIEF CATHY: The natives are less or more but always settled about the settlements. And it's hard to know unless you have it the trouble you're in.

POSTULA: Sediment of industrial ooze, turpentine and benzine and other heavy weighing oils on our waters. Often I bless the whale that was killed for my foremothers' beauty the suppleness of their skins, their poison assent. Oh there I go, pulled down by DOS again.

TROT: DOS is sod spelled backwards.

MISS PRESS: Same thing only more useful.

POSTULA: The auld sod.

DIVA, THE GOD OF WINE APPEARS AND everybuddy is awed by the Plutonic Power of his beauty. Also impressive are the gold embroidered beast and long tales floating on dark and stormy winter night.

POSTULA: We're speechless, Lord.

DIVA: What do you want? I have everything here, cocaine, smack, uppers, downers . . .

SHE WHIPS OPEN HER JACKET TO REVEAL INTRICATE POCKETS FULL OF STUFF.

TROT: This guy has no lush breasts but a veritable pharmacy in his waistcoat. He seems to be the butcher, the baker, the candle stick maker or I'm not florist for Queen Anne, which I'm not because I'm Trot.

DIVA: Dare you look at me, you, a mere figment of some laggard's imagination?

TROT: I am a thought, hence universal. Anyone could conceive of me, given german circumstances. Hence my innocence.

POSTULA: Guilty as charged, You Honour, but you know what you can do with your rap.

DIVA: Well, listen, you guys. It's been a slice. We'll contINTINTINue all night.

Babylon is Gone, I Weep for Babylon

Where has she gone?

That day she was sitting on a foldable camp chair in her red coat and wide-brimmed pink hat, her tracts to her left in a portable shelf of Bibles and literature organized as a wall to protect her from the corner of Hastings and Abbott. She it was who could shout up from the portable chair a mighty voice and a message that cowed the most aggressive young or old male who towered over her, shouting.

The first time I saw her she was further east on Hastings between Funky Winkerbean's pub and Save On Meats. Or was it the Army and Navy? As I passed her she sang like the radical diva she was,

"Glory unto the Lord
Glory unto the Lord
From the rising of the Sun
To the falling of the Moon"

She had my soul.

For a while I was a regular, walking by her, bending a little in my speedy fear-space-time continuum to listen for a song. But in a short time there was no more singing. Just loud clear ravings in the distance then, "Glory Glory Glory, Praise the Lord."

Politely I would repeat her approbation, thinking, "Just Who Is this Lord." One day I paid her a dollar for one of her tracts, took it home and was so scandalized by her Divine Intolerance I stupidly threw it out.

At a certain point in twenty or less years she moved westward to the corner of Hastings and Abbott Street where the long derelict hunk of bricks and space still called Woodward's was: sometimes a movie set, once a W art show and before that the most useful, varied and affordable food, shoes, clothing, gardening tool, spring bulb and clothing store in town. For years I kept a pair of soft leathered but structured boots I bought there. Across Hastings on the east side of Abbott was a

large laundromat. A reportedly nicely-kept upstairs SRO. And a genuine cobbler's shop that repaired our shoes for 'm raving from hindsight, my brave preacher. Everything wears out.

Across from her she still had the patrons of a real country western bar to rave against as well as the shoe repair. And directly across, more incidental gatherings of grey and dusty ghostly old young people. Sometimes she disappeared but always came back again. I asked people at Carnegie and someone, was it Muriel Marjorie, said that she went back to Jamaica, on to Africa and Europe to attend congresses of street preachers.

I once helped her haul her operation aboard the Granville bus going west. She seemed profoundly embarrassed.

I saw her again at the corner the Woodward's protest group had occupied for three months before it had been removed. The Homeless Demonstration had had a fortuitous summer, warm and dry, even at night. Finally, with shrinking days and cold, came the rain and flu. People had extended tarps from the old Woodward's overhang, which supported a ladder for protesters and acted as a davit from which the honey buckets of the inside occupiers were delivered down to the people on the street, the tenters, who took them over to the Dera Pub to dispose of in their toilets. That's another story.

Woodwards became guarded by Sikh warriors in Security uniforms and even a dog or two. Hoardings crowing "An Intellectual Property" with pictures of local artists went up to prevent further occupations. Headlines told of high finance developers. People crumbled in the winter.

One day the Woodward's civic process took the public into a large room with models on tables presented by competing developers. The main body of the store had been exploded then reduced to some possibly dangerous dust and rubble but they kept or tried to keep the woodframe building on the corner. It was here that the promises of a beautiful life replacing this banal history were shown.

Wandering about musing on these dreams I met Carnegie community poet Delany Miriam Azreal. We were both bummed out by this show and its people. We escaped back to Hastings Street and found the preacher lady on her chair weeping real tears. Delany and I stopped and knelt down on the sidewalk beside her. I asked, "Why are you crying?" And she said, "I am weeping for Babylon. Babylon will be no more."

"You mean all around here," I asked, pointing to the gloomy street, the poor people crouching in door wells, and the great brickhulk under which we sat.

"Poor Babylon," she cried, not loudly but deeply, warmly.

"Is it those images of new buildings inside this door?" I asked.

"Babylon, Babylon is lost," she cried.

Delany and I sat beside her on the sidewalk assenting with our own sorrow her sorrow. She was indeed right, as right as anyone can be. Then, looking up at new towers everywhere in distant parts of town outside of the Downtown Eastside, up town, downtown, Yale town and remembering all my walks; the accumulating high rises of the West End; and Coal Harbour, which once been a thriving ship building village. And I remembered the dream of old-time Sixties poet and musician Howard how all the town of Vancouver was to be drowned like Atlantis under the ocean, this prophecy all but accepted totally now by climatologists as being possible by as early as 2012. I told her of this prophecy that is coming to be true; the polar ice caps and the remnants of once vast glaciers are all melting.

"One day everything here will be under the ocean. This Babylon will be no more."

She dried her tears and we said goodbye to go to our own doomed homes in the Downtown Eastside. I looked back and saw her crying and singing, "Oh Babylon, poor Babylon, Babylon will be no more."