

“getting it straight”:
Ambivalent Misalignment and the Kinship Idiom
in the Drama of Sharon Pollock

by

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This study explores Canadian playwright Sharon Pollock’s work under the conceptual and formal framework of what I call “ambivalent misalignment” and “the kinship idiom:” the former in terms of relationships between individuals and groups, and as a characteristic dramatic form; and the latter, as both the context within which misalignments are manifest and as an idiom through which Pollock’s characters and communities articulate their experiences. Scholars have described Pollock as a “playwright of conscience,” emphasising the content and instrumental nature of her work. My focus is on Pollock as artist and the forms and techniques she uses to convey her ideas and meanings. I argue that ambivalent misalignment and the kinship idiom form a cohesive framework which makes visible neglected formal, emotional, ethical, and thematic elements in Pollock’s work.

My work is informed by the theoretical observations of Susan Letzler Cole, on tragic drama and mourning rituals; Bennett Simon, on familial conflict in tragedy and its structural representation; Carol Gilligan, on relational psychology and the justice and care orientations in ethical decision making; and finally, Günther Anders, on the importance of imagination and feeling for ethical action.

Chapter two explores Pollock's representations of the literal and metaphoric family and recurring issues such as identity, self-knowledge, the self-in-relation, and the ambivalent difficulties of belonging. Chapter three focuses on familial loss and mourning and related concerns such as one's relation to the past. I also discuss formal elements of the mourning ritual in Pollock's work, including the liminal, the mourner-inheritor, the beloved deceased, and ambivalence. Chapter four considers stories about relations and relational stories, and how story-telling functions as strategic performance, a way of being in relationship, and a means of self-reflection. I argue that misalignment is a necessary and positive condition for ethical story-telling. Finally, chapter five examines Pollock's visions of desirable communities. I show how Pollock dramatises the ambivalent misalignment between the justice and care orientations in ethical decision making. I also demonstrate how kinship informs Pollock's ethical values and her use of the kinship idiom as a means to create an expansive moral imagination and affective response necessary for ethically responsible action.

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Chapter One

Introduction: “getting it straight”

Sharon Pollock has been one of the major contemporary theatre practitioners in Canada. Her theatrical career spans over forty-five years and a variety of roles including actor, playwright, director, teacher, artistic director, and theatre founder.¹ As a playwright, she has consistently examined and critiqued political and social issues of continuing relevance often grounded in a Canadian context, issues such as the conditions of women’s lives (their struggle for autonomy, self-expression, and community), national identity, and social inequity. Her plays have been performed nationally and internationally and they have been widely anthologised as representative modern Canadian drama. Pollock’s dramatic writing has been recognised by multiple honours, among them the 1979 Golden Sheaf Award for human drama in television for *The Person’s Case*, the 1981 Nellie award for best national radio drama for *Sweet Land of Liberty*, the Governor General’s Literary Award for *Blood Relations and Other Plays* (1981) and *Doc* (1986), and the 1988 Canadian-Australian literary prize (awarded for a body of work).

Pollock’s significant and diverse contributions to Canadian theatre have been recognised by critical studies of her work. To date, one critical biography and two anthologies have been devoted to Pollock.² There are several graduate theses specifically on her drama,³ numerous interviews with Pollock, and a growing number of critical essays. As titles such as “Sharon

¹ Pollock won the 1966 Dominion Drama Festival best actress award and has performed in and directed her own plays as well as those of other writers. She was the Artistic Director of Theatre Calgary (1984) and Theatre New Brunswick (1988-89) and the founder of the Garry Theatre in Calgary (1992-97). In 1999, she received the Harry & Martha Cohen Award for Sustained and Significant Contribution to Theatre.

² Sherrill Grace. *Making Theatre: A Life of Sharon Pollock*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2008. Sherrill Grace and Michelle La Flamme, eds. *Sharon Pollock*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2008. Anne Nothof, ed. *Sharon Pollock: Essays on Her Works*. Toronto: Guernica, 2000.

³ There are graduate research which include Pollock in their discussion but few on her plays alone. For examples of the latter, see Loucks, Ziraldo, and Belliveau “Re-Staging the Past.”

Pollock 1973-1985: Playwright of Conscience and Consequence” (Loucks), “Sharon Pollock: Committed Playwright” (Page), “The Split Subject of *Blood Relations*” (Clement and Sullivan), “Towards a Better, Fairer World” (Pollock/Zimmerman), “Re-Staging the Past: Moral Inquiry in Sharon Pollock’s Memory Plays” (Belliveau), “‘Painting the Background’: Metadrama and the Fabric of History in Sharon Pollock’s *Blood Relations*” (Wyle), “Sharon Pollock’s Portraits of the Artist” (Grace) and “Sharon Pollock: Transfiguring the Maternal” (Zimmerman) indicate, many interpretations characterise Pollock’s drama as explorations of social injustices and individual moral choice, expressions of feminist critique, and reconsiderations of various historical constructions of the past.

Broadly speaking, aside from an emphasis on metadrama and the memory play genre, much of the existing research approaches Pollock’s dramas with a focus on content, predominantly from an instrumental perspective, asking “what is the playwright saying?” or “what do the plays do?” Corresponding answers to these questions of the plays’ functions include: to critique historical inaccuracies or omissions; to inform audiences of these past, and often continuing, inaccuracies and omissions; to point out social injustices (whether they be racism or sexism or a discriminatory penitentiary system); to inspire audiences to self-reflection and responsible social action; and to highlight and question various constructions of identity. For example, Harold Baldrige, director of the 1973 production of *Walsh*, states: “I believe we have made our audience *think* about our responsibility to and our responsibility for the modern-day problems of the Plains and Woods Indians. I think that not one of us will ever be able to regard a drunken Indian on the street corner in quite the same way” (qtd. in Page 105). Likewise, twenty years later, Guy Sprung, director of the 1993 première production of *Fair Liberty’s Call*, writes: “Not only is this the rare work of art which tries to understand present-day English Canada by exploring the past, but Pollock has dared to examine our identity in relation to our powerful neighbour to the south without resorting to cheap stereotypes. Rather, she is forcing *us* to come to terms with ourselves. [. . .] We are all responsible for our own choices” (“Introduction” 9). Indeed, because of Pollock’s interest in exploring historical and contemporary occasions of inequity, both social and personal, her work lends itself to such critical approaches.

In contrast, the aim of my present analysis is to contribute to the existing research on Pollock’s drama with a close reading of the texts and sustained exploration which shifts the focus from the instrumental to the conceptual and the formal. In this respect, I am moving in the

direction of Robert Nunn's early observation of Pollock's use of "montage as a principle of composition" (75), Richard Perkyns' discussion of symbolism in Pollock's *Generations* (605) and Ann Jansen's discussion of Pollock's use of different narrative styles and genres in *The Making of Warriors* (90-94). Instead of asking "what" (What do the works say? What do the works do?), the emphasis of my question is "how": how do the works convey their message? and how is the form or structure related to the content and function? More specifically, my analysis focuses on a particular form in relation to a particular content.

This study examines the dramatic work of Sharon Pollock as organised under the formal and conceptual framework of what I call "ambivalent misalignment" and the "kinship idiom": ambivalence and misalignment in terms of relationships between individuals and groups, and as a characteristic of dramatic form; and kinship, family, as both the domain or context within which misalignments are manifest and as an idiom through which Pollock's characters articulate their experiences and perceptions. This formal and thematic exploration reveals and highlights facets of Pollock's work neglected by existing critical analyses which characterize her work variously as moral, historical or meta-historical, feminist, or post-colonial. I wish to emphasise, at the outset, that just as it is difficult to examine form and content as if they were two discrete objects, so within my study, ambivalent misalignment and the kinship idiom are concepts which will increasingly encompass both the form and content of Pollock's work.

Sharon Pollock's work often gives me the feeling that something "doesn't fit," that something is "out of place." This manifests itself variously—in a sense of logical and linguistic confusion, in the presence of characters who talk across each other, in the numerous characters who feel themselves to be misfits or misplaced, in plot and linguistic structures which exhibit discontinuities of time and space. It is a quality which holds my attention and keeps the works in my mind. Timothy Findley once wrote: "I have always believed that *concentration* lies behind the images we remember — a concentration of energies or of focus or of space. Tension. The tension in what we see is what forces us to look again" (141, emphasis in original). I call one of the points of concentration in Pollock's work which causes me to feel something doesn't fit, which produces tension and forces me to look again, "misalignment." My choice of this term was inspired by Pollock's play *Getting It Straight*, which premiered at the International Women's Festival, Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1988 with Pollock herself performing the solo role of Eme. The title, *Getting It Straight*, welcomes many interpretations. The phrase, in our current usage, is

rich in potential meanings, even contradictory, ambivalent meanings: both radical and conservative. On a basic level, the title suggests that something is not “straight,” something is out of line, mis-aligned. When people speak of “the straight goods” or “give it to me straight” or of “getting the facts (or the story) straight,” they are using “straight” in terms of “frank, honest” or “to make (something) clear, to reach an understanding” (“Straight,” def. 6a). They imply an attempt to cut through a facade to get at the radical truth of an issue. However, “straight” also has conservative, prescriptive meanings: to be “in proper order,” (“Straight,” def. 8.a), “conventional, respectable, socially acceptable” (“Straight,” def. 6.d). We speak of “the straight and narrow” and the “straight ticket” is all the official candidates in a political party (“Straight,” def. 9.a). In addition, the title verb “getting” denotes an incomplete action, an action in process. It will be an important issue of my discussion whether completion of the action is assured, or even desirable. Both the object and the subject of the phrase “getting it straight” are unclear and open to consideration: What is being straightened and who is the agent of this action? What is clear is that Pollock is interested both in the state of misalignment and the process of change, of “getting it straight.”

In addition to the play’s title, I was also inspired by a visual metaphor in my choice of the term “misalignment.” In the publicity poster for the 1995 student production of *Getting It Straight* at the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, the designer, Giambrone Design Limited, had scored a vertical line through each letter of the play’s title and shifted the two resulting segments relative to each other along this vertical axis. The two parts of each letter were thus mis-aligned. This spatial displacement, recalling to me the schematic representation of the shifting slabs of earth along the fault line of an earthquake (see Figures 1 and 2 below), gave a physical shape to features I sense in Pollock's work.

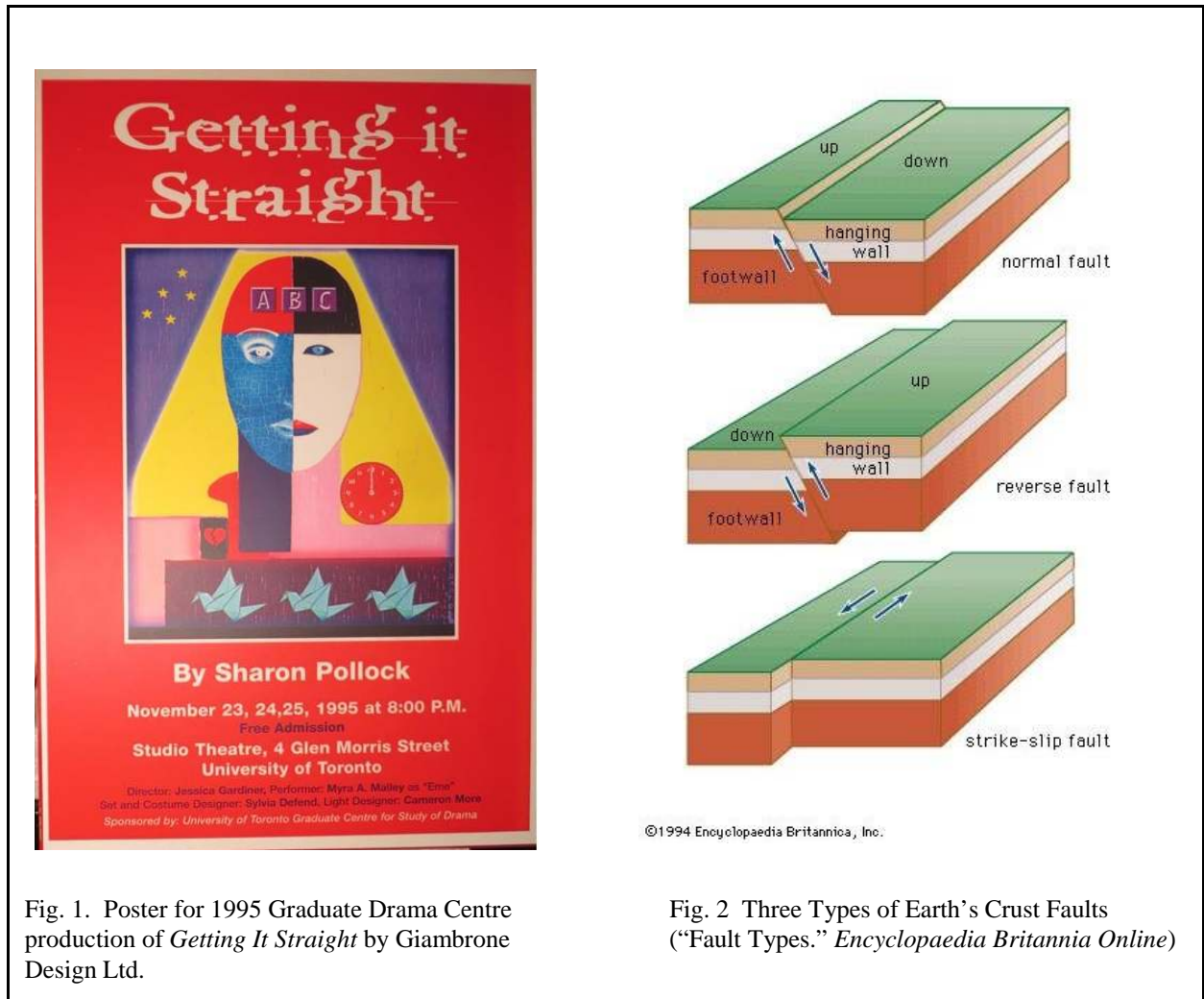


Fig. 1. Poster for 1995 Graduate Drama Centre production of *Getting It Straight* by Giambrone Design Ltd.

Fig. 2 Three Types of Earth's Crust Faults ("Fault Types." *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*)

The earthquake image further enriches my sense of misalignment. A simplified model might explain the mechanism of an earthquake as follows. The pieces of the earth's crust on each side of a fault line are in natural motion, sliding against each other. The friction along the surface of contact generates stresses and strains. If this friction is sufficiently strong to prevent the relative movement of the two pieces of earth, then the pressures and tensions accumulate until the stored energy is great enough to shatter the rocks of the land masses themselves. This explosive shattering, a sudden release of the stored energy, and the movement it enables are what constitute an earthquake. This process from geology, with its image of opposing forces, friction, stress, and tension; of two bodies rubbing against each other; of relative position; and a line or plane of contact offers one of the key images in my conceptual matrix.

What interests me about the concept of misalignment is that it is a spatial metaphor and

an inherently referential and contextual term. Misalignment carries with it the notion and awareness or recollection of alignment. It is a difference conscious of the past existence or future promise of commonality. There is also an additional characteristic to this tension which interests me. While Pollock's work has been discussed by several critics (as well as Pollock herself)⁴ in terms of ambiguity, I find this term unsatisfactory. Ambiguity suggests obscurity and inexactness, qualities which do not characterise Pollock's work at all.⁵ There are indeed many cases where apparently important facts are left unclear by Pollock. For example, we don't know who killed Andrew and Abigail Borden in *Blood Relations*; we never know the content of Ev's mother's letter nor whether she committed suicide in *Doc*; we do not know whether Eme injured or killed her husband or not in *Getting It Straight*. I would argue, however, that this ambiguity exists in Pollock's drama mainly as a narrative device. While attempts to clarify the ambiguity may generate initial interest or drive the action, its reduction would not adequately address the central concerns of the drama. An existential recognition and acceptance of the unknowable or indeterminate in life do not seem to be the central focus of Pollock's exploration though they constitute an important factor, because the presence of the unknown or indeterminate permits one to imagine difference, change, and differing outcomes. Pollock's dramatic ambiguity highlights to audiences, through their own desires for a determinate outcome, their own values, expectations, and judgments. I believe a more precise and productive term for Pollock's work is ambivalence, "the coexistence in one person of contradictory emotions or attitudes (as love and hatred) towards a person or thing" ("ambivalence | ambivalancy, n." *OED Online*), an ambivalence which stems from a misalignment.⁶ I acknowledge that ambivalence may possess a negative connotation in its possible association with indecision or inaction, a kind of "wishy-

⁴ For example, see Zimmerman, "Sharon Pollock: The Making of Warriors" 73.

⁵ Discussing *Blood Relations*, Pollock once said: "She [Lizzie Borden] was a lady that [sic] made decisions. She didn't like where she stood and she tried to do something about it. I like to make decisions, too. We're not so dissimilar" ("A Conversation" 139).

⁶ Several critics have observed ambivalence in Pollock's work but not in terms of a core feature which spans a number of plays. For example, Robert Nunn notes Hopkinson's racist ambivalence towards Indians in *The Komagata Maru Incident* (76) and Herb Wyile discusses the tension between the highlighting of metadrama and the overwhelming power of the Actresses' performance of Lizzie as a tension related to "the postmodern ambivalence towards conventions of representation" in *Blood Relations* (202).

washy” *laissez-faire*. However, ambivalence need not be negative or paralysing. I find of equal interest the ambivalence which accompanies decision or action and persists even in their aftermath.⁷

Within this study, I envision ambivalence and misalignment as intimately linked with issues of proximity (another spatial metaphor). Rather than post-modernist fragmentation, or modernist distinct polar opposites and absolute duality, I envision a movement of one party against another, a shifting of position, which retains mutual contact. In my exploration of ambivalent misalignment, I will also pay attention to the former position, the former “alignment,” real or imaginary. In terms of Pollock’s drama and human interactions in general, especially familial relationships, this seems a more realistic and pragmatic characterisation: relationships and conflicts in life are more often such side-ways steps than huge abrupt breaks and departures. Often, one doesn’t even have a choice in the matter: memories, artifacts, the on-going community, and other links to the past remain; one stays in some form of contact. A person might have shifted from her former position but she is not completely free of the former context, the former identity, the former connections.⁸ One might desire the former state even as one changes and steps away from it. And, if there was a former alignment, then perhaps there might also be a future re-alignment (whether similar or different from the past). I wish to emphasize that my use of the term misalignment is intended to be neutral. The presence of misalignment is neither necessarily positive nor negative. As my earlier discussion of the term “getting it straight” suggests, to be “straight” or “mis-aligned” can have variable and paradoxically ambivalent meanings. It may be that alignment and re-alignment precede and follow misalignment, but it may equally be that we move from one state of misalignment to another, with misalignment and ambivalence being the common and “normal” state of affairs in the world as observed and represented by Pollock, a state which may be productive as well as

⁷ A good example of this is Alfred Nurlin’s ambivalence towards farming in *Generations*.

⁸ One clear expression of one’s connectedness with the past is the exchange between Dolly and Leah after the death of Will Farley, Dolly’s lover and Johnny’s brother. Leah tells Dolly to “forget about Will” and “start fresh.” However, Dolly replies: “But you’re who you are and who you were and who you met and what you did and . . .” (*Whisky Six Cadenza* 224). Of course, Leah’s perspective is influenced by her desire to be free of her own past. Again, we have a dramatisation of Pollock’s ambivalent views about the influences of the past.

destructive.

This study will explore the presence of ambivalent misalignment in conjunction with another key feature in Pollock's work, the kinship idiom.⁹ Again, *Getting It Straight* helps to illustrate the concept. The central character Eme's insistent concern with the well-being and the future of children (her own children as well as the children of others), and her discussion of her father, her grandfather, her mother and brother, her husband and children, highlight a preoccupation with the family. From this perspective, the term "alignment," rooted within the term misalignment, leads me to notions of lineage: the family line, the relationships between the generations, and to the idea of familial misalignment. For example, Pollock's plays are full of (adult) children who do not know or refuse to acknowledge their lineage; of parricide; of symbolic and literal incest;¹⁰ of "wars" between siblings, spouses, and generations; of families which turn out not to be blood families at all.

Another significant linkage between ambivalent misalignment and the kinship idiom is the seldom noted but overwhelming presence of loss and death in Pollock's drama. While scholars have recognised the influence of the death (and life) of Pollock's mother on her work,¹¹ I am pointing towards a broader focus than that of the mother-figure. Virtually all of the major published plays to date, from *Walsh* to *Man Out of Joint*, involve one or more deaths. In most cases, though all the deceased may have a variety of identities within the drama, their immediate identity in relation to the central characters is that of kin: parents, spouses, children. A significant facet of Pollock's work is a concern with familial loss, death, mourning, and identity; with inheritance received, lost, or denied; with absent parents and endangered children; with a focus on the past (individual and social) as a source of mystery and missing knowledge vital for the present and the future.

⁹ My use of the term "kinship idiom" is inspired by Nancy Chodorow, who writes that "[i]n contemporary primitive societies, a kinship idiom can come to describe and incorporate whatever productive relations develop" (12).

¹⁰ Jerry Wasserman argues, in "Daddy's Girl," that the relationship between Miss Lizzie and her father Andrew Borden in *Blood Relations* is symbolically incestuous and Mr. Big's love for his "chosen" (adopted) daughter Leah in *Whiskey Six Cadenza* is certainly incestuous.

¹¹ For example, see Grace's *Making Theatre: A Life of Sharon Pollock* and Zimmerman's "Sharon Pollock: Transfiguring the Maternal."

My interest in ambivalent misalignments within the family extends beyond Pollock's representation of literal families in her drama to include questions of social relations and language (textual and theatrical): the metaphoric family and the kinship *idiom*. For me, Eme's striking statement that "his [her husband's] parents" have dropped the bomb which "wasted all / the people but it kept the real estate" (*GIS* 113) is illuminating. In various forms, Pollock's work explores the possibilities and effects of envisioning social and political relationships in familial terms. Such "fictive kin"¹² may encompass a community, a nation, or the globe. At this level, concepts of misalignment and kinship apply to relationships within and amongst social groups; loss, mourning, and inheritance exist in terms such as collective losses and deaths, cultural identities and heritages, political actions and promises, and ethical responsibilities.

Kinship and family relations make up not only the content of many of Pollock's dramas from her earliest to her latest works but they supply the language, the idiom, with which her characters describe their experiences and situate themselves in their worlds. Surveying the plays as a whole, I would further suggest that the kinship idiom is practised not only by Pollock's dramatic characters but by Pollock herself as dramatist. Pollock's use of the kinship idiom can be found not only in plays explicitly focussed on family relations but also in the more overtly historical and socio-political plays such as *Walsh*, *Komagata Maru Incident*, *One Tiger to a Hill*, *Getting It Straight*, *Fair Liberty's Call*. It is found in the representation of social and political relations in terms of familial relations; in the inseparable links amongst individual history, family history, and social history; in a preoccupation with inheritance, inter-generational transmissions, lineage, and identity; in anxieties about the continuance of the family, and by extension, the community and the nation.

My study of Pollock's drama is specifically informed, in different ways, by the theoretical work of Susan Letzler Cole, Bennett Simon, and Carol Gilligan. The ideas of these three researchers have provided theoretical support and encouragement for the approach I have chosen. In certain cases, they have also provided a vocabulary which has helped me to give name to key figures and concerns I have observed and wish to examine further. Drama scholar Susan Letzler

¹² Fictive kin are like kin and are seen as kin; they are perceived as making a greater commitment to the relationship. Rayna Rapp states that "[f]ictive kinship is a prime example of family-as-ideology" (178).

Cole's *The Absent One: Mourning Ritual, Tragedy, and the Performance of Ambivalence*, a study of the relationship between tragic drama and mourning rituals, provides an important basis for my thinking about Pollock's work. Cole explores the hypothesis that the "originary impulse" (3) of tragedy was funerary rituals and that this connection explains the presence of a "distinctive cluster of components" (1) in the tradition of Western tragic drama from Classical Greece to modern Europe and North America.¹³ These components, as identified by Cole, are:

1. a liminal (i.e., transitional) space or journey or status, associated with a central figure in the play, most often a tragic protagonist
2. the presence of the uncanny, associated with the dead or the realm of the dead (e.g. ghosts, symbolic dreams, hallucinations, waking visions)
3. the beloved deceased, usually a father or father-figure
4. a mourner-inheritor, usually a son or son-surrogate
5. the antithetical style and antiphonal exchange characteristic of ritual lament
6. ambivalence: (a) as expressed by intrapsychic conflict within a single character; (b) as reflected in the relationship between two central characters: deceased and mourner, father (-surrogate) and inheriting son (-surrogate); (c) as displaced onto the governing structure and imagery of the play (1-2)

Cole argues that both the dead and the living mourners inhabit a liminal space (physical, social, and psychological) and that tragic drama is a contained way for the social collective to enter the liminal and return. She goes on to suggest that two of the key issues in tragedy and in the mourning process are how to sustain the relationship with the (beloved) dead and simultaneously how to end the relationship so that the living can continue their lives in meaningful ways as members of a community, "in some way redefined by the absent one(s)" (6). Here, again, ambivalence is central in our relationship with the dead and the past.

Of significance to my study is the recognition that such characteristics are not exclusive to tragedy. Cole herself acknowledges that ambivalence, absent parents, and journeys as rites of passage may be found in other dramatic genres and that the "artistic transformation of the impulse to mourn may play some role in all theatrical enactment" (5). Although my study is not focussed on Pollock's work as tragedy, I find that Cole's observations resonate with Pollock's

¹³ While Cole's analysis of tragedy focusses on canonical Western dramatic texts, her discussion of funerary rituals includes not only Western customs but those of Africa and China.

plays. Ghosts and hauntings exist in many forms in Pollock's drama. Most importantly, the beloved deceased and the mourner-inheritor are particularly relevant as central figures and as focal points in a context of lineage and ambivalence. One interesting contrast between Pollock's work and Cole's discussion is the gender of the beloved deceased and the mourner-inheritor. Because Cole deals predominantly with classical and canonical tragic drama (plays written predominantly by men), these figures in her analysis are often men, specifically fathers and sons,¹⁴ a bias which Cole herself acknowledges. In Pollock's case, the beloved deceased and the mourner-inheritor are, as often as not, women: mothers, daughters, sisters. Cole notes that, while it is outside the scope of her study, research on Greek mourning ritual "suggests that female mourning, like male mourning, is a performance of ambivalence but that familial, social, political status, power, and authority – and especially the role of the mourner as inheritor – are quite different for the two sexes" (6).

My analysis of the kinship idiom in Pollock's work as it speaks of mourning and inheritance will include an investigation of how a female beloved deceased and/or a female mourner-inheritor may present different forms of and different solutions to the issues of loss, lineal misalignment, mourning, and inheritance. While Cole's exploration focuses on mourning related to the loss of an individual, Pollock's drama prompts me to extend the notion of loss to include that of material possessions and immaterial objects such as an ideal or a certain expectation for the future. Likewise, the concept of mourning and inheritance broadens beyond the individual and familial level to that of the community and the nation, subjects which are central in Pollock's work.

Of equal importance to my notion of ambivalent misalignment as a formal and conceptual characteristic in Pollock's drama is Cole's identification of the liminal space (both geographic and psychic), the uncanny, and the presence of ambivalence reflected in interpersonal relationships (Cole focuses on that between the dead and the living, the past and the present) and in dramatic structure and imagery. Included in the latter are elements such as reversals (in clothing, roles, manners, and actions) (20), doublings (spatial, material, and psychological) (19),

¹⁴ Cole discusses such pairs as Darius and Xerxes in Aeschylus's *The Persians*; Hamlet, both father and son, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; Theseus and Hippolytus in Racine's *Phèdre*; and Captain Alving and Oswald in Ibsen's *Ghosts*.

“antiphonal exchange” (41), and an “antithetical style” (41). In terms of dramaturgy, examples of the liminal condition can be found in the fluid sense of stage space and time, and the polyphonic soundscape in plays like *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, *Doc*, *Fair Liberty’s Call* and *End Dream* (especially in their opening stage directions), and the presence of doubling and doubles in *The Komagata Maru Incident*, *Walsh*, *Blood Relations*, *Doc*, and *Fair Liberty’s Call*.

A second source of ideas which helped me tie together the notions of kinship and lineage with the many characters in Pollock’s plays who seem driven by the necessity to tell their own story and that of their family is the discussion by professor of psychiatry and psychoanalyst Bennett Simon of tragedy and family conflict in *Tragic Drama and the Family*. Simon’s focus is on a specific set of familial themes and related formal characteristics in tragic drama. These themes include “a sense of terrible warfare within the family, and [. . .] the sense that problems cannot be solved by displacing the issues to outside the family (i.e., by fighting outsiders) or by changing conditions around the family” and the risk to the family of self-destruction, “either by literally destroying its own progeny or by making propagation impossible, for example, because of intractable warfare between husband and wife” (2). He also identifies a “curse on generation” and “a dread of the progression of generations,” combined with “the assumption—indeed the ideal—that the house and line should be continued, that families exist to propagate and to bind the generations together” (2-3).¹⁵ (Again an instance of ambivalent misalignment.) Simon adds that in many tragic dramas “acts of betrayal, the crimes, including the murder of children, are somehow committed in the name of continuing or enhancing the line, or at least enhancing one line over another” (3).¹⁶ This in turn results in the prevalence of the themes of sacrifice and guilt in tragedy (26). He notes that an attack on women, as related to the cursing of birth and generation, is another common feature of canonical tragic drama from Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* and

¹⁵ This is literally the case in *Doc* where Ev authorises his wife Bob’s hysterectomy and, later, urges his daughter Catherine to marry and have children. Catherine also expresses anxieties about having children.

¹⁶ This is forcefully highlighted in *Angel’s Trumpet* where Scott Fitzgerald repeatedly identifies the future of his family (himself, Zelda, and their daughter Scotty), along with his art, as the justification for his harsh treatment of Zelda, her continuing institutionalization, and the prevention of her writing. He is willing to exchange her sanity, freedom, and self-expression for his family (183), literally the “Material Survival, of the Fitzgerald Menage” (216), and his “honor and obligation” as the patriarchal provider of the family, a right and responsibility taught him by his father (222).

Euripides' *Medea*, to Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, to O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and Beckett's *Endgame* (3). A final chief theme which he identifies and relates to the problem of familial generation, one I find very useful for my exploration of Pollock's work, is "an anxiety and concern about generating and propagating stories" (4).

As is the case with Cole, while my focus is not specifically on the tragic status of Pollock's work, several of Simon's ideas resonate with my interest in ambivalent misalignment and the kinship idiom. The two themes most important to me are the threat to the family of self-destruction, even as the ideal of family is promoted, and the link between the anxiety about the generation of descendants and the generation of stories. Certainly, many of Pollock's plays present families in a state of "warfare" which threatens to destroy or actually does destroy the families themselves. Think of the parricide in *Blood Relations* and *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, the fierce conflict between Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald in *Angel's Trumpet*, and the metaphoric parents who drop bombs on their own children in *Getting It Straight*. The link between the anxiety about the continuation of the family and of stories, especially stories about the family, throws an interesting light on a specific constellation of elements in Pollock's dramas including: characters' lack of information about their own past or parentage (hence have little information to pass on to future generations), the presence of family secrets, competing accounts of the familial past, and the destruction of family history. The prime examples of this are Catherine's search for familial answers, her anxiety about starting her own family, and her burning of grandmother Kate's letter in *Doc*; and George's attempt to silence Joan's accounts of her sons in *Fair Liberty's Call*. Alternatively, in *Angel's Trumpet*, we see characters like Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald desperately telling their stories of their life and family history but lacking any real sympathetic listener for their tales. Finally, Pollock dramatizes instances of parents more concerned about the propagation of stories than the propagation of generations. This is evident in literal families in figures like Ev and Bob, Scott and Zelda, George Roberts, and Nell Shipman, who are more interested in their own lives and needs (their own "stories") than the care of their children; as well as figurative communities and nations as families in *Walsh*, *Getting It Straight*, and *Fair Liberty's Call*.

Simon complements his thematic observations with related formal characteristics which are also relevant in terms of the formal misalignments I see in Pollock's work. For example, he speaks of "twisted time," "blocked speech," and "interruption in narrative continuity" as

structural articulations of a concern with the interruption of generations and with the condition of “telling and not telling” (142), another significant form of ambivalence in Pollock’s work. Examples of such parallels in formal and thematic misalignments in Pollock’s drama include: Eme’s concern with the future of children; her confused sense of time, space, and identity; as well as her stylized and fractured speech in *Getting It Straight*. Like Eme, Joan Roberts confuses place and identity as she struggles to speak of the war and the deaths of her children in *Fair Liberty’s Call*. Finally, we have Nell Shipman’s failed familial relationships and the competing voices and narrative shifts in *Moving Pictures*.

Where Pollock’s work differs from Simon’s analysis is in his primary focus on the biological family itself and in his sense that in tragic drama the problems of the family cannot be solved by displacing the issues to outside the immediate family. No doubt both of these choices are largely due to Simon’s psychoanalytic perspective and his view of tragic drama as dealing largely with psychological relationships between members of a nuclear family. While psychological conflicts between family members constitute a key element in Pollock’s work, her drama clearly invites audiences to see the external influences on the family unit. In addition, I am interested in exploring that aspect of Pollock’s work which figuratively extends familial relationships beyond kin or even fictive kin to the level of the greater community and the nation. At the level of the community or nation as family (i.e., if we are all “family”), it is then possible to return to Simon’s observation that the problems of the family cannot be displaced outside the family (and we are all responsible for the problems we face).

Unlike Simon’s predominantly psychoanalytic approach to anxieties about the propagation of families and the propagation of stories about the family, my study will include the methodologies and ideas of researchers in the fields of family history, sociology, and narrative where family story-telling is not only a reflection of individual psychological states but a strategic narrative act, often competing narrative acts, used to maintain, negotiate, or challenge familial and social power, moral authority, individual and group identities. Sociologists and historians have pointed out that families are not stable, monolithic, or homogeneous. As author and literary scholar Elizabeth Stone writes: “family is always jerry-built and has to be reconstituted and reimagined every generation” (40) and “what blood does not provide, narrative can” (70). From the perspective of narrative and group power relations, the question becomes not only whether it is possible to tell stories but which stories to tell and which secrets to keep,

when, by whom, to and from whom, for what purposes. A significant component of Pollock's plays has always been the concern with the power relationships inherent in the act of story-telling. Over the course of her work, the narrator(s), the number of possible narratives, and the truth value of any one story within a play have changed and multiplied. For example, while early socio-historical plays like *Walsh*, *The Komagata Maru Incident*, and *One Tiger to a Hill* challenge dominant historical and national narratives (the honour of "the Men in Red Serge," the multi-cultural tolerance of Canada, the just efficacy of our penitentiary system), they do so by presenting one fairly homogeneous counter narrative which is intended to be more accurate than prevalent history. However, beginning with *Blood Relations*, the number of possible narratives and/or narrators begin to increase and the dominance of any one narrative version to decrease.

I am aware that, in citing the observations of Cole and Simon, I have bracketed the researchers' central subject: tragic drama. One might ask, given that I find resonant in Pollock's work characteristics attributed by Cole and Simon to tragedy, why might tragedy not serve as a form equal or superior to misalignment with which to discuss Pollock's work? My answer is two-sided, ambivalent like Pollock's drama itself. Pollock's exploration of social injustices, her belief in the possibility and necessity of personal and communal activism in creating "a better world for our children" (*Fair Liberty's Call* 75) stands in opposition to the sense of inevitable fate, loss, decline, and powerlessness so prevalent in traditional tragic drama. As Diane Bessai notes, Pollock's women characters (and I would add her male characters) "are essentially social beings" (98) struggling with social, ideological, and moral forces. On the other hand, it is possible to identify tragic elements in Pollock's work, whether these are compatible with more modern and contingent conceptions of tragedy such as that of Raymond Williams¹⁷ or with a more classical conception. While earlier critics, such as Richard Perkyns and Robert Nunn, have discussed Pollock's work in terms of myth,¹⁸ I believe her plays have yet to receive serious

¹⁷ For example, Williams states that "[t]ragedy is [. . .] not a single and permanent kind of fact, but a series of experiences and conventions and institutions" (69) and proposes that "all that is common, in the works we call tragedies, is the dramatisation of a particular and grievous disorder and its resolution" (76). This allows Williams to accommodate the tragic within his socially historic and contingent world view because definitions of order and disorder are themselves historical, contingent upon a community's experiences, conventions, and institutions.

¹⁸ See Perkyns, "Introduction" and Nunn, "Sharon Pollock's Plays."

critical attention from the perspective of tragedy, an approach which I believe would be fruitful and for which my present analysis on ambivalence, misalignment, and the kinship idiom may serve as a building block. I will return to this possibility at the conclusion of this study.

To point out that one of the central focuses of Pollock's work is the family seems to be saying the obvious and to identify a common and enduring concern of drama and other forms of artistic expression. In the context of Canadian drama, as early as 1983, Ann Saddlemeyer, in a brief survey of drama by English-Canadian women, recognised family relationships as central to a large proportion of plays by women, including Pollock. Saddlemeyer writes: "Time is, indeed, measured not by hours or by seasons as often as it is by generations; growth and development by the strength, tenuousness and straining of bond between parent and child. Frequently seen through the eyes of a daughter (or grand-daughter) impatient with the mores, manners and conventions of an earlier generation, all values are questioned" ("Circus Feminus" 89). Certainly, there is significant critical attention to Pollock's representation of familial relationships, especially in her family plays. While not a new point of view, I am confident that my examination of Pollock's work through the lens of the "kinship idiom" can account for unexplained observations and make visible overlooked evidence, and raise different questions about Pollock's representation of human social relations, and thus make useful contributions to the existing research on Pollock. For suddenly, different features come to the fore. While Pollock's drama is still politically, morally, and ethically driven, as her earlier critics observed, my analysis will explore how the values behind her political and ethical arguments are articulated through the vehicles of familial inheritance and generational responsibility. In addition, if the kinship idiom is the language of her dramatic universe, the collection of metaphors in operation, then ambivalent misalignment is the condition which is overwhelmingly expressed by this language. Ambivalence exists as a problematic of specific human social interactions (something historic and transient, specific to a given time, place, group of agents), as a fundamental existential condition, and as a formal characteristic of Pollock's works.

One final important concept which informs my understanding of Pollock's work is the notion of misalignment in communication, the co-existence of different languages (textual and theatrical), and the differences in ethical orientation which these languages embody. Specifically, my thinking is influenced by psychologist Carol Gilligan's ideas on moral orientation. Gilligan's work *In a Different Voice* (and subsequent publications) proposes the

existence of two contrasting approaches towards moral valuation and reasoning: a justice and a care orientation. These two orientations are characterised by differing understandings of the self and assumptions about human nature and human inter-relationships which lead to differing moral values, conceptions of the source of moral conflict, and methods of moral reasoning.

In broad terms, the justice orientation is characterised by a model of human development in terms of progressive separation, independence, and autonomy. Moral intelligence and sophistication are seen as moving from a deference to authority towards self-chosen yet universal principles of justice and equality. It accords to the individual rights which are, in theory, universally recognised by rational people. Conflict is regarded as arising from competing rights, hurt as resulting from expressions of aggression, and mediation is achieved “impersonally through systems of logic and law” (*Different* 29). Alternatively, the care orientation sees connection and interdependence as signs of human development. Moral sophistication traces a process of care for the survival of the self, to a conformity which equates “goodness” with self-sacrificing concern for others, to a concern for “truth” which recognises the need to balance the needs of the self with those of others. Conflict is cast in terms of competing responsibilities, hurt as resulting from a failure to respond with care, and mediation is achieved “personally through communication in relationship” (*Different* 29).

The justice orientation values equality, liberty, and the dignity of the individual. Its approach to a moral problem is formal and abstract. As such, the justice perspective conceives a “generalized other” (*Different* 11) in abstract relation with the self. The care orientation, with its valuation of the relationship before the individual, envisions a “particular other”¹⁹ (*Different* 11) in its recognition of concrete differences between the self and other. Its resolution of moral conflict requires “a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract” (*Different* 19). As Meyers and Kittay point out, within the justice perspective, “[p]eople are surely entitled to noninterference; they may not be entitled to aid” (5). Alternatively, within the care perspective, the injunction is “to engage responsively and with care” (*Different* xix).

While Gilligan cautions that her empirical research shows that individuals are capable of

¹⁹ Gilligan attributes the terms “generalized other” and “particular other” to Margaret Mead (*Different* 11).

understanding and using both the justice and care orientation, and that the two modes of thinking are not biologically determined, her research also shows that people do tend to focus on one orientation, and that there is an association between moral orientation and gender. Gilligan reports from her study that both men and women are equally likely to focus on a given orientation. However, of those who do focus, the men tend to focus on the justice perspective while the women are divided equally between the care and justice perspective (“Moral Orientation” 25). It is important to note that while Gilligan emphasizes the importance of the care perspective and its link to women’s experiences and ways of responding to a moral issue, she also stresses that she advocates neither the justice nor care perspective alone. She suggests that a more mature approach to moral problem solving and decision making would entail a balance of the two ways of seeing and responding (*Different* 174).

The usefulness of Gilligan’s theories in relation to my analysis of Pollock’s drama is multi-faceted. Gilligan’s methodology, her attention to language and voice as important indicators of moral orientation, and her conceptions of human relationships lend themselves to my application of her ideas to a formal analysis of Pollock’s dramatic work. Her identification of a care orientation which values relationships and the web of connections between individuals adds significant layers of meaning to my identification of the “kinship idiom” as a dominant trope in Pollock’s work, for kinship relations are a fundamental form of human connection. Her formulation of differing approaches in terms of rights and responsibilities echoes one of Pollock’s continuing ethical preoccupations from *Walsh* to *Angel’s Trumpet*. Her suggestion that the two orientations relate to each other as figure and ground (“Moral Orientation” 19-20) and her observations about separation and connection have useful points of correspondence with my model of ambivalent misalignment in terms of proximity and distance. An application of Gilligan’s ideas can help articulate the terms for the ambivalence and paradoxical blindness inherent in the many relationships in Pollock’s drama.

On a final note, I recognise that Gilligan’s research focus on the moral and ethical facet of relationships between individuals, their responsibilities to each other, as well as the rights of individuals, is not new in the history of philosophy or psychology but what she adds to the project is the dimension of gender: a feminist critique of traditional biases and, most importantly,

the voices of her women subjects, absent from her predecessors' work.²⁰ Pollock too has been attentive to the voices of women as they struggle with the ethical and moral dilemmas and the patriarchal values which confront them. Her characters, especially her women characters, whose perspectives Pollock has increasingly articulated, have displayed a variety of responses to the ambivalent demands of rights and responsibility, justice and care: from the more abstract and simplistic (and idealistic) maternal care and strength of Pretty Plume in *Walsh* and the nameless Sikh mother in *Komagata Maru*, to the disturbing and radical self-interest of Lizzie Borden in *Blood Relations* and Nell Shipman in *Moving Pictures*, to the overwhelming sense of responsibility felt by Eme in *Getting It Straight* (perhaps equally disturbing), to the pragmatic balance attempted by the Roberts women (Joan, Annie, and Eddie) in *Fair Liberty's Call*.

The central chapters of this study are organised around four images derived from interviews given by Pollock and from her play *Getting It Straight*: a jigsaw puzzle, a ghost story, a gem in darkness illuminated by beams of light, and a net of stars. My interest in these images is formal and relational: all the images, in themselves and in the context of their telling, are related to forms which relationships between people can take. They are also connected to my central themes of kinship and ambivalent misalignment. I will elaborate on the source, context, and function of each image in its respective chapter. At present, I will simply note that each functions as a formal metaphor for the group of elements and issues I wish to discuss. Borrowing an astronomical metaphor from *Getting It Straight*, it would be useful to imagine the elements of Pollock's drama discussed in each chapter as individual stars and the images as constellations—designs inspired by Pollock—which give a cohesive form and meaning to the separate elements. Each chapter will focus on plays which best exemplify the issues under discussion, though I wish to stress they are not an exclusive choice. It is one of my goals to demonstrate, with each additional chapter of this study, that the themes and forms I highlight are intimately related and discernable in many of Pollock's works. My approach is, in this sense,

²⁰ Gilligan questioned the theories of human development constructed by her predecessors based on gender-biased data. For example, she noted that Lawrence Kohlberg derived a six-stage model of moral development from a twenty year study of eighty-four boys. This model, based on an all male sample, was then applied normatively to both men and women with the result that women were evaluated as less mature than men in their moral decision making because their responses deviated from the (male) norm (*Different* 18). Gilligan's original contribution was in recognising this male bias, listening to women's voices, and in not equating their difference with immaturity or inferiority.

holistic. Thus, where relevant, supporting evidence will be drawn from other Pollock plays that are not the primary focus of a given chapter.

Chapter two of this study, organised by the image of a jigsaw puzzle, explores Pollock's representations of the relationship between the individual and the family or community in *Blood Relations*, *Walsh*, *Generations*, and *One Tiger to a Hill*. It deals with the issues of identity (especially the specific ways Pollock's characters define themselves or are defined by others), self-knowledge, the positive and negative potentials of a self-in-relation, and the difficult and ambivalent conditions of belonging and fitting in. From the perspective of kinship and the kinship idiom, family, in this group of plays, is most often experienced as a constraint to self-expression, a conservative force with the power to define and limit one's identity rather than support its continuing development. The perspective of earlier scholarship presented Pollock's protagonist as romantic individuals battling against an overpowering system:²¹ the one against the many, the moral against the corrupt. Yet the "system" label is reductive and, in a sense, emotionally and ethically simplistic. It is often easy to distance oneself from "the system." Who would rush to embrace a system? I wish to resist this distancing abstraction and retain the specificity of the relationship and its ambivalent complexities. What happens when "the system" is one's family, community, country? I propose that Pollock's individuals are initially active parts of "the system,"²²—their family, community, country—though some, in a mis-recognition of the self, thought themselves otherwise. Misalignment occurs not between polar opposites or opposing families or communities but when one of the family "steps out of line." The theme of story-telling, particularly family story-telling, another important element in Pollock's drama, one that weaves in and out of each chapter of this study, will be introduced here as one means by which familial and social context, the picture of the jigsaw puzzle, is created. As such, the educational and coercive functions of family story-telling as represented in Pollock's work will

²¹ In fact, in her 1976 article, "Sharon Pollock: In the Centre Ring," Margo Dunn cites Vancouver theatre critic Max Wyman as interpreting the name of Pollock's cynical, ironic vaudevillian narrator of *Komagata Maru Incident*, T.S., as representing "The System" (5). This interpretation has been cited by subsequent scholars including Page (108) and Gilbert (116).

²² Both Diane Bessai and Heidi Holder highlight this aspect in their discussion of *Walsh*. See Bessai, "Women Dramatists" and Holder, "Broken Toys." My analysis further qualifies this characteristic and extends it to other plays. See chapter two.

be explored.

Whereas chapter two focuses on the individual in context, the individual's relation to the community, chapter three examines the individual bereft of context. It deals with Pollock's drama in terms of the ambivalent misalignments which result from various forms of loss, especially familial loss and death, and how individuals and communities respond to this experience. The image which organises this chapter is that of the ghost story and issues of importance are: loss, mourning and inheritance, ghosts and hauntings, family secrets, and the choice of whether to tell stories—ghost stories—or not. As discussed earlier, much of Pollock's drama contains the death of a family member, but in addition to the loss of an individual, another key type of loss is the loss of faith in an ideal. In all of these cases, Pollock also examines one's relation to the past, whether this be an individual, familial, or national past, for after all, ghosts are those who were alive in the past; they are, in fact, the past in the present and one's decision to tell or not tell ghost stories, as well as the type of ghost stories one tells, reflects one's relation to the past. While technically the term "ghost" carries no attendant moral or emotional value, culturally this is otherwise and Pollock's choice of the term "ghost" and the ghosts which appear in her plays will be explored precisely for their potential moral and emotional significance. Finally, structurally, ghosts are themselves embodiments of an ambivalent misalignment: simultaneously dead and alive, absent and present, abhorred (as unnatural, as reminders of misdeeds, as fearful entities) and desired (as the return of the beloved deceased). Ultimately, I believe one key argument Pollock makes is for the practical necessity and moral responsibility to remember and to tell stories, even disturbing and painful ghost stories about oneself and one's family or community. While there are many Pollock plays which exemplify this theme, because I feel my attention to loss and mourning makes a particularly significant contribution to Pollock scholarship, I present a detailed analysis of one play, *Fair Liberty's Call*, to demonstrate this approach and suggest its applicability to Pollock's other works.

In this chapter, the ideas of mourning, inheritance, and the relation of the generations to each other, discussed earlier in association with the work of Susan Letzler Cole, are explored. Loss, absence, and death, create a sense of misalignment in the family. The family line has been disturbed. The process of mourning can be seen as a liminal status/condition both for the death object and the living mourners. This liminal condition is discernable not only in characters such as Catherine/Katie in *Doc* or Joan in *Fair Liberty's Call* but also in the formal (this includes

sound, lighting, setting, stage directions, etc.) and linguistic structures of the plays. Finally, I will also broaden the context of the family to the society, in which case the relationships of the generations become our social and political history, and consider how Pollock's communities and countries too are haunted by ghosts.

The focus of chapter four is represented by Pollock's image of a crystal in the dark illuminated by different beams of light from different "angles of observation": truth is that crystal, and any one story is just one of many possible beams of light shining on it. Here, I examine Pollock's representation of story-telling as a multifaceted, multi-vocal project and misalignment (in the story line) as a necessary condition associated with positive consequences in plays such as *Moving Pictures*, *Doc*, and *Angel's Trumpet*. I will show how Pollock problematizes the context of familial story-telling, explores story-telling as strategic performance, and demonstrates how any one story must be perceived in the context of other stories. In addition, the condition of self-consciousness, of looking back on the self, evident in the psychological experience of many Pollock characters as well as formal elements such as Pollock's treatment of time and staging, constitute additional forms of "different angles of observation" and misalignment. With respect to the ideas of Bennet Simon, I also explore the relationship between the generation of stories and the generation of progeny in Pollock's work.

Finally, chapter five considers Pollock's vision of possible models for community and the enduring challenges they face. Given that kinship is the idiom and that Pollock's representations of the family (nuclear or otherwise) are overwhelmingly negative and dysfunctional, are there alternative models for family, for community, for nation, available in Pollock's work? Do her plays envision forms of relationship which are ethically and emotionally desirable? Chapter five is organised by the metaphor of a net of stars, a constellation, and its focus is on the issue of proximity and distance. The plays of particular relevance here are *Getting It Straight* and *Fair Liberty's Call*. Carol Gilligan's critique of developmental psychology's differing valuation of separation and attachment and its influence on attitudes towards ethical conduct and social relationships is a key theoretical resource for my exploration of the continuing attempt of Pollock's characters to balance the claims of rights and responsibilities, independence and community. As we shall see, this challenge will also involve a more expansive exercise of our imagination and emotions. From the linear model of the fault line to the planar model of the jigsaw puzzle, I arrive at the four-dimensional model of the constellation as a potential model for

community (time and the generations are important elements in Pollock's vision): individuals as stars, gathered into a meaningful design, a community, for common goals, yet maintaining their discrete identity and differences.²³ Ambivalent misalignment here exists as an on-going negotiation of proximity and distance. Just as a constellation is recognisable as such only from a given line of vision, just as its design is dependent on the distance (the relationship) between the individual stars, and just as different cultures organise stars into different designs, so families, communities, nations, can take different shapes, for different purposes, yet be composed of the same individuals. I believe this is the conceptual, ethical, and experiential ideal to which the plays aspire. First, however, let us begin with a recognition and exploration of what is the real in Pollock's dramatic worlds, relationships symbolised by the form of the jigsaw puzzle.

²³ I acknowledge that my analogy is imperfect: stars do not order themselves into designs/constellations, unlike humans who can unite intentionally to build communities.

Chapter Two

The Jigsaw Puzzle

In a 1991 interview with Cynthia Zimmerman, Sharon Pollock tells a story which provides the title image for this chapter:

Zimmerman: That reminds me I wanted to ask you why it is you feel most at home on the prairies.

Pollock: I have to tell a story here. I was back in New Brunswick and I asked my father about a man who was the mayor of Fredericton when I was there. My father talked for about forty-five minutes. Starting with the parents of the man's wife, he told me who they were and who they were related to and what had happened in their family; then he told me about the man's parents and everything that had happened to their family; and everything that had happened in the community around the time that everything was happening in the extended family of these two people. When the time was up I went out, got into the car and thought to myself "My god, he hasn't told me one thing about the man himself. He's told me about everybody else." Then I thought "No, he's told me everything." It's as if it was a five-hundred word puzzle and I had asked about piece four hundred and ninety-nine. My father put in all the pieces except one. And the one he didn't mention was the man himself. That made me realize why I wasn't comfortable in New Brunswick, and why I was comfortable in the west. If you had the piece in your hand which was the man, and when you tried it turned out that it didn't fit into the puzzle, what do you do? You pound it like hell! You make it fit! Partly because so many people have come recently, in the west many pieces of the puzzle are missing or they just are not relevant. Literally and figuratively there is a lot more space. (Pollock "Towards a Better" 37)

What initially struck me about this passage is Pollock's imaginative use of the jigsaw puzzle metaphor for the family and her emphatic expression of the fate of the individual who is different, who doesn't fit in: "If you had the piece in your hand which was the man, and when you tried it turned out that it didn't fit into the puzzle, what do you do? You pound it like hell! You make it fit!" This seems to me a graphic description of many of Pollock's dramatic protagonists and their families. Yet, there is also an interesting paradox in the story: how is it that a piece of the puzzle fails to fit in? After all, there is no suggestion that the piece comes from a *different* puzzle altogether. The man in the story is clearly a member of the extended family described by Pollock's father. One reason is, of course, the metaphor in operation. A

jigsaw puzzle is a static closed object and families are organic open entities, much as traditional images and conservative forces within families themselves would like to imagine them otherwise. This is one of the underlying points of the story.

Furthermore, Pollock's story, her approach to answering Zimmerman's question, is an example of what I mean by the kinship idiom and it permits me to elaborate the idea as it functions in this study. Here Pollock is responding to a question about home and regional characteristics, and her final answer is really one of constraints and freedom, "space." Such "space" can be influenced by a variety of factors that are social, psychological, and physical, such as geography, urbanization, level of education, life experiences, economic opportunity, and social and cultural values. But all this is articulated through the idiom of kinship, the jigsaw puzzle of the extended family. Pollock also interprets her father's answer specifically as a story of familial constraints and rigid expectations. It could equally have been interpreted as a story of a father's rambling style of story-telling or the celebration of the survival of a cohesive family history, a story of continuity and belonging to a place and a community, but Pollock has assigned the story a different meaning in order to illustrate a personal view of place, home, and family.

Pollock's story and the context of its telling highlight several issues which are the focus of this chapter. One is the question of identity, self-knowledge, and the self-in-relation expressed in terms of familial relationships, literal and figurative. The plays I will discuss in this context include: *Blood Relations*, *Doc*, *The Komagata Maru Incident*, *Generations*, *Walsh*, and *One Tiger to a Hill*. On the whole, the images of the family and the community as family in this group of plays, like the jigsaw puzzle story above, are predominantly restrictive, with negative influences on the individual. However, even as her characters are trapped and broken by these oppressive family structures, they seldom relinquish the desire for idealised, often traditional, familial relationships. Significantly, many of the protagonists (Lizzie Borden, Bob, Oscar, Alfred and David Nurlin, James Walsh, William Hopkinson, Dede Walker and Ev Chalmers, Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald) ultimately choose not to leave the authoritative "family." *Getting It Straight* (1988) and *Fair Liberty's Call*¹ (1993) might signal changes in Pollock's representation

¹ Throughout this study, unless where noted, my quotations of *Fair Liberty's Call* come from the 1995 publication. The 2006 publication (in *Collected Plays Vol. 3*) contains revisions which I will point out when they are relevant. I chose the original published text because it contains elements which contribute to the play's symbolic depth. I believe the omission of some of these elements in the later text

towards alternative and more positive forms of “family,” though later plays like *End Dream* (2000) and *Angel’s Trumpet* (2001) return to the confines of the oppressive family.

Pollock herself, along with many scholars, has identified the relation of the individual to external forces as a central theme in her drama. The focus has often been on the necessary and difficult task of maintaining one’s own integrity despite external challenges. She states in an interview with Rita Much:

All of my plays deal with the same concern. I think I write the same play over and over again. It’s a play about an individual who is directed to or compelled to follow a course of action of which he or she begins to examine the morality. Circumstances force a decision, usually the authority (family, society, government) is removed emotionally or geographically from the protagonist, and it usually doesn’t end very well. (“Sharon Pollock Interview” 210)

This is an accurate description of her work. However, much of the attention on Pollock’s representation of relationships has been focussed on the antagonistic conflict between the individual and the family or society. In the following discussion, I would like to shift the formulation from directly opposing forces and what keeps members of the same family (literally and figuratively) apart to forces of attraction and what prevents individuals from leaving (even at the cost of their emotional and/or moral destruction) or what draws people together while allowing them to maintain their personal integrity. Given that the answers one achieves are dependent on the form of one’s questions, it is an important difference to examine. My different focus also highlights the issue of distance and proximity and the nature or quality of the space or bridge between people which I will discuss in greater detail in chapter five. After all, in the interview with Much above, Pollock speaks of an “authority (family, society, government)” which is “*removed* [emphasis added], emotionally or geographically.” I believe that, ultimately, Pollock is less interested in the romantic heroism of isolated individuals than in how individuals together can build viable communities, the “better, fairer world” to which she refers later in the

cloaks one source of the power and resonance in the drama. The earlier text allows us to see more clearly what is invisible, but no less present, in the later version.

interview with Zimmerman (“Towards a Better” 34).²

This chapter begins with Pollock’s representation of literal families and characters who define their identity through the medium of the family. One important characteristic of many of Pollock’s protagonists is that they don’t seem to know or refuse to acknowledge their lineage. The challenge of transforming this absence or denial into presence and/or acceptance is a key element in the dramas which I will examine further in the next chapter. This interest in lineage also suggests the importance of the past (personal and social), one’s relation to it, and its narrative formulation as autobiography, biography, and history in Pollock’s work. Next, I examine the metaphoric family and the various ways Pollock uses the language of kinship to articulate social relationships and moral struggles. I also touch on the implications of such a choice of idiom, a question which I will return to in greater consideration at the end of this study. Finally, I take a look at how Pollock’s kinship idiom is expressed structurally and linguistically in the plays: in the organisation of generations, in the practice of naming, in the syntax of appellation, and in the use of repetition.

Individual Identity and the Family -- A Piece of the Jigsaw Puzzle

“I must be like someone.” (Actress/Lizzie, in *Blood Relations* 57)

Repeatedly in Pollock’s drama, a child, often an adult child,³ asks a parent, a friend, herself or himself, “which of my parents do I take after?” It is a question related to personal and familial identity, and the relationship between the present and the past. This question is often accompanied by anxieties of inheritance or inter-generational transmission: biological, in the

² Annie Roberts in *Fair Liberty’s Call* echoes Pollock’s words when she tells Anderson that “[w]e oughta be lookin’ to a better world for our children” (75).

³ Many of Pollock’s adult character have names in the diminutive form (for example: Lizzie; Dede and Gillie; Old Eddy, Eddy, Young Eddy, and Bonnie; Katie and Robbie; Johnny; Eme; Ev; Eddie and Annie) as if they remain in a sense caught in the past, struggling with or influenced by childhood identities and issues, parental forces or legacies. Diminutives are also used to infantilise, ridicule, or taunt individuals; for example, Evy taunts Hopkinson by calling him “Billy” (*KMI* 33), the white Loyalist veterans call a former slave and fellow veteran “Black Wullie” (*GIS*), and Eme refers to her brother as “bubu” (*GIS* 101). In response, some characters insist on their full name expressly as a rejection of these factors (William or Bill Hopkinson, not Billy; Catherine, not Katie).

form of genetic and psychological characteristics, as well as social, in the form of familial hopes and expectations. By the latter I mean cases such as a child following her parent's choice of occupation, or a younger child or a "replacement child" fulfilling, consciously or unconsciously, the familial hopes associated with an elder sibling. Often, the social is confused with and naturalised as the biological, diminishing the sense of personal choice and agency and amplifying the transgression of difference. In Pollock's work, the question of identity and the location of its answer in the family and the past exist not only within individuals but within groups and communities: consider James Walsh's relationship to the North West Mounted Police in *Walsh* or the Loyalist veterans in *Fair Liberty's Call*. First I will look at the situation of the individual then I will expand my observations to that of the larger community.

In the second act of *Blood Relations* (1980), at the beginning of a crucial realisation and decision about who she is and what she is capable of doing, the Actress/Lizzie⁴ asks her father, Andrew Borden, questions of identity:

LIZZIE: You're a very strong-minded person, Papa, do you think I'm like you?

MR BORDEN: In some ways . . . perhaps.

LIZZIE: I must be like someone.

MR BORDEN: You resemble your mother.

LIZZIE: I look like my mother?

MR BORDEN: A bit like your mother.

LIZZIE: But my mother's dead.

MR BORDEN: Lizzie—

LIZZIE: I remember you told me she died because she was sick . . . I was born and she died⁵ . . . Did you love her?⁶ (57)

⁴ Following the convention of the script, I will use Miss Lizzie to refer to Lizzie Borden and the Actress/Lizzie to refer the Actress playing the Lizzie of the past.

⁵ Historically, Sarah Morse Borden, Lizzie's mother, died when Lizzie was three years old. Pollock's paratactic use of the conjunction "and" creates the impression that Sarah Borden's death and Lizzie's birth occurred chronologically close to each other and are somehow, mysteriously, linked. Certainly, Lizzie seems to feel a sense of guilt or responsibility for her mother's death. The link between a child's birth and a mother's unhappy demise is again present in *Doc* when Katie/Catherine feels herself responsible for her parents' unhappy marriage (49-52) and for her mother's death (32). Catherine fears being an unwanted child (50) and, like Lizzie, has the added burden of not being the wished-for male first child (50, 53). Guilt, then, is another form of inheritance women in Pollock's drama deal with.

⁶ Note also the jump (or misalignment) in the flow of Lizzie's thought here from her mother's death (and her [Lizzie's] possible relation to it) to the nature of her parents relationship, "Did you love

Lizzie goes on to postulate a cause for her mother's death:

Perhaps she just got tired and died. She didn't want to go on, and the chance came up and she took it. I could understand that. . . . Perhaps she was like a bird, she could see all the blue sky and she wanted to fly away but she couldn't. She was caught, Papa, she was caught in a horrible snare, and she saw a way out and she took it. . . . Perhaps it was a very brave thing to do, Papa, perhaps it was the only way, and she hated to leave us because she loved us so much, but she couldn't breathe all caught in the snare. . . . *Long pause.* Some people have very small wrists, have you noticed. Mine aren't . . . (58)

Lizzie rejects her father's answer that she is like her mother, clearly pointing out to him the disturbing nature of the analogy: her mother is dead. She does not wish to resemble a dead woman, a woman who was sick and whose death was somehow related to her own birth. Yet, it is also clear that Lizzie does feel a resemblance to her mother whom she envisions as trapped, without power or agency (not active but passive and reactive, waiting for the chance of exit), who, in Lizzie's construction, courageously chose death as the only means of escape. Significantly, Lizzie's ambivalent hypothesis is not that an absence of love prompted her mother's departure but that her mother chose to leave despite the presence of love: "she hated to leave us because she loved us so much but she couldn't breathe all caught in the snare." The passage could be interpreted both as Lizzie's fantasy of a loving mother and family (she asked her father earlier "Did you love her?" [57]) and as an anti-romantic observation on the nature of love and motherhood. Contrary to conventional idealisation or perhaps our deepest hopes and desires, love does not conquer all. While her mother loves them, she also had other competing needs: "She didn't want to go on, and the chance came up and she took it." Similar questionings of the nature and limit of love occur in many other plays including *Doc*, *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, *Moving Pictures*, *Angel's Trumpet*, and *End Dream*.

On the other hand, it might be equally accurate to say that the mother resembles the daughter; that Lizzie, in her desire to be "like someone," has created a mother in her own image. Many critics have observed Pollock's use of bird imagery, its association with Lizzie, and the symbolism of Mr. Borden's murder of Lizzie's pet doves with an axe. Likewise, they have noted these images reverberate with other scenes in drama, for example: Mr. Wright's killing of his

her?". This questioning of love appears again in other plays such as *Doc*, *Moving Pictures*, and *Angel's Trumpet* and is arguably another thematic question in Pollock's work which merits further attention.

wife's pet bird and her subsequent actions in Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* and the killing of Miss Julie's birds by her father in August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*.⁷ There is, however, a double, generational, association in *Blood Relations* where caged birds, the patriarchal forces behind their confinement, and their (violent) death are linked to both Lizzie and her mother. In the end, however, Lizzie makes a decision and a self-evaluation which distance her from maternal resemblances and what she imagines was her mother's choice. Pollock mirrors this in the linguistic form. There is a sudden eerie break in Lizzie's speech as she switches from her fantasy of a mother, brave and loving even as she abandons her daughter in favour of death, to a seemingly unrelated comment about the thickness of her own wrists. She also shifts from a string of conditional "perhaps" to a declarative assertion: "Some people have very small wrists, have you noticed. Mine aren't" The associations are all there: small, fragile, bird-like, liable to be caught in snares and fatally injured—mother-like. Lizzie will not be like her mother, but her father, strong-minded, the wielder of axes and killer of birds, rather than the birds themselves. Note the confines of the jigsaw puzzle here: Lizzie can't seem to envision an alternative beyond maternal or paternal resemblance. Here, family intersects with class values since what Miss Lizzie also cannot truly envision or enact is life without what she perceives as her rightful inheritance: her share of her father's wealth, the life of the house on the hill, and the middle-class privileges and values to which she is accustomed.

This scene of identity questioning and construction, of a child searching for answers about herself in the identity of her ancestors and her relationship to them, recurs in Pollock's drama again and again in differing forms. So too do issues such as: the concept of "psychological inheritance" (positive and negative), the dangers of maternal inheritance, and the attempt to distinguish between nature and nurture, determinism and choice. We have a series of similar scenes in *Doc*:

OSCAR: I think your father got his drive from your Gramma and you get yours from him.

KATIE: Are you saying I'm like her?

OSCAR: In some ways perhaps.

KATIE: I would never walk across a train bridge at midnight!

⁷ See Chung, "A different kind of the same thing"; Walker, chapter three of *The Buried Astrolabe*; and Wasserman, "Daddy's Girls."

OSCAR: You might.

KATIE: I would not!

OSCAR: Well it was an accident she—

KATIE: What do you mean I might!

OSCAR: It was a short cut.

KATIE: I'm not like her! I would never do that!

OSCAR: It wasn't anything she did.

KATIE: I'm too smart for that!

OSCAR: It was just something that happened.

KATIE: You don't know that! You don't know anything. (42-43)

Katie is also named after her grandmother, Kate, and later in the play, she again reveals her anxiety by asking Oscar whether he believed people come to resemble their names. The scene ends with the adult Catherine voicing explicitly what the child Katie could not:

KATIE: Do you think names are like dogs?

OSCAR: In what way like dogs?

KATIE: I read dogs start to look like their owners or owners start to look like their dogs. Do you think if you get an ugly name you start to look like your name?

CATHERINE: Or be like who you were named after? (54)

In positing the source of Katie's drive in her father and paternal grandmother, Oscar is, in a sense, telling her that she does "fit in" the family jigsaw puzzle. However, this is hardly comforting. To be like Ev is to achieve success in one's career and in public life but to neglect and to alienate one's family. Katie knows this since she is the recipient of this neglect and, as an adult, she will in turn neglect Ev and live out a form of familial alienation by avoiding a family of her own.⁸

More importantly, the child Katie, like Lizzie Borden, is disturbed by any suggestion that she is like her female ancestors. Katie finds that her "drive" may be an ambivalent trait. The strength which has allowed her to endure her difficult childhood and which will propel her adolescent self to independence away from home is itself a sign of her affinity with her mysterious and psychologically powerful grandmother. Katie does not wish to have the name of

⁸ Even the act of renaming herself, from her given name of "Katie" to "Catherine," a variation, can be seen as a rejection of her familial ties, albeit on a limited basis.

or to be like her grandmother, a woman who died under unclear circumstances, struck by a train on a railway bridge in the middle of the night. Her mother claims it was an act of suicide, while her father and Uncle Oscar claim it was an accident. Neither possibility is comforting. The threat of suicide is doubly real for Katie because her mother, an unhappy, trapped, alcoholic woman (who regrettably needs rather than gives to her child care, support, and attention), is suicidal and will succeed in her attempt later in the drama. Literature scholar Elizabeth Stone points out that, while they are not necessarily biologically determined, suicide, illness, and injury can be seen by some families as a “psychological destiny,” even a form of “intergenerational family loyalty” (94), and resisting any family script is difficult and often seen by the family as rebellion—as Katie, Bob, Oscar, and even Ev, all learn.

The possibility of “accident” is no better. “We know ‘accidents’, don’t we,” the adult Catherine says to Katie (99). To Katie, the word “accident” has been used too freely and inaccurately by the adults around her for it to explain anything adequately. It is a word Catherine and Katie suggest Oscar used to explain Bob’s overdose of medication (108). How can Bob’s depression and illness be completely accidental when, at home and in the absence of other adults to validate her observation, Katie watches her mother purposefully drinking and taking pills? The label “accident” also suggests a lack of agency. In fact, with respect to Gramma Kate’s railway death, Oscar stresses that “[i]t wasn’t anything she [Katie’s Gramma] did” (42). This is bitterly ironic since the act of suicide might be considered a last claim to self-determination, agency, and attention for Bob and possibly Katie’s Gramma. Finally, as Katie well knows, the word can be used to cover up socially inappropriate actions like the railway suicide her mother suggests:⁹

OSCAR: How did this happen? [Pollock’s stage direction states that Katie is holding her wrist]

KATIE: I dunno.

OSCAR: Yes you do.

KATIE: I’m accident-prone. Some people are you know. Accident-prone. I do dangerous things. I like doing dangerous things.

OSCAR: How’d you do this?

⁹ Suicide was not only socially inappropriate but illegal in many countries in the past. For example, it remained in the Canadian Criminal Code until 1972 (Kellner n.p.)

KATIE: It was just something that happened.

OSCAR: Ah-huh.

(OSCAR is taping KATIE's wrist) (58)

It is unclear what the nature of Katie's injury is but there is certainly the suggestion that she in fact does know how it happened and it was not completely accidental. A comparison of this scene with the earlier one quoted above where Katie and Oscar discuss her grandmother's death is revealing. The young girl who rejects Oscar's explanations and insists that she is "very smart" and would never be caught in a dangerous and fatal accident like her grandmother, explains her own injury using the same word ("accident") and exactly the same phrase ("It was just something that happened"¹⁰) used by Oscar to describe Gramma Kate's death (42). In this and in playing in the freight yards with her brother Robbie, crawling under train cars, Katie appears to be pushing the boundaries between choice and heredity, testing and challenging her ability to control her life against the possibilities of such a psychological inheritance and the veracity of the adults around her.

Furthermore, these questions and anxieties about biological and psychological inheritance do not reside only in Katie/Catherine.¹¹ Oscar feels the familial burden of both social and psychological inheritances. His physician father wants him to be a doctor, a wish to which he reluctantly acquiesces. He tells Ev: "I don't have ambitions and desires and goals in life. I don't need 'em. My old man has my whole life mapped out for me and I know what I'm supposed to do. I'm supposed to read and follow the map. That's it." (40). But he repeatedly wonders to Ev whether he takes after his absent mother:

OSCAR: When I think of medicine I get sick. Yeah. The thought of medicine makes me ill. Physically ill. Do you think that could be my mother in me? [. . .]

EV: Maybe.

OSCAR: My father says it's my mother in me. At least she had the good sense to get out. Leaving me with him. How could she do that?

EV: I dunno. (35)

¹⁰ Interestingly, "it was just something that happened" is also the exact phrase Andrew Borden used to explain his wife's death to his daughter Lizzie (*BR* 58).

¹¹ Zimmerman, in "Transfiguring the Maternal" (159n2), also makes this observation.

Note Oscar's ambivalence about his mother's departure, an act of "good sense" and of incomprehensible abandonment. We also have another example of the influence of family storytelling and the type of value-laden identity stories elders tell their children. What one parent finds undesirable in the child is attributed to the other parent ("My father says it's my mother in me"), leaving the child with doubts about his lineage as well as his autonomy. In addition, like much of the personality attributions by parents and quests for identity by children in Pollock's drama, there is the sense that what is positive can only come from one parent. Dual or multiple influences and inheritances seem difficult for the characters to imagine.

One crucial difference between Oscar and Katie (or Lizzie Borden in *Blood Relations*) is that Oscar's mother, while absent like so many mothers in Pollock's drama, did not choose death as the means of leaving her entrapment and her family. In my reading, Oscar's mother, a doctor's wife and a mother like Bob, has managed to escape alive and functions in Pollock's play as a reminder of alternative possibilities to the course of Bob's life, her choices and her constraints, just as the Actress and Bridget, as independent working women (albeit, and significantly, from a lower class) serve as alternative examples to Miss Lizzie's own life choices. As Craig Walker points out, Pollock denies the complete supremacy of environmental determinism and insists on the existential possibility of personal agency despite the powerful presence of external or systemic influences. He notes it isn't that "there are *not* 'paternalistic, dictatorial' elements that emerge from the various families in Pollock's plays, but rather that it is essential to each play that the personal and social dilemmas be understood to be as much internal as external *or systemic* matters" (182, emphasis in original).

Family has positive as well as negative potentials. Bob too is sensitive to her familial past. But unlike Katie and Oscar, who are fearful of their lineage, she proudly tells Katie the story of her ancestor and her name:

BOB: Eloise Roberts, and they called me Bob, and I could run faster and play harder and do better than any boy I ever met! And my hair? It was all the way down to there! And when I asked my Mama -- Mama? -- She said, we have been here since the Seventeen Hundreds, Eloise, and in your blood runs the blood of Red Roberts! Do you know who he is? A pirate, with flamin' red hair and a flamin' red beard who harboured off a cove in P.E.I.! A pirate! And inside of me -- just burstin' to get out! To reach out! To grow! . . . And when I sat on our front porch and I looked out -- I always looked up, cause lookin' up I saw the sky, and the sky went on forever! And I picked and sold berries, and my Mama cleaned house for

everyone all around, and my sisters and my one brother Bill, everything for one thing. For me. For Eloise Roberts. For Bob.

(62-63, emphasis in original)

Bob's monologue is a clear example of what Stone calls the "myth of 'blood'": "when we think of families, we think of 'blood' lines, and the image this summons up in our minds is of a rush of blood coursing down the generations, undiluted and unalloyed. Our collective fantasy is that the same blood that surged through our ancestors surges through us with undiminished power" (39). Her story also depicts a woman who is valued by her family and the recipient of their attention. In addition, it is evidence that Katie's "drive," whether it is a positive or negative behaviour and whether it is inherited or learnt (or both), need not have come solely from her paternal ancestors (Ev or his mother), as Oscar suggests.¹² Bob's exhilarating and romantic sense of personal pride and assurance is all the more moving because the audience is aware that this is a description of a self which she has lost or which has been taken from her (57). Her lack of fear and anxiety about her familial identity may be explained by the fact that it is not her mother, who cleaned people's houses and raised eight children on that and her husband's military pension, from whom she chooses her inheritance. While her mother's hard life and work may be interpreted as an achievement (raising eight children on her own), clearly Bob does not wish to emulate it. The ancestor she feels connected to is masculine, autonomous, adventurous, and socially unconventional. Yet, this connection to Red Roberts is made possible for Bob through her mother's gift of an ancestral story, itself an "inheritance" of sorts. Bob's story illustrates that the individual has a certain degree of choice regarding which element of the family to recognise or with which ancestor one aligns oneself, and that the choice can be influenced by external, social, conditions. Bob's story of Red Roberts and the path of her own life also demonstrate the relative power of familial influences, personal will towards rebellion, and the strength of social gender expectations. The model and spirit of Red Roberts supported Bob in achieving a professional

¹² Interestingly, the sense and tone of this passage, Bob's youthful vitality and promise, her reference to the sky and its vast scale, are echoed by Helen (the young Nell Shipman, later to be "The Girl From Alaska") in her description of her Alaskan epiphany, running with her dog under the northern lights, feeling as if it was the force of her running steps, pushing against the ground, which moved the earth in its rotation (*MP* 49). Likewise, Pollock's Zelda Fitzgerald speaks of a childhood in perpetual motion: running (like Helen, with her dog), jumping, swinging, climbing (*AT* 189) and of being named by her mother "after a gypsy queen in a novel" (*AT* 190).

nursing career beyond one set of social and familial expectations (those for a single woman with her family and class background), yet it was not able to strengthen her against another set of social and familial expectations (those for a prominent doctor's wife and a mother):

EV: Look, you're not just¹³ an R.N. anymore.

BOB: No.

EV: You're not Eloise Roberts, you're not Bob any more.

BOB: Who am I?

EV: My wife. (56-57)

A little later in the drama, Pollock again makes clear the different social standards to which Bob and Ev are subject:

BOB: I know I'm a good nurse. I'm as good as anyone. When I'm out . . . I'm never sure which fork to use.

EV: Who gives a shit which fork you use? Whichever one comes to hand.

BOB: When you "go out" that fork's important. (60)

We see that Bob is more sensitive to and more restricted by social expectations than Ev, whose gender and career persona as a hard talking, embattled physician enable him to not "give a shit" about the intricate mores of social etiquette and expectation. In fact, his abrasive and ambitious behaviour is accepted by his community. Bob, stripped of her career status and subject to her society's expectations of proper feminine behaviour (especially for the wife of a prominent doctor), has no such protection or acceptance. Bob's own passion for Ev and her inarticulate attachment to her children¹⁴—both powerful familial forces of attraction—as well as her inability

¹³ Notice also how Ev's words "just an R.N." trivialises Bob's accomplishment, one which Bob's story tells us entailed familial sacrifice and love, and personal courage and effort.

¹⁴ Interacting with the past, Catherine asks her mother why she didn't leave her unhappy marriage. Bob's response answers little. Twice she replies with a question; the only unequivocal answer is the names of her children and even that seems inadequate.

CATHERINE: Why couldn't you leave?

BOB: Leave?

CATHERINE: Just leave!

BOB: Katie and Robbie.

CATHERINE: Did you care about them?

BOB: And your father? (94)

It is as if her feelings are so ambivalent or the act of leaving and hence destroying the family so unacceptable that they cannot be spoken. This notion of obstacles to familial story-telling will be

(continued...)

to defy the social expectations of a doctor's wife, prevent her from taking the path of Oscar's mother.

Finally, while Ev does not seem to share Katie and Oscar's sense of anxiety over the possibility of psychological inheritance or uncertainty about personal identity (at least not until the end of the drama),¹⁵ he also admits to a familial burden of the past. He tells Bob after she first meets his mother: "Things haven't been easy, you know. You've seen Dad, he's a good man but he's -- when Georgie [Ev's older brother] died, the old man wept on her [Ev's mother] -- there was no one for her to weep on. It was hard on her losin' Georgie, and now all of her hopes for me and for Georgie are all pinned on me . . . You can understand that" (52). In this apologia for his mother's possessiveness and her antagonism towards his future wife Bob, Ev permits a glimpse of the influence that his parents and dead brother had on him. In this respect, Ev's situation is similar to those of Alfred and David Nurlin in *Generations*, younger sons who fulfill the expectations once aimed at their older brothers. Fortunately for Ev, familial expectations and social values, the extended jigsaw puzzle, support his own career drive and turn a blind eye to his neglect of his own family. His parents take pride in his medical career. (Meanwhile, Bob bitterly observes that her mother takes pride not in her medical career as a nurse but in her marriage to a doctor [71]). Ev even achieves social status and admiration for his exclusive devotion to his patients (after all, a hospital is about to be named after him).

Bob's story of Red Roberts and her triumph over poverty to become a successful nurse, the stories Katie asks of Oscar about her own parents, Ev's stories of his family and his pioneering medical work, highlight another important focus in Pollock's work: the role of narratives, family stories, in creating individual and family identity. To repeat Stone's observation: "What blood does not provide, narrative can" (70). Over and over again, Pollock reminds us that such family stories, such histories, are never purely objective descriptions but

¹⁴ (...continued)

discussed further in chapter four. Note that Catherine's question, "Did you care about them?," is another example of the questioning of the nature and limit of love I spoke of earlier.

¹⁵ Ev finds his identity challenged by Catherine and Oscar when they question his self-righteous single-minded devotion to his patients, when Catherine asks him "[w]as it worth it?" (79) and Oscar refuses to answer his leading question: "was that worth it?" (123). Significantly, in both cases, Ev is unable to answer the question himself.

contestable and contested amalgamations of fact and romance. Each story is a performance aimed at a specific audience in order to attain strategic goals, such as sympathy, status, moral authority, compliance, security, precedence. We see this every time Ev tells a story of the needs of his poor rural patients in response to a plea from Bob or Oscar to attend to his own family, every time Bob tells Katie stories of her achievement and skill as a nurse to gain sympathetic attention and to validate her former independence and confidence.

Another example of the anxiety about identity and genetic inheritance appears in Pollock's early play *The Komagata Maru Incident* (1978, first production 1976). Unlike Catherine or Oscar, who, despite their anxieties, continue to seek to understand their absent mothers, or Lizzie Borden, who imaginatively recreates hers, William Hopkinson actively refuses to acknowledge or discuss his maternal lineage, a lineage which Pollock's drama, as well as historical evidence, suggests is Indian. Like Katie, Hopkinson fears and rejects any link to his mother or an Indian heritage but his behaviour is influenced more immediately by socio-political conditions than fears of a psychological inheritance. Families in *The Komagata Maru Incident* clearly convey national meanings.

In *The Komagata Maru Incident*, the rhetoric of kinship is used to defend racism. The Vancouver politician portrayed by T.S. speaks in parliament defending the "white man's country" (17) against Sikh immigration, asking rhetorically would citizens prefer "[m]en, honest and true like ourselves, whose fathers made this country what it is today--or will they be surrounded by coloured men with foreign food? Canadians have rights! Our fathers died for them!" (17). As Benedict Anderson points out in *Imagined Communities*, the "vocabulary of kinship" (143) and home can be used to describe a political attachment to a nation. The rhetoric of kinship also has a naturalising tendency which may be manipulated for political ends. Anderson writes: "Both idioms [kinship and home] denote something to which one is naturally tied. As we have seen earlier, in everything 'natural' there is always something unchosen. In this way, nation-ness is assimilated to skin-colour, gender, parentage and birth-era – all those things one can not help" (143). Thus, the kinship idiom can be used to exclude individuals and groups (strangers, not kin) from membership in a community or nation on the basis of things they cannot control. Within this ideology, choice has no influence on nationality, even though we know that nationhood is not necessarily natural or strictly hereditary, just as blood families and generations grow by incorporating strangers.

Pollock also explicitly demonstrates that the abstract “system” is itself manifest in the form of families. Evy tells Georg and Hopkinson a “story about governments . . . a bedtime story” (30). T.S. then takes over most of Evy’s narrative in which pacifist European immigrants are invited by the Canadian government to homestead in Manitoba but had their land taken away when they refused military allegiance to the country. Throughout the “bedtime story,” itself a narrative form often associated with the familial context, the people involved are described as families:

There was a little boy who came to Manitoba with his mummy and daddy and sisters and brothers and many others very much like him. [. . .]. The daddies worked to earn money for seed and supplies, and the mummies harnessed themselves to the plough and pulled it [. . .]. By and by, the mummies and daddies had homes and barns and food for the winter and seed for the spring and horses for the plough. Then others came and saw what they had. And Canada said--Now about this allegiance! And which of you owns this particular piece of land? Be precise and sign here! And my goodness, friends, isn’t all this worth killing and maiming for? What kind of people are you?

The mummies and daddies and sisters and brothers set out on a pilgrimage. [. . .] a special train came along and returned everyone to Northern Manitoba. And those who would not sign and swear allegiance were driven from their land with only what they could carry! (30-31)

T.S. continues, saying that a group of people with fairer skin than the earlier immigrants “stormed the land office for homesteads and barns and harvests still in the fields” (31). Then Evy adds: “My brother stood in the line for three days, he got a section-next to my father’s” (31). She tells Georg and Hopkinson: “It can happen to any of us” (31). The “system,” the government, its victims and its agents, are families: “sisters and brothers,” “mummies and daddies,” “my brother” and “my father” — “us.”

As in other Pollock dramas, parental influence is significant but unlike in plays such as *Blood Relations* or *Walsh*, we have a scene in which daughters discuss mothers in a positive manner. In fact, despite Hopkinson’s initial rejection, mothers’ teachings, in *The Komagata Maru Incident*, are seen in a positive light. At the start of the play, Pollock slips in a first reference to mothers when Hopkinson goes to see his informer in the Vancouver Sikh community and Evy comments: “My mother always said, don’t snitch, and don’t play with snitchers. Didn’t your mother ever tell you that?” (4). Then, there is the formidable Woman, the unnamed Sikh mother on shipboard, intelligent, brave, politically astute, defending her son and her people. (In fact, Pollock gives us two parallel families, that of the Woman and of Hopkinson,

with two soldier fathers, two Indian mothers [one present, one absent], and two sons [one infant and one infantilised by his English superiors].) Later, Sophie and Evy have a private scene together, seemingly unrelated to the political drama, but containing stories about family, what “runs in the family” (13), and caring maternal advice. Sophie tells Evy about leaving her unhappy childhood family life to find something better. The older Evy adds: “Don’t stop here, Sophie. [. . .] Find a nice man, and move on” (14).

Finally, Hopkinson’s loyalty to his informants and his acceptance of his maternal heritage are symbolised through the two-step image of a child returning to the arms of his mother. First, in a mystic, highly sensitive state, Hopkinson describes his encounter with death:

When I see him [his killer, Mewa Singh], I feel myself bursting. My toy town is destroyed in an instant. He is large, he encompasses my world, I feel myself racing towards eternity – They say I grapple with him. I do not. I open my arms, I say:

Now (47)

The rest of Hopkinson’s speech seems to be a description of the Hindu god Vishnu. Next, T.S. tells us Mewa Singh fires three shots and kills Hopkinson. Pollock then significantly leaves the last lines to the Woman, the unnamed Sikh mother, who describes Mewa Singh’s death by hanging and his last words: “I offer my neck to the rope as a child opens his arms to his mother” (47). Thus, the sentence and image begun by Hopkinson are repeated and completed by Mewa Singh and the Sikh mother. Of course, this is an image which is also visually present throughout the drama, raised above the stage, embodied by the Woman and her young son.

Family is indeed significant, but to compound matters, Pollock’s drama also questions the definition of “family,” who is “family,” and the degree of power or choice one has in these determinations. For example, in *Blood Relations* Lizzie denies familial status to her stepmother:

EMMA: If mother [Abigail Borden] heard you, you know what she’d say.

LIZZIE: She’s not my mother or yours.

EMMA: Well she married our father twenty-seven years ago, if that doesn’t make her our mother--

LIZZIE: It doesn’t.

EMMA: Don’t talk like that. (25)

Harry, Abigail Borden’s brother, is similarly defined as not family. Here, Lizzie and Emma raise the question of nature or culture (there’s little “nurture” here) in the creation of family, with

Lizzie clearly choosing nature, what Reid Gilbert points out are “relations of blood, rather than of marriage” (117). Ironically, blood relations imply the lack of agency and choice to which Lizzie so objects. Of course, Lizzie’s choice of familial identity is also a strategic action in order to support her own claim to her father’s estate over that of her step-mother.

If “family” is defined as those with whom one has a morally privileged relationship,¹⁶ then in *Doc*, Ev’s choice to neglect Bob, Katie, Robbie, and his mother Kate, in favour of his patients might also be seen as an instance of confusion about the definition of family and who is family. Meanwhile, Oscar is in the difficult position of functioning, with Ev’s encouragement, as a surrogate companion/husband to Bob and a surrogate parent to Katie. It is Oscar who is sensitive to Bob’s unhappiness, concerned about the appropriateness of her medical treatment, and argues for Ev to spend more time with his family. It is Oscar, instead of Ev or Bob, who attends to Katie, ties her shoelaces, bandages her wrist, answers her demands for stories about her parents. In an exchange with Oscar, Katie both challenges Oscar’s status as kin and affirms his importance by continuing to address him as “Uncle,” as she will throughout the play:

KATIE: You don’t have any family.

OSCAR: You’re my family.

KATIE: I’m not related to you, and you’re not related to me, you can’t be family,
Uncle Oscar. (104)

Here again Pollock points out the tension between blood relations, families of choice, and fictive kin. As Stone reminds us, “the central paradox and challenge of marriage is that we have to make family out of someone we’re not related to” (63), even “blood relations,” grow and are created by incorporating strangers and turning them into kin.

The issue of choice versus blood (absence of choice) in familial and individual identity appears again in *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, where the audience, and Johnny Farley, quickly discover that what was thought to be a blood relation, “family,” turns out not to be so at all: Leah is an adopted daughter, or in Mr. Big’s words, a “chosen” daughter. The question is, of course, who has and who lacks the power to chose? As Mama George points out in her eventual confrontation with Mr. Big (236-37), the abandoned child Leah had little choice in her life with

¹⁶ Scholars in the philosophy of the family have questioned to what extent should family members be favoured over non-family and whether one has special responsibilities and obligations toward family members. For example, see essays by Thomas Donaldson and Patricia Smith.

them. Yet, if the family of choice fails in *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, so too does the family of blood relations, the Farleys. Where Mr. Big seduces with his non-conformity and empty promises of choice and Mama George binds with her complicity, Cec tempts with his license and Mrs. Farley judges and punishes with her conservative morals. Johnny is unable to accept Leah once he discovers her true background because, as Bessai points out, he “is his mother’s son as far as sexual morality is concerned” (103). Both children are trapped by their parental inheritances. In the case of Johnny, his allegiance to Mr. Big as a charismatic father figure is also disastrous.

In fact, there is an interesting symmetry, in the two families in this play. Each family has a set of misplaced or “mis-aligned” kinship relationships. In Mr. Big’s incestuous relationship with his adopted daughter Leah and his neglect of Mama George, and in Mrs. Farley’s exclusive and stifling love for her son Johnny and her contempt for her husband Cec, we have a set of destructive “over-rated” and “under-rated” familial relations: an excessively intimate parent and child relationship and a spousal relationship lacking in intimacy, a situation where the intensity of intimacy conventionally held for one’s spouse is directed at one’s child. While it is possible to argue that such conditions may not be so unusual or rare in everyday life, in the context of a formal exploration of Pollock’s drama, in their status as artistic forms and structures, I believe they are relevant and useful examples of the overlapping of misalignment and the kinship idiom.

Another form of familial confusion appears in the multiplicity of kin in Pollock’s drama. For example, as Jerry Wasserman points out, Lizzie Borden has three “mothers” in *Blood Relations*: her birth-mother; her step-mother Abigail; and her older sister, Emma, who brought Lizzie up and was like a mother to her¹⁷ (“Daddy’s Girl” 30). In *The Komagata Maru Incident* there are dual Indian mothers, absent and present: Hopkinson’s unacknowledged mother and the Sikh mother represented on stage. In fact, there are parallel colonial family structures of Indian mother, soldier father, and son since we are told that the Sikh father of the child on the Komagata Maru was, like Hopkinson’s own father, a soldier in the British forces (13). Pollock’s choice to represent the Sikhs on the Komagata Maru, most of whom were men, by a mother and child

¹⁷ At the end of *Blood Relations*, Lizzie tells Emma: “It was you who brought me up, like a mother to me. Almost like a mother.” (70). Wasserman also argues for the existence of a symbolic incestuous relationship between Lizzie and father (“Daddy’s Girl” 30-31). This interpretation would suggest another form of misalignment and confusion of familial relationships.

attests to another instance of the kinship idiom at work.¹⁸ Finally, in *Fair Liberty's Call* there is a proliferation of doubles, which I will address in the next chapter.

Generations (1980) also illustrates concerns about the restrictions of the family but, unlike *Doc* and *The Komagata Maru Incident*, the focus is on material and social inheritances rather than biological or psychological, at least on the surface. The three generations of the Nurlin family in this drama struggle with and against the Canadian prairie, a land of “*omniscient presence and mythic proportions*” (141). A play emphatically prairie in origins,¹⁹ *Generations* is both a romantic anthem to the mythic allure and power of the land and a realistic examination of the costs it exacts from the families who farm it and of the neglect these families face from the nation. More than in any Pollock play, except perhaps *Getting It Straight* and *Fair Liberty's Call*, here individual time, family time, national time, and geological/astronomical time are integrated and inseparable in her dramaturgy as well as her narrative. Pollock's description of the setting joins place and generations, as well as individual and family time. She states that a portion of the “Old Place,” the Nurlin homestead built by Old Eddy, can be seen from the “New Place,” the current family home, built when Alfred (the second generation) and Margaret married (141). Past and present exist at the same time and are structurally materialised in the setting of the play. National time is invoked by the effects of the Second World War on the sons of Charlie and Old Eddy, David and Old Eddy's running jokes about the enduring conflict between Canada/Ottawa and the West (145), the disagreement between the First Nations and the government in which the farmers are caught, and the farmers' meeting with the provincial and federal officials at the end of the drama. Astronomical time is invoked by Pollock in her opening stage directions: “*During the action of the play, the sun is slowly passing overhead; the earth is turning; this is reflected subtly in the changing patterns of light and shadow*” (142). This description links the drama of the Nurlin family to the movement of our planet Earth within the

¹⁸ Historically, most of the passengers on the Komagata Maru were men. Women and children were present, but they were very few. Hugh Johnston notes that Dr. Rughunath Singh, the ship's medical officer, was accompanied by his wife and son; and another passenger, Sundar Singh, had his wife, son, and baby daughter on board (34).

¹⁹ Paul Matthew St. Pierre states that the play was “commissioned by Alberta Theatre Projects and premiered at Calgary's Canmore Opera House in 1980” and began life as “a 1978 CBC radio drama (titled simply *Generation*)” (304).

Solar System just as it echoes an earlier description where Pollock writes: “*THE LAND is a character revealed by the light and shadow it throws on the Nurlins’ lives*” (141). The sun casts its presence on the land which in turn casts its presence on the Nurlins. Cosmic forces can also be seen in the *deus ex machina* of the saving rain which puts out the fire set by David and the young farmers and may or may not mitigate the drought.²⁰ As constructed by Pollock, the family jigsaw puzzle of the Nurlins is incorporated into the flow of historic time and the seemingly timeless and unchanging prairie, and aligned with cosmic natural dimensions: a potentially overwhelming force or a powerful ally.

In *Generations*, a less extreme portrayal of the restrictive family than *Blood Relations* (where murder seemed the only means for Lizzie to attain freedom from her family and the social values it enforces, and even then success is questionable), the family seems to have more positive possibilities. At least, there seems space for difference. Young Eddy has managed to pursue a university education and a law career away from the farm and Old Eddy seems to recognise the need for familial flexibility, though within very strict limits:

OLD EDDY: Say Eddy, you like doin’ this lawyer bit?

YOUNG EDDY: Yes I do, Grampa.

OLD EDDY: Well yuh know what I always say.

YOUNG EDDY: What?

OLD EDDY: A family can’t accommodate one foolish bastard in it ain’t worth a pinch a coon shit . . . Long as the centre holds. And this here’s the centre. Right here. (173)

As long as the family tradition is not threatened, as long as “the centre holds,” then difference is tolerated, though judged as foolish. As long as there is David to take over the farm, then his older brother Young Eddy is free to be a “foolish bastard.” Such was not the case for their father Alfred.

Alfred Nurlin, like Ev in *Doc*, has had to shoulder alone the familial expectations, in this case the continuation of the family farm, which he might have shared with his elder brother (Edward) had the brother survived a childhood illness. He is, however, much more ambivalent

²⁰ The fire is a political and violent action rejected by Old Eddy, who significantly does not even attend the farmers’ meeting with government officials. Old Eddy distances himself from any political socio-economic or state related impingement on his personal and familial relationship with the land which, for him, is an elemental and mythic encounter.

about his choices (or lack thereof) than Ev. For Alfred, the costs are higher and rewards fewer. We learn that Alfred had hopes of travelling and attending university but these seem to have been destroyed by his crushing experience in the Second World War (192) and pressures from Old Eddy turned him toward the farm. He is pointedly non-committal or silent each time he is asked if he actively chose to farm:

YOUNG EDDY: [. . .] do you think you'd have had a right to your own life if you hadn't wanted to farm—to do what you wanted. If you hadn't wanted to be part of all this.

ALFRED: I dunno.

YOUNG EDDY: Like me, in a way.

ALFRED: I dunno.

MARGARET: Your father's always done what he wanted, haven't you, Alfred?

YOUNG EDDY: I was thinking of Davey. (177)

Later, in a discussion with David, Alfred admits that he did have other dreams:

ALFRED: I know I give in to Eddy. I know that.

DAVID: Not this time. We're not sellin' a piece and we're not takin' no more loans out for Eddy.

ALFRED: I see myself in Eddy, him doin' things I mighta done, but--

DAVID: You say No! (182)

Alfred is the one clear sacrifice in this drama. Even when he opens up to his younger son and admits that in Young Eddy he sees the fulfilment of his former hopes for himself, David does not hear the personal costs his father is revealing and the only response Alfred receives is that the farm takes precedence and he must deny Young Eddy as he has denied himself. Yet, even this acquiescence is not enough. Reminiscent of Pollock's story of bashing in the misfit jigsaw piece, Old Eddy demands of Alfred a total affinity and commitment, material and emotional, to the land:

OLD EDDY: What do yuh [Alfred] know, your heart was never in this.

MARGARET: Will the two of you stop it.

OLD EDDY: I can remember, always at me he was, he was gonna do this, he was gonna do that—the only thing he was never gonna do was carry on what I started.

MARGARET: He's here, isn't he

OLD EDDY: Not by choice.

MARGARET: How can you say that?

OLD EDDY: It was the war—it was the killin' kept him here!

ALFRED: Papa, I–

OLD EDDY: Yuh think I'm old! Yuh think I forget! Always talkin' 'bout goin' places, goin' to the coast, goin' to Calgary, goin' to university–what yuh did was go to war, and yuh come back and yuh never talked 'bout goin' nowhere again!

ALFRED: I was a kid! I grew up!

OLD EDDY: Thank God for Davey! That's all I got to say, thank God for Davey! *He exits to the porch where he sits.*

[.....]

ALFRED: Goddamn place. I sometimes wonder who owns who. (154-55)

It is fortuitous for the Nurlin family, at least for Old Eddy's vision of the Nurlin family, and for Young Eddy, that David does choose, in the end, to farm the land. Farming is accepted by David as an unexamined fate in the beginning of the drama. Like Alfred, David's initial response to the question of whether he wants to pursue the harsh life of a farmer, under such difficult financial and political circumstances, is "I dunno" (169). However, he is forced by Bonnie and Young Eddy to question his commitment to the Nurlin legacy. The one character who changes during the play, David's passage is towards self-awareness and active choice, key concepts in Pollock's work. Ironically, this is spurred on by Bonnie, the one person who wishes David would leave the farm:

DAVID: I love this place.

BONNIE: You're tied to it, Davey, do you want to be?

DAVID: I . . . I dunno.

BONNIE: Think about it.

DAVID: Someone has to be.

BONNIE: Not if they don't want to be.

[.....]

DAVID: This is my place. I belong here.

BONNIE: Only if you choose, David, it's not yours if someone else chooses for you.

DAVID: Well maybe I chose it!

BONNIE: You should know if that's so. (169-70)

Having witnessed the losses of her own family, which was unable to sustain a living from

farming, and feeling no affinity towards the prairies, a land in which she feels dwarfed (191),²¹ Bonnie cannot understand anyone willingly choosing the harsh life of a farmer. Such a commitment is, in her view, less a choice than a sacrifice. She tells David: “Old Eddy Nurlin! He sacrificed his wife and his sons and now he’ll sacrifice you to this bloody place! And you know it! And you’re goin’ right along with it!” (170). David’s final answer is that he knows the land, is connected to it, and senses its elemental power (196) and this gives him a sense of identity, permitting him to answer Bonnie’s challenge:

BONNIE: Who do you think you are?

DAVID: *He smiles.* I’m the fuckin’ salt of the earth. Who are you? (197)

The notion of sacrifice and choice is further elaborated by Margaret and Bonnie’s discussion, a scene through which Pollock presents women’s perspectives of the farming experience. Unlike David, who expresses his choice in nebulous experiential terms associated with the power of the land and its ability to simplify life by imposing upon the person an essential, elemental relationship,²² Margaret knows exactly why she chose to marry Alfred Nurlin and the farming life:

BONNIE: [. . .] I . . . marvel at you . . . I don’t admire you. I marvel at . . . how you can submerge yourself in all this. Be nothing but . . . an extension of this. . . . I would not want that to happen to me.

MARGARET: I don’t feel *submerged*-- I am *tired* on occasion.

BONNIE: I’m afraid of that happening to me.

MARGARET: Why?

²¹ Interestingly, Pollock has Bonnie contrast her feelings about the prairies with her view of New Brunswick, Pollock’s own birth province. In a discussion with Alfred, Bonnie confides that she feels more comfortable with the “domesticated” landscape of New Brunswick:

BONNIE: It’s like Munchkin Land—but you can relate to it. That’s where I should’ve been born. *Alfred smiles.* I mean here, I’ve always been afraid of the spaces. How can one person relate to the prairies? Maybe that’s the trouble.

ALFRED: They make you feel small alright.

BONNIE: Useless.

ALFRED: Not useless . . . unimportant maybe. (191)

²² David tells Bonnie: “I know *one thing*, alright? Out *there* . . . is . . . something—I know it. Out there . . . is a feelin’ . . . you don’t get other places. Other places it’s hidden in all the dinky scenery, but on the *prairies* it’s just *there*. A *power*. [. . .] there’s just somethin’ ’bout a person standin’ there on the prairies, everything else stripped away. It makes things simple” (196, emphasis in original).

BONNIE: Why? . . . Because . . . I don't want . . . to lose *myself*.

MARGARET: Lose *yourself*? Lose yourself. . . . And what would you know about loss? . . . It's true I might not have a mind, but I do have a memory, and I remember the thirties. [. . .] Oh yes, the Nurlins were lucky, they hung on to this place but some of us, we weren't so lucky. . . . My father, first he lost his livestock, then his faith, and in the end the bank took what was left, so we moved to the Hat and lived hand-to-mouth, god knows how. . . . When I met Alfred Nurlin, and he asked me to marry him, I knew I had a chance to be part of something again. . . . And you talk about losin' yourself? Are you so special, so fine, so wonderful, there's nothin' bigger worth bein' part of? . . . Good. . . . You be whole then, be complete, be self-sufficient. And you'll be alone. And in the end, you'll be lonely.

BONNIE: There's worse things than lonely.

MARGARET: Are there?

BONNIE: Yes.

MARGARET: I don't know what *they* are. (188-89, emphasis in original)

In this dialogue, Pollock gives an alternative view of the family jigsaw puzzle. If having too many pieces already in place can be destructive to the individual who is different, having insufficient pieces connected or losing pieces of the puzzle can also harm the individual. Here, Margaret speaks of the need to belong to something bigger than her individual self, but unlike David, the whole she envisions is less related to a mythical sense of the landscape than to people, a family, its companionship, endeavours, hopes, and faiths.

Margaret and Bonnie's conversation also highlights two important themes in Pollock's work which I will discuss further in this study: loss and the ambivalent tension between the need for independence and for attachment. Margaret's life choices and values can be seen as responses to and products of loss, issues I will discuss in chapter three. Bonnie's response to Margaret can be seen in terms of dependence and independence. The younger woman, still in the process of defining who she is, struggling for independence, sees the older woman as without a voice of her own, submerged in the family and dependent on the men. Margaret's reply is that independence has its costs and is not necessarily a valued goal. Her response (in terms of loneliness) exemplifies Carol Gilligan's comment on how one's view of a situation "shifts when dependence, which connotes the experience of connection, is contrasted with isolation rather than opposed to independence" ("Exit-Voice" 144). This positive re-framing of dependence, as opposed to disconnection rather than independence, can be seen as another case of ambivalent misalignment.

In *Generations* the restrictive and coercive elements of the family are significantly muted and mitigated largely by the association of the prairie landscape with a mythic sense of permanence and power and the Nurlin family's link to this mythic landscape as farmers. This may in part represent Pollock's acknowledgement of the lived experience of those who first commissioned the play and her own affinity for the prairies but it also leaves issues unsettled. Young Eddy's argument that his needs and wishes are important though different is forgotten as the drama moves to a climax in which he attends the community meeting to show "Nurlin solidarity" (189) and later joins in to save the farm from the fire set by David and his friends. Bonnie's critique of sacrifice and lack of choice is blurred by the pragmatic and realistic way in which constraints can sometimes turn into supports. Being part of something bigger, generations of a family endeavour or the land itself, can give one the strength to endure great hardship. As Robert Nunn observes and articulates so well: "the play is about inheritance, about how you can inherit an obligation that slowly ripens into a vocation, and about the family farm as not just a way of growing food but as a way of preserving a sense of a life spanning generations, indeed as a human construct that is bigger than the individual and so permits him to hold his own against the vastness of the prairie landscape" (82). In the end, the boundary between social and genetic inheritance blurs and what was the result of an individual choice based on social and environmental factors can seem, in time, a physical hereditary trait. In a moment of reflection, Young Eddy asks David whether he wanted "something different from what you're doin' now" (163), and David replies: "*Low* . . . Sometimes . . . when we're eatin' . . . I . . . look at their hands, Old Eddy's and Dad's . . . They seem big. Too big. It's like something happens to the skin and the nails when you work with your hands . . . they get—worn, you know what I mean? Dad's hands are like that, mine'll be someday. *Gives Eddy a light touch on the arm, smiles.* Yours won't" (164).

Pollock herself states another possible factor in the decision of the individual who subordinates her needs to the needs of the group or community, the notion of a higher ideal, something of "worth": "Margaret is a willing sacrifice. There's something bigger worth being a part of, which is what David says too" ("Sharon Pollock," *The Work* 118). Survival and belief in a common higher goal are some of the factors which keep families together despite individual differences and the sacrifices which individuals may be required to undertake. The ethical qualification Pollock insists upon for such sacrifices and disparity of needs is the presence of

choice and self-awareness, that the individual takes an action which is not seen as a painful sacrifice to her or him. Pollock goes on to suggest that, in fact, the community can't function without people willing to serve the larger whole:

I don't know, for example, whose side I'm on in that play [*Generations*]. Part of me relates to Margaret and part of me is with Bonnie. I don't know whether there's worse things than being lonely or not. I have a real interest in people who are willing sacrifices. On the other hand, it can't be a sacrifice to the person who does it. That's what I'm trying to deal with in that play: when a society no longer has those kinds of people who realize what it is they're doing and still do it willingly, that society is doomed. ("Sharon Pollock," *The Work* 117)

A sacrifice which is not a sacrifice seems to me another instance of ambivalent misalignment, and suggests the practical, personal, and societal challenges such an act implies.

Scholars have observed *Generations* variously as realistic and naturalistic as well as a symbolic and mythic drama and have noted that symbolism and myth are achieved by Pollock's representation of the land.²³ Perkyns also links *Generations*' portrayal of the family and its relation to the land to the drama of Eugene O'Neill, Gwen Pharis Ringwood, and Herman Voaden (606). I would like to emphasise that the symbolic and mythic nature of the drama is achieved not only in her characterisation of the land and the Nurlin family's relationship with it, but in her use of traditional familial and generational structures and her treatment of the dynamics of family inheritance, responsibility, choice, and sacrifice (as Perkyns notes but does not consider in detail in his reference to O'Neill, Ringwood, and Voaden). Each generation following Old Eddy Nurlin must wrestle with the familial expectations of continuing the family farm, which, as discussed, can bring to bear upon the individual overwhelming historic and emotional forces. Pollock also employs the familiar trope of the two brothers (Perkyns 606), in fact, two generations of two brothers, and strengthens the symbolism even further by repeating the two-year age difference within each pair, Edward and Alfred, Young Eddy and David. In

²³ Gilbert writes that in *Generations*, like *One Tiger to a Hill*, Pollock again deals with the "problem of designing a production to support her ideas, of finding a way to combine the Naturalism which her plays often require with her obvious desire to explore concepts in an abstract way" (116). Nunn observes that "[t]he play calls for the most detailed farm-kitchen realism yet at the same time for the most abstract and mythic rendering of the prairie landscape. When the naturalistic dialogue reaches toward that mythic level, there is a similar clashing in gears" (82). Perkyns states that "[w]hile the play is primarily naturalistic and in the tradition of the well-made play, the dramatist clearly wishes to make a broader, symbolic statement about the land, that it takes on a brooding intensity comparable with the elm trees in O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*" (605).

each generation, it is the younger, sometime prodigal, son who ends up accepting and maintaining the family legacy unfulfilled by his older brother. Pollock's statement in the typescript scenario she prepared for the early radio drama version of the play (titled "Generation") also indicates that she was working with an underlying mythic structure (as well as explicitly using a kinship idiom):

Were this story a Greek myth, it would be seen as dealing with the necessity of sacrificing one member from each generation to the land thus assuring the fruitfulness of the individual land plot, and of the familial group, and by extension, the country, of which the family and the farm are units generating the vital force which forms "the People" and "the Nation". (1)

This description also recalls one of Bennett Simon's characterisations of tragedy in which the family, especially its children, is threatened in the name of the continuation of the family.

Pollock illustrates that members of each generation are already shaped by the family's hopes before they are even born through her use of character names: Old Eddy; (Young) Edward, his deceased first son (157); and Young Eddy, his first grandson. This use of names to express and pass on a family's hopes and characteristics, its attempt to influence the future, and its burden on the child, appears again in *Doc* where Katie/Catherine fears the power of her grandmother's name, Bob delights in the Red Roberts of her family name, and Ev and Bob argue over whether their second child, a son, will be named George (after Ev's dead older brother), William (after Bob's older brother), or Robbie (unstressed but clearly after Bob's family name of Roberts, Red Roberts, and Bob herself) (66-67). Unlike Katie's situation, the "generations" in this earlier play seem less self-conscious and much less anxious about their patronymic stamp except for one passing, yet important, reference. David speaks with Young Eddy about his girlfriend Bonnie and the future he envisions with her: "I want her to quit [teaching], get married, we'll have kids of our own she can scream at. . . . Have a boy, eh? Call him 'Youngest Eddy,' eh? *Smiles*" (162). Not only do David's words reveal his lack of understanding about Bonnie's own aspirations and values, but the notion of naming his future son "Youngest Eddy," even if partly in jest, is evidence of David's ignorance and a dubious sign of the continuation of the Nurlin burden into another generation, the very thing Bonnie fears. After all, it is the sons not named "Eddy" who have continued the Nurlin legacy of farming, surely a reflection of Pollock's opinion regarding such attempts to control future generations. It may be argued that Pollock's

use of “eh?”, the absurdity of the name (*Youngest Eddy*), and the smile allows a more ironic reading and performance than I have described. This may be so. In which case, the scene demonstrates less David’s ignorance than his ambivalence: his recognition of the emotional desire to control the future and future generations as well as the ethical and practical limits to doing so.

The Metaphoric Family: Community and Nation as Kin

EME: inside his head they dropped the bomb it wasted all
 the people but it kept the real estate
 they say who dropped the bomb?
 I say his parents
 myrna says don’t tell them that!
 I say it’s just a metaphor! what are you thinking!? (*GIS* 113)

Sharon Pollock’s interest in the family is not confined within her dramatic explorations of literal families as they appear in plays like *Blood Relations*, *Doc*, *Generations*, and *Whiskey Six Cadenza*. As my previous discussion of *The Komagata Maru Incident* and Pollock’s statement regarding the mythic and nationalist nature of her radio drama “Generation” demonstrate, family functions as a key metaphor and idiom with which she articulates the broader social relationships of communities and nations. Just as individuals contend with their identities and inheritances, family histories, and familial relationships, social groups in Pollock’s drama use the rhetoric of family and kinship to express their struggles with their cultural identities and heritages, national histories, political relationships, and ethical responsibilities. Questions about the continuation of the family²⁴ translate into the continuation of the community and nation. This is evident in Pollock’s more historical and social dramas, from her earliest works such as *Walsh* (1973, revised 1983), *The Komagata Maru Incident* (1976), and *One Tiger to a Hill* (1980) to the more recent such as *Fair Liberty’s Call* (1993). I will introduce my observations with a scene from

²⁴ For example, James Walsh on having no sons (*Walsh* 162), Andrew Borden on the merits of not having children (*BR* 35), and Catherine’s anxiety about having children (*Doc* 27).

Walsh:²⁵

WALSH: I am a soldier of the Great White Mother. You may know me, and others like me, by my red coat. *He indicates his tunic.*

GALL: *offering WALSH a George III medal* My grandfather was a soldier for the grandfather of Queen Victoria. At that time, your people told him that the Sioux nation belonged to that grandfather of the Queen. My people fought against the Longknives for your people then. We were told that you would always look after your red children. Now the Longknives have stolen our land. We have no place to go. We come home to you asking for that protection you promised. (*Walsh* [1983] 149)

Here Gall uses the rhetoric of the family and home, the language used by the Europeans, to remind the Canadians of their responsibility and to claim for the Sioux the right to “parental” care once promised them. Not only are current relationships between the Sioux and the British characterised as one of kinship but political and national history are represented as family history and inheritances, promises made between grandfathers. As this scene and later ones make clear, it is not that the Sioux genuinely see themselves as children and the Europeans as parents but that both parties use the rhetoric of family and the emotional and political weight familial ties wield in attempts to manipulate social relationships towards their own interested goals. A little later in the drama, Walsh refuses help to the Sioux using the same idiom Gall used to seek help:

WALSH: [. . .] I have news . . . and it’s not good news. . . . My chief says the Queen is not responsible for you. *He holds up the George III medal.* This happened a long time ago. The Great White Mother has made peace with the Americans.

SITTING BULL: *with a hint of sarcasm* Whose red children are we then?
(*Walsh* [1983] 151)

The above passage exemplifies one of the problematics of the kinship idiom. Families are predominantly hierarchical, along a variety of lines: gender, age, generation, financial status. For example, children usually have less power than parents or other adults to assign roles, enforce rights and responsibilities, or assert their desires; hence, Walsh can tell Sitting Bull that

²⁵ There are two main versions of *Walsh*, the original 1973 stage version, which uses documentary voice-overs, and the 1983 revision, which discards the voice-overs but adds the framing scenes in the Yukon and, significantly for this analysis, the wives of Walsh and Sitting Bull. I am taking my quotation from the 1983 revised version of *Walsh* because it is the one most commonly performed and published but the passages in question are virtually the same as those of the earlier 1973 version. I will discuss the addition of the women in the revised version later in the chapter.

the Queen (parent/adult) has unilaterally withdrawn responsibility for the Sioux (children). The Sioux and other Native groups may have had no choice in the role they have been assigned (“red children” to the White parents), but in using the language and metaphors of the Europeans, they are caught within the power dynamics it entails. It is also clear that the two social groups are focussing on different aspects of the parent-child relationship to further their goals. The British, Canadians, and Americans concentrate on the paternalistic, authoritative aspects of the parent-child relationship while the Sioux appeal to the responsibility of care within the parent-child relationship and the function of the family as a locus of safety and nurturance.

Pollock also highlights that there are different types of family, different models of familial relationships. One such difference clearly present in *Walsh* is between what Kenneth Kipnis calls the “dominion” and the “custody” model of parental authority and the parent-child relationship. Rooted in Roman law, the dominion model locates total political power within “the *paterfamilias*, the father heading the household,” including powers of ownership and life and death over all members of the family (Kipnis 2). Kipnis points out that while this view of parental authority has largely given way to the custody model, the notion of dominion still survives, to a certain degree, in current thinking about children: “The expression ‘my child’ often suggests property. Just as I do not have to account to others when I decide to paint my automobile, so parents don’t have to justify themselves to anyone when they make decisions regarding, for example, the religious upbringing of their children. Parenthood consists of a right that certain men and women have *in* children” (2-3, emphasis in original). He adds that “[d]ominion in family law is most clearly seen in the legal system’s response to actions that would be criminal offenses but for the fact that the ‘perpetrator’ is the ‘victim’s’ parent. If I wreck your child’s bicycle, that is a serious legal matter; if I wreck my child’s bicycle, there can be no legal charge” (3). In the dominion model, individuals are differently accountable to society for the treatment of their own children and for the children of others.

An equally important and ancient,²⁶ yet conflicting, model of the parent-child relationship, the custody model envisions parenthood as shared between parents and the larger community, for example, the state. The state entrusts parents with the care of the child (Kipnis

²⁶ Kipnis states: “Plato, in the *Crito*, has Socrates argue that the state, acting through its laws, is a third and preeminent parent” (4).

3-4). In the custody model parental authority is a stewardship with special privileges which may be withdrawn if special responsibilities are not fulfilled (Kipnis 4). The challenge to our social and legal system is to define the nature and limit of such special responsibilities and privileges. This model suggests that members of the community outside “blood relations” have an interest and responsibility in the welfare of children, an important underlying theme in Pollock’s earlier dramas which will come forcefully to the surface in her later work such as *Getting It Straight* and *Fair Liberty’s Call*.

Returning to *Walsh* with these understandings of family in mind, we can see that Sitting Bull’s sarcastic remark (“Whose red children are we then?”), Walsh’s official government-line rhetoric, and Clarence’s initial attitude towards the Indians²⁷ all point to a White culture which subscribes to the dominion/ownership model of the parent-child relationship where parents “own” children and paternalistic governments “own” groups they perceive as child-like. By the same token, James Walsh discovers that his own membership in the family of the NWMP and the Canadian state is less secure than he believed. The nature of the family to which he felt he belonged is different from his understanding. Alternatively, one can say that his understanding and the state’s understanding of the relationship are mis-aligned. Where he had assumed a reciprocal relationship of mutual responsibility, there is none:

MacLEOD: The Prime Minister is not responsible to you, Jim!

WALSH: Goddamn it, he is! If I carry out his orders, he is responsible to me.

MacLEOD: You’re talking nonsense. An army that operated like that couldn’t navigate its way across a playing field! And you know it! (161)

Walsh here is not speaking just as a citizen to whom an elected politician is responsible but, contrary to MacLeod’s argument, as an exemplary and effective field commander whose responsibility to his subordinates earns him their trust and who expects likewise from his

²⁷ When Harry explains to Clarence the American practice of firing the border, depriving the Indians north of the Medicine Line of buffalo, Clarence replies:

CLARENCE: Well, what about *our* Indians?

LOUIS: *surprised* You got some Indians?

CLARENCE: You know what I mean.

LOUIS ignores him and looks at his gun.

Okay. . . . What about *the* Indians livin’ on the Canadian side of the line? (158, emphasis in original)

superiors.²⁸ Interestingly, Pollock has already hinted at the start of the drama that Walsh's voice is ignored in Ottawa. Embedded in the partially humorous scene of the shovels and ploughshares in Act One is the fact that Walsh has repeatedly been ignored by his superiors. He knows this, is resigned to it, yet chooses not to see its implications in terms of his relationship with the government:

WALSH: Are you telling me, man, that once again the government has seen fit to burden me and the natives of these parts with another load of seed and equipment to rot and rust when they know goddamn well, because I've told them time and again, that these Indians are not, and will never be, farmers!

There is a pause as WALSH stares at HARRY.

HARRY: *answering weakly* That's it, sir.

WALSH: Right! *His anger seems to subside.* Well . . . can't be helped, can it? (145)

Sadly, Walsh is another of Pollock's protagonists who have, in a sense, mis-recognised themselves. There is a misalignment in identity. He, like Lizzie Borden, William Hopkinson, Dede Walker, Eme, and Emily Roberts, is initially an active part of "the system," an individual who thought he was a secure, valuable, and valued member of the metaphoric family to which he belongs (whether this be the NWMP, the mercantile upper-class of River Falls, the Canadian Immigration Department, or the United Empire Loyalists). And like them, he will discover himself otherwise. Diane Bessai notes that "the recurring pattern in the plays of Sharon Pollock is one of individual struggle against a social or political order of which the character is part" (106). Likewise, Heidi Holder notes of Pollock's James Walsh and William Hopkinson, "we observe an individual in conflict not only with a group of 'outsiders,' [the Sioux, the Sikh] but also with the group of which, ostensibly, he is a part" (132). Holder also astutely notes that "[b]oth cases also involved outsiders [the Sioux, the Sikh] claiming status as insiders" (133). I would add to Holder's observation that the group is often the family or intimately linked with a sense of family, hence the strength of its force on the individuals involved and the large degree of ambivalence it elicits in them.

In contrast, Pollock represents Sitting Bull's own family, the Sioux culture it represents,

²⁸ Note also the contrast between the linear, unidirectional, non-reciprocal structure of relationship described by McLeod and the circular, reciprocal structure of the Sioux's concept of the sacred circle and Sitting Bull's understanding of his responsibility towards those he lead.

and other Indian leaders and their tribes (Crazy Horse and the Oglala, Chief Joseph and the Nez Percés) as modelled on a form of parent-child relationship with an emphasis on care and nurturance, one closer to the “custody” example described by Kipnis. I will discuss Pollock’s use of the two forms of families as indicators of ethical status and the notion of families as ideological units a little later in this chapter. At present, I would like to note in brief that the two differing attitudes towards familial relationship and responsibilities also parallel differing cultural attitudes towards the land. The Sioux’s relation to the land is one of familial responsibility and custodianship as much as it is of ownership. As Sitting Bull explains to Walsh, the land does not belong to him and is not his to give away. There are collective and historic (temporary, generational) ties involved: “The Black Hills is our home! And the white man has stolen them! I cannot sign away the Black Hills. They are not mine alone. Before me, they were my father’s. After me, they shall be my children’s. Do you sign away the birthright of your children?” (151).

One might argue that my choice of examples, the political rhetoric of the “Great White Mother,” “The Great White Father in Washington” (155), and the “red children,” reflects Pollock’s historical research (i.e., her employment of historically accurate terms) rather than her artistic mode or thematic interest. However, this is not the only instance of the kinship idiom in the play. There is an extended network of “families” and familial concerns in *Walsh*. The drama opens in the Yukon tavern Prologue with James Walsh asking for the song “Break the News to Mother” (141) and denying help to the Prospector and to Joeie, whose “Da froze and his Mum takes in washin’” (142), repeating the words he used nineteen years earlier in denying Sitting Bull and the Sioux, “I can give you nothing” (142, 165). Pollock emphasises the familial association and the repetition of events by double casting the roles of the Prospector and Sitting Bull, and Joeie and Crowfoot (Sitting Bull’s son). Even the song is significant. “Break the News to Mother,” by American popular songwriter and music publisher Charles K. Harris (1867-1903), “King of the Tear Jerkers,” was originally written in 1891, as the words of a dying firefighter (injured in action) to his father: “just break the news to mother / she knows how much I love her / tell her not to wait for me / for I’m not coming home.” The song became very popular when Harris revised it in 1897, at the start of the Spanish American War, recasting the lyrics as the last words of a young soldier, dying in his father’s arms (Reublin and Maine, para. 6,8). Walsh’s choice of a sentimental tear jerker about a dying young man even as he refuses to help the needy child before him indicates his moral decline and the misalignment between false sentiment and

lack of true compassion and action.

Next, we move into the past and Pollock quickly establishes the “family” of the North West Mounted Police, not just the regiment as a military family but within it the constellation of Clarence, the new recruit, as the child-figure within the company, initially concerned with writing home to his mother (148); Walsh, the stern but caring father-figure (Louis tells Clarence “He [Walsh] care a lot and so he yell a lot, eh?” [146]); and McCutcheon, the “mother hen” (159) of the regiment. Louis introduces himself to Clarence by identifying his parental heritage (Métis), which in turn signifies his social and political position: “Louis Leveille *shaking hands with CLARENCE*. Fort Walsh scout. . . . Mother red, father white. . . but not so white as da Major dere. . . . Louis’ father, French” (146). Clarence himself struggles to understand his own familial relations. Inspired by his mother’s stories of his deceased soldier father, he pursues a romantic conception of adventure in the West, only to discover that perhaps “me Mum was the real soldier” (158) in raising him single-handedly following his father’s death a year after they emigrated to Upper Canada.

Earlier, in reference to the scene between Margaret and Bonnie in *Generations*, the notions of dependence in terms of connection to others, sacrifice to a higher ideal, and survival were identified as forces which may keep one within the family or community. However, the darker side of survival as a force keeping one in “the family” and individual sacrifice for the greater society (which society? which vision of society?) can be found in *Walsh*, where James Walsh ultimately chooses personal survival and the metaphoric family of the NWMP in favour of attempting to offer further assistance to Sitting Bull and the Sioux. When MacLeod, Walsh’s commanding officer, orders Walsh to enforce Ottawa’s decision to refuse further aid to the Sioux and to apologise to the Americans, he adds:

MacLEOD: If you find yourself unable to do this [follow orders], it is my sad duty to ask you for your resignation.

WALSH: How well you know your men.

MacLEOD: I pride myself on that.

WALSH: They say one’s strongest instinct is self-preservation . . . and I’ve made the force my life. . . . To whom do I send this letter? (162)

In this case, the NWMP and the Canadian government of which it is an instrument have failed to be the “something bigger worth being a part of” which Pollock spoke about and it is the absence of a morally sound higher goal which turns Walsh’s “sacrifice” of his personal integrity and

independence into the tragedy it becomes for him. This also explains Pollock's comment that Hopkinson, who ultimately remains true to his personal values and responsible to the Sikh by risking his life to testify on behalf of his Sikh informers, is morally superior to Walsh.²⁹ Alternatively, a more sympathetic view of Walsh might argue that Pollock dramatises the ambivalent tension between competing societies or visions of community which seek one's sacrifice and she demonstrates that the boundary between willing sacrifice and scapegoat is sometimes perilously narrow.

With the entrance of the Sioux, Pollock introduces the idealised, close, and loving nuclear family of Sitting Bull, Pretty Plume, and Crowfoot, which is contrasted not only with the all male military family of the NWMP (Walsh, McCutcheon, Clarence) but also the fragmented and remote domestic family of James Walsh, his wife Mary, and daughters Cora and "little" Mary.³⁰ It is important to note, as Wasserman points out, that the original version of *Walsh*, the 1973 Theatre Calgary production, lacked both the Yukon Prologue and the characters Mary and Pretty Plume, additions made in the 1974 Stratford Third Stage production ("Introduction" 139). Also added in 1974 is Clarence's description of his mother and father. In effect, the social "families" of the NWMP and the Sioux, communities as families, were present but the corresponding personal domestic families of the men, and women as members of these families, were absent or less prominent until the 1974 revision.³¹

²⁹ Pollock tells Robert Wallace : "I am very fond of Hopkinson; I see him as a far finer man than Walsh. Hopkinson is a person who has a guilty secret that is used against him by people in power. He atones for his actions by the manner of his death. When he says, yes, I'll testify, he accepts fatalistically the manner of his death in the nature of a Sikh, his mother's religion. He accepts responsibility for it and, to me, that's not despairing; that's a high point. That's why I have him say, 'I open my arms' towards death, and speak the verse that is that part of his background" ("Sharon Pollock" 121).

³⁰ Another example of doubling and the repetition of names across generations in Pollock's drama.

³¹ This is not to say the sense of Sitting Bull's own family as being close and loving was absent even in the 1973 production. In fact, in the 1973 version of the scene where Walsh and Sitting Bull discuss General Terry's amnesty offer, a scene in which Sitting Bull ultimately decides to stay in Canada "to raise my people in this country" (*Walsh* [1973] 57), Pollock has Sitting Bull twice break from his conversation with Walsh to speak a "lullaby" to his sleeping son (*Walsh* [1973] 54, 57):

SITTING BULL: *He begins by playing the role a bit. He came here to tell us lies, but we don't want to hear them. I intend to stay here . . . looks down at his son and drops the "role" and to raise my people in this country. He speaks to the child*

(continued...)

Pollock also emphasises these familial parallels through her stage directions. For example, at the close of the teaching scene in which Sitting Bull instructs both Crowfoot and Clarence in the philosophy of the sacred circle and the resemblances and interconnectedness amongst all things, the Sioux prepare to meet with the American party headed by General Terry. Pollock's stage directions say: "*SITTING BULL places a hand on his son's shoulder. They make their way to the meeting place with GENERAL TERRY*" (155). Pretty Plume prepares to leave but Sitting Bull asks her to join them and has her speak for the Sioux as "[t]he bearer of our children" (155).³² Meanwhile, the Canadians also prepare to meet with Terry. Clarence joins Walsh and as they approach the meeting place, Pollock's directions say: "*WALSH places a hand on his shoulder and gives it a reassuring clasp*" (155). These matching paternal gestures and parallel scenes reinforce the familial resemblances between Sitting Bull's family and Walsh's "family," between Sitting Bull as father and leader/father-figure and Walsh as father and leader/father-figure. They also signal and invite the audience to make comparisons and value judgments along such parallels.

Furthermore, Pollock portrays not only the Sioux but other Native Indian groups in the drama, the Oglala and the Nez Percés, in familial settings. Crazy Horse of the Oglala is described by Sitting Bull not only as a brave and wise leader but as a man who "loved the little children and could not bear to see them suffer" (151). Sitting Bull also describes Crazy Horse's murder by the American soldiers as a betrayal by "his red brothers" (152), the reservation chiefs,

³¹ (...continued)

softly, his voice fading as the lights fade, ignoring WALSH, CLARENCE and LOUIS who leave.

Little One, Little One, beloved of everyone,

Little One speaks sweet words to everyone,

Hence the Little One is loved by everyone . . . (57)

Note also that Pollock intertwines Sitting Bull's role as a father with his role as his nation's leader, just as she links the individual family and the nation as family. Sitting Bull's "lullaby" to Crow Foot is cut from the 1974 version of the script but Pollock adds the stage presence of the mother, Pretty Plume (as well as Mary Walsh).

³² A Sioux woman was one of the speakers at the meeting between Sitting Bull and General Terry, but she was not Sitting Bull's wife. Stanley Vestal writes: "Sitting Bull's stage management of this council was admirable; he overlooked nothing. One of the most effective speakers was a woman, whom he brought in to present the case of the Sioux mothers: she was The-One-That-Speaks-Once, the wife of Bear-that-Scatters" (217).

and as a heartless sundering of family bonds:

[. . .] his arms were pinioned by his red brothers and a white soldier pushed his bayonet into Crazy Horse's stomach! It took one night for him to die. He sang his death song and his mother and father stood outside and sang back, for the white soldiers would not let them enter where he lay dying. (152)

Similarly, Pollock represents the remnant of the Nez Percés who seek asylum across the Medicine Line as fragmented family groups: siblings and mother and child.

CLARENCE: [. . .] My coat . . . I've . . . I've given it to . . . *He indicates vaguely outside of the light.* . . . to . . . to a little girl and her brother. Their feet are frozen, sir.

[.]

WALSH: Take this [his tunic] . . . take this to the woman on the pony . . . there . . . with the papoose on her back. Take it to her.

CLARENCE: Yes, sir. [. . .] She doesn't need it. . . she's been hit in the chest. The baby's dead. (153-54).

Finally, the demise of the Sioux, symbolised by the fate of Sitting Bull, is recounted with reference to the family. While an un-named messenger brings the news, Pollock has Clarence, the child-figure of the regiment and the counterpart to Crowfoot, describe the death of Sitting Bull and his son:

They shot him [Sitting Bull] twice and put the boots to him . . . and Little Crow says the soldiers dropped him in a pit of lime, so's his people couldn't bury him proper.

WALSH stands there frozen, staring at CLARENCE.

And Crowfoot? . . . Do you remember Crowfoot, sir? He used to come up to the fort, sir, and us men, we used to play with him 'cause he was just a kid, and ain't none of us got kids here . . . and he was a real good boy . . . and I liked him, sir. . . . And they dug him out from under the bed where he was hidin' and they threw him down and they shot him and he's dead too! (168)

Note also in the passage above that Pollock emphasises the absence of children (and women) in the military family of the NWMP and how the men felt such an absence keenly. Finally, in all these accounts of the destruction of the Native Indians, it would be remiss of me not to point out the obvious symbolism of families as representatives of larger communities and nations and children as the future of such communities. Likewise, the destruction of families and the death of children signal the loss of communities and their futures.

Families and one's response to kin, in art and in life, have been manipulated by artists and

other social agents and interpreted by audiences as indicators of ethical standards and conduct (at times, even having a family at all carries with it social and moral value³³), even though we know real families seldom exist in accord with our idealised fantasies and that how one treats one's own family is not necessarily an accurate indicator of how one treats fellow citizens or metaphoric families. Pollock uses her representation of white and Indian families, literal and metaphoric, personal and social, as an idiom to articulate different political choices and actions, cultural views, and ethical positions. Jane Collier, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Sylvia Yanagisako argue that the family carries such ethical weight partly because it has been constructed as such to begin with. They write that, rather than a universal biological structure, the family, at least the Western notion of the modern family, is "a moral and ideological unit" used to organise and think about human relationships, a domestic locus of nurturance and privacy specifically defined in opposition to the competitive public and political sphere (33). I will examine the kinship idiom and the construction of private and public spheres in my discussion of *One Tiger to a Hill* later in this chapter. First, however, I would like to consider further Pollock's use of the family to comment on white/European and Native Indian culture and their respective ethical merit or conduct.

Throughout *Walsh* there is a consistent pattern of associations between ethical status and the family. The ethical merit of the Native Indians, represented most clearly by Sitting Bull's family, is associated with an idealised, harmonious, close, and nurturing family structure, while the ethical corruption of white/European society is linked to paternalistic, fragmented or incomplete, emotionally and geographically distanced family groups. The all male family of the NWMP is contrasted with the Native Indian communities which always appear in family groupings which include men, women, and children. The depiction of Sitting Bull's family, his love for his son, his warm respect for his wife whom he invites to speak to General Terry for the Sioux as the "bearer of our children" (155), is contrasted with James Walsh's own family and European sexist attitudes towards women in the poignant epistolary scene at the beginning of Act Two. Itself an example of misalignment in understanding and communications, this scene

³³ There are persisting and powerful social, cultural, and familial pressures for one to have a family and children of one's own (to continue the family line). Not to do so may be evaluated variously as a sign of failure and lack, an act of selfishness, disloyalty, or transgression. Pollock's Lizzie Borden, Catherine, and Oscar are all subject to such pressures.

reveals the lack of communication between Walsh and his wife Mary, their distance from each other, and her political ignorance (partly due to her distance from events). Pollock even has Sitting Bull observe that the white man's religion seems to reward those who disregard family ties: "The God whose son you killed must love you and your people well, for he has rewarded you with many gifts" (156). Indeed, Pollock portrays European culture as not only killing other families/peoples but as one which devalues its own daughters and lacks or spiritually "kills" its own sons: the state and the NWMP discard Walsh, they and Walsh "lose" Clarence's faith, and the defeated and embittered Walsh tells Harry that it is "just as well" that he (Walsh) had no sons (162). The point is not whether Pollock presents an accurate portrayal of the historical Walsh or of Sioux family structure (in fact, Sitting Bull's family is suspiciously like contemporary ideals of the nuclear family) but that the family functions as a means of signification as well as a theme within her drama.

Another clear example of the family's function as an ideological sign and Pollock's critique of how it is manipulated to buttress political positions and justify actions can be found in *One Tiger to a Hill*. At the start of this drama, Everett Chalmers introduces himself to the audience by situating himself within his immediate family before he mentions his profession: the "private" comes before the "public" self, even though the latter is the primary role he plays in the drama he narrates. Addressing the audience directly, he tells them, "My name is Ev Chalmers, Everett Chalmers. *He descends the stairs, stops at the bottom.* Everett. . . . No one calls their kids that any more. It's all Robyn and Jason today. My kids -- Robyn and Jason -- and Anne with an e, that's my wife. *He will walk along the lower level corridor speaking to the audience.* I'm a lawyer, corporate law, my own firm" (76). Chalmers' self-description locates him in the familial and the familiar. His invocation of family is another example of Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako's notion of the family as "a moral and ideological unit." Here, it signals to the audience that Chalmers, the "family man," is like many of them or at least like the traditional status quo: "normal," with spouse and children (the latter bearing the common names of "today"), the idealised domestic and social norm, the nucleus of community (Ev goes on to mention the street he lives on and the park it borders). Pollock also uses inclusive pronouns in Chalmers' speech to stress his role as a representative of the audience and, by extension, the audience's participation in Chalmers' actions: "there were riots inside, prisoners died inside, there were charges, counter charges, all those news items *you and I* read [. . .] a resolve to find

out what happens to them – and to *us* – when *we* condemn men to that wastebasket *we* call the pen” (76-77, emphasis added). At the end of his introduction, he identifies “the pen” (77), completing the dualities of “us” and “them,” domestic and institutional, law-abiding citizens and criminals, the destruction of which is part of Pollock’s dramatic goal. However ironic Ev’s statements may be during this narrative moment, read chronologically after the events of the drama about to unfold before the audience, they certainly suggest that Ev Chalmers once considered his family status as a source of security, a key element of his personal and social identity, and an indication of his moral standing.

Chalmers is not the only one in *One Tiger to A Hill* who alludes to the moral ideology of family as well as their own family to make their point. George McGowen, the Head of Security, and Carl Hanzuk, the prison guard and sharp shooter who is assigned to kill the hostage-taking inmates Tommy Paul and Gillie MacDermott, will both tell their side of the prison story using the language of the family (or the kinship idiom) to enhance their arguments. As pressure builds in the hostage-taking and as the drama closes, each man has a brief dialogue with Chalmers, the audience’s surrogate on stage. Chalmers criticises the prison’s treatment of its inmates and McGowen replies: “Would you like to know what makes me wonder, Mr. Chalmers? *Chalmers stops.* We got three inmates in here gettin’ degrees, university degrees. Isn’t that wonderful, eh? I served my country through France, Holland, right into Berlin with the tanks, and I can’t afford to send my own boys to college.” (123). Later, Hanzuk has a similar conversation with Chalmers:

HANZUK: [. . .] all I am is a screw, eh? . . . You know what they say.

CHALMERS: No.

HANZUK: Well a screw’s someone too lazy to work, and too dumb to steal--and look at them sayin’ that about you. Well, there’s more to my life than this place, you betcha. This isn’t my life. You know I was a cop?

CHALMERS: No.

HANZUK: A good cop. I got a wife. I got a daughter, she’s fourteen, real pretty. I also got an unlisted phone and I keep my address real quiet, one of these bastards get released you don’t know what’s in his head, [. . .] Listen, once I was standin’ in line for a movie, standin’ there with my wife, and a goof on parole walked by and spit in my face!” (130)

In both these cases, just like Chalmers, the prison staff use the rhetoric of the family to argue for their social acceptability and merit, their status as fellow citizens, to differentiate themselves

from the prisoners and, by extension, to authorize their own actions. Ironically, their use of the rhetoric of the family reveals their similarities with the inmates rather than their differences, for the inmates also talk about the family, revealing similar values and emotional attachments.

GILLIE: You ever live in one of them homes?

PAUL: Yeah.

GILLIE: When she [Gillie's mother] took us to welfare, she said it was just for a while, she'd be back. I remember that. And her hair. But she never came back . . . Jesus, you shouldn't do that to poor little kids.

PAUL: Maybe she tried, but she couldn't get back.

GILLIE: You think so? . . . Yeah . . . She tried, but she couldn't get back. . . . Do you have a mum?

PAUL: Yeah.

GILLIE: You remember your mum?

PAUL: I remember my grandma. I remember people always seemed to be dyin' . . . fallin' down drunk and freezin' to death, smokin' and sleepin' and burnin' to death, gettin' hit by a train, gettin' hit by a car, bein' in a car and hittin' a car. . . . I remember lookin' at my brothers and sisters and thinkin', Jesus, that is not gonna be me.³⁴ (114-15)

Later, when Chalmers encounters Hanzuk, Hanzuk tells him that Desjardins, the inmate who died mysteriously in solitary confinement, "was crazy. Always screamin'. He'd drive you crazy workin' the tier. Screamin' for his mother—or Louis—that was his brother" (129). Immediately after Chalmers' and Hanzuk's encounter, Gillie and Paul are told they will get the helicopter they requested and, in good spirits, Paul tells Gillie: "Wherever we're goin', it's gonna be home" (130). Finally, after Walker admits to Paul that she does not love him personally and romantically as he thought but in the abstract, "as a person who's been . . . fucked up, and screwed around but—that's as far as it goes" (134), and he realises he is alone and risking death,

³⁴ Note also in this passage images, phrases, and ideas which reverberate in other Pollock plays. Gillie's response to his mother's abandonment "But she never came back . . . Jesus, you shouldn't do that to poor little kids" is echoed by Oscar in *Doc*: "At least she had the good sense to get out. Leaving me with him. How could she do that?" (35). Paul's imaginative recasting of maternal abandonment in an attempt to retain the fragile hope of maternal love (note the adverbs "maybe" and "perhaps"): "Maybe she tried, but she couldn't get back" is similar in sentiment to Lizzie Borden's vision of her mother: "Perhaps it was a very brave thing to do, Papa, perhaps it was the only way, and she hated to leave us because she loved us so much, but she couldn't breathe all caught in the snare" (*BR* 58). Finally, *Doc*'s Katie/Catherine will be familiar with two of the familial losses itemized by Paul, "fallin' down drunk" and "gettin' hit by a train."

he has a last conversation with Chalmers:

PAUL: You don't have to do that [walk out with them in front of the guards].

CHALMERS: I want to.

PAUL: I suppose . . . you got a wife and kids and a house.

CHALMERS: Two kids.

PAUL: I know there's a life out there different from mine.

CHALMERS: Tommy—

PAUL: I got choices, man!

CHALMERS: Yes. (135)

Pollock shows us that the inmates, Desjardins, Gillie, and Paul, value and yearn for their families and the ideal of home as much as the prison staff. What differentiates the two groups is not different ideologies about the family but the presence and absence (or loss) of the valued ideal. Ironically, these shared values and desires do not make the inmates and the prison staff any more human in each other's eyes. They continue to objectify each other as "screws" and "goofs" (130).

Family as a moral and ideological unit is also that which both confines and "liberates" Lizzie Borden in *Blood Relations*. Pollock shows that Lizzie is punished for resisting her father's and her community's domestic expectations for a woman of her class: to be the loving and obedient daughter and wife, to manage a household in service to her father or her husband and children. Equally related to familial ideologies is the issue of gender and inheritance. Pollock highlights that Lizzie, as a daughter, is denied the inheritance and the freedom of expression which would have been hers had she been her father's son. However, the ideology of the upper-middle class family is a double-edged sword. Pollock's lawyer in *Blood Relations* asks the gentlemen jury whether they believed "Miss Lizzie Borden, the youngest daughter of a scion of our community, a recipient of the fullest amenities our society can bestow upon its most fortunate members" (36) could have murdered her parents. He adds: "Gentlemen! If this gentlewoman is capable of such an act—I say to you—look to your daughters—if this gentlewoman is capable of such an act, which of us can lie abed at night, hear a step upon the stairs, a rustle in the hall, a creak outside the door. [. . .] Which of you can plump your pillow, nudge your wife, close your eyes, and sleep?" (36). The play suggests that for the jury to admit the possibility of Lizzie murdering her parents, they would also have to admit to a breach in their notion of the Victorian upper-middle class family as a moral exemplar and as the locus of

domestic harmony and love, as well as their view of women in their class as “angels in the house,” something they were unable to do.

The Structure of Kinship

The kinship idiom appears not only as a metaphor of communities as families but also in the structure of Pollock’s drama through naming, repetition, and even the choice of songs. The recurrence of first names amongst generations in plays such as *Generations* and *Doc* has been discussed earlier in terms of anxieties of biological or psychological inheritance, as well as the burden of social expectations which a similar name confers. Another form of repetition in naming is the recurrence of character names amongst Pollock’s plays. Unlike Michel Tremblay’s extended Montreal families, James Reaney’s Donnellys, or David French’s Mercers, the same characters and families who appear in multiple plays, the “family” which I see inhabiting many of Pollock’s work is composed of different and unrelated (in the familial sense) characters with the same or variations of the same name, often occupying the same or similar familial roles. The cumulative presence of these different yet similar characters fosters the impression of a connected whole, not many different families but one symbolic family. What I am referring to might best be shown in the list of names and characters below:

Name	Specific Character and Play ³⁵
George	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Native protagonist in “Split Seconds in the Death of” (1970), Pollock’s first produced radio drama (Grace, <i>Making 100</i>) • George Roberts, an old “retired railway man” in a “provincial institution” and the father and grandfather in “That Was Before, This Is Now,” an outline for a CBC TV drama (ca. 1970s), with plot elements which reappear in <i>Getting It Straight</i> • one of Goose’s sons in <i>And Out Goes You?</i> • Georg in <i>The Komagata Maru Incident</i> • George McGowen, Head of Security, in <i>One Tiger to a Hill</i> • Mama George and Mr. Big, Leah’s adoptive parents in <i>Whiskey Six Cadenza</i> • Georgie, Ev’s dead older brother in <i>Doc</i> • George, husband of the central figure, Martha, in “Egg,” the unproduced project which later became <i>Getting It Straight</i> • George Roberts, the father in <i>Fair Liberty’s Call</i>
Everett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everett Roberts, minor character in 1970 radio play “Split Second in the Death of” (Grace, <i>Making 100</i>) • Evy (probably Evelyn, but looks like Ev), Hopkinson’s girlfriend in <i>The Komagata Maru Incident</i> • Everett Chalmers, narrator and lawyer in <i>One Tiger to a Hill</i> • Ev, the husband, father, and title character in <i>Doc</i> • Note: Chalmers is also the surname of Pete, the history teacher in <i>A Compulsory Option</i>, one of Pollock’s earliest stage plays
Robert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Roberts, protagonist in 1971 radio drama “Thirty-One for Two” (Grace, <i>Making 102</i>) • Bob Roberts, university professor and second son of George Roberts in “That Was Before, This Is Now,” an outline for a CBC TV drama (ca. 1970s) • Robert Enns, English teacher/former student activist in <i>A Compulsory Option</i> • Robert, one of Johnny’s deceased older brothers in <i>Whiskey Six Cadenza</i> • Eloise “Bob” Roberts, her son Robbie, and her ancestral pirate Red Roberts in <i>Doc</i> • the Roberts family in <i>Fair Liberty’s Call</i> • Robert Clarke-Evans in <i>End Dream</i> (<i>End Dream</i> is based on a historical incident and the figure’s real name was Fred Baker.)
Richard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Richard, one of Goose’s sons in <i>And Out Goes You</i> • Richard Wallace, the prison warden in <i>One Tiger to a Hill</i> • Richard Roberts, Joan’s deceased older son in <i>Fair Liberty’s Call</i>

³⁵ Note that in the present study I have only surveyed characters in the published drama and early unpublished scripts which have received critical attention. There may be more occurrences of these names in other unpublished scripts.

Name	Specific Character and Play
Emily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Millie (Mildred or Emily), Ev's sister in <i>Doc</i> • Emily, the secretary at Universal Inc. in "Egg" • Eme in <i>Getting It Straight</i> • Emily/Eddie, the younger daughter of the Roberts family in <i>Fair Liberty's Call</i>
Edward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edward Roberts, lawyer and eldest son of George Roberts in "That Was Before, This Is Now," an outline for a CBC TV drama (ca. 1970s) • Old Eddy, his older son Edward/Eddy (died of a childhood illness), his lawyer grandson Young Eddy, and David's imagined son Youngest Eddy in <i>Generations</i> • Teddy, another of Johnny's deceased older brothers, named after his maternal grandfather, in <i>Whiskey Six Cadenza</i> • Prince Edward ("Eddy") in <i>Saucy Jack</i> • Eddie/Emily and her twin, Edward, in <i>Fair Liberty's Call</i>
Kate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kate and Katie/Catherine, grandmother and grand-daughter in <i>Doc</i> • the female character in <i>Saucy Jack</i>
Anne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everett Chalmer's wife in <i>One Tiger to a Hill</i> (she does not appear on stage) • Annie, Joan and George Roberts' older daughter in <i>Fair Liberty's Call</i>

Finally, Pollock's own parents' names were George Everett Norrie Chalmers and Eloise Elizabeth Roberts, and her brother's name is Peter.

I would like to draw special attention to the significant number of names which recur in three or four different plays: "George," "Everett," "Robert," "Edward," and "Emily." The name "George" and "Everett" appear often as that of the protagonist, patriarch, or the elder son. "Edward" tends to name a member of a subsequent generation, a son, unmarried, not yet the patriarch of his own family. "Edward" is also associated with characters who rebel against or otherwise fail to fulfill familial or paternal expectations. "Robert" has mixed associations: both patriarchal (as in the George Roberts family in *Fair Liberty's Call* and Robert Clarke-Evans in *End Dream*) and filial or maternal, unconventional, rebellious (one of Johnny's brothers in *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, and Red Roberts and Bob in *Doc*). "Emily," like "Edward," is associated with a voice of dissent and inquiry. A sensitivity to these repetitions in turn enhances the possible significance of names such as Anne, Kate, or Richard, which repeat but not as frequently. With reference to Pollock's parents' names, in several instances, "George" and "Everett Chalmers" are split into two characters within the same play: George McGowan, the

Head of Security, and Everett Chalmers, the lawyer/narrator, in *One Tiger to a Hill*; and Ev Chalmers and his deceased older brother Georgie in *Doc*. Alternatively, Pollock combines her paternal and maternal names to create George Roberts and the Roberts family (with three strong women: Joan, Annie, Emily) in *Fair Liberty's Call*, a play set in Loyalist New Brunswick, the province of her parents', as well as her own, birth.

I would like to stress that I am not arguing for a fixed pattern of assignments but an impressionist, psychological, and emotional resonance amongst the plays. Pollock, in the Rita Much interview quoted earlier in this study, acknowledged that many of her plays explore a similar issue. Here, I suggest that Pollock's choice of character names reveals that her plays can be seen to deal with the same "family," psychological and structural if not necessarily genetic. I am not asserting that Pollock is always writing about her own family, but I believe that family relationships form an important element in her work and the fact that she chooses to use and reuse names, figures, and familial constellations, including ones from her own family, is another form of the kinship idiom in her work and attests to a social art which is informed by the personal. Pollock once stated in the "Playwright's Notes" of the 1984 Theatre Calgary house programme for *Doc* that "I write to make sense of the seemingly incoherent and chaotic world we live in, and to discover meaning and purpose in life and in the lives around me," and that one way to attain this meaning and purpose is "by imposing on that play world and people a unity of intellect and/or imagination" which can provide, to the audience, sustaining "insight and awareness into the human condition" (n.p.). She also said, in reference to *Doc*, that:

It is not "my" story nor the story of my family. There is a lot of my father in EV, my mother in BOB, and me in CATHERINE, but EV is not my father, BOB my mother, nor CATHERINE me. They are extensions of real people and through telling their story, my personal journey of discovery is hopefully made large enough to communicate itself to you. ("Playwright's Notes" n.p.)

Combining Pollock's statements and my observation of character names in her plays, it is possible to say that the kinship idiom of the cumulative dramatic "family" which inhabits Pollock's work is one key form of the "unity of intellect and/or imagination" with which she attempts to create structure and coherence, attain insight and awareness. It is a characteristic way in which Pollock's drama attempts to make sense of the world.

Another way in which Pollock's use of names reveals an interest in familial relationships

exists in a particular idiomatic syntax and form of repetition: characters refer to individuals with complex, layered familial designations. For instance, in *Doc*, Bob tells Katie that “Your father’s mother, your Gramma, killed herself and he’s afraid to open it [Gramma’s letter]” (10). Later, Bob speaks with Katie about her own family while simultaneously a hockey scene with Oscar and Ev begins in the background:

BOB: How did my mama manage?
 (OSCAR stands up, holding two hockey
 sticks. He is looking at EV, whose back
 is to him. EV puts his glasses in his pocket)

OSCAR: Go.

BOB: All older than me, all born before he [Bob’s father] went to war.

OSCAR: Go.

BOB: Him, her husband, my father, your grandfather, Katie.

OSCAR: Go. Go!

BOB: And her with the eight of us and only the pension. (33)

In speaking to Katie, Bob refers to Ev’s mother Kate as “Your father’s mother, your Gramma” and she refers to her own father as “Him, her husband, my father, your grandfather.” Similarly, Eme in *Getting It Straight* uses the term “his mother my gramma” (92) for her paternal grandmother. This idiomatic pattern of multiple kin designations for the same person has several effects. Structurally, it is a very elementary, pared-down, version of the procedure taken by Dr. Chalmers in Pollock’s jigsaw puzzle story to Cynthia Zimmerman: “Starting with the parents of the man’s wife, he [Dr. Chalmers] told me who they were and who they were related to and what had happened in their family; then he told me about the man’s parents and everything that had happened to their family; and everything that had happened in the community around the time that everything was happening in the extended family of these two people.” (“Towards a Better” 37). It is a mini-jigsaw puzzle in itself, in which the individual is surrounded by the adjoining relations and relationships of the family.

More importantly, Pollock creates a multiplicity of identity-relations for the same person: an individual woman (Kate) is not only Katie/Catherine’s grandmother, but Ev’s mother. Bob’s father is simultaneously himself (“him”), husband, father, and grandfather. In one sense, this form of naming represents linguistically the notion of multiple identities (possibly but not necessarily fragmentary) recognised by feminist and postmodern views of subjectivity. In the context of the kinship idiom, this pattern of naming creates a sense of the web of family relations

and identities which bind individuals together. It suggests that the individual's relationships (parent-child, husband-wife, grandparent-grandchild) are as important as the individual person being named and that the self is always a self-in-relation. The significance of relationships is also an important pillar of Carol Gilligan's developmental theory which I discussed earlier and will apply to Pollock's work later in chapter five.

This form of naming also linguistically prevents Bob's interlocutor from having the sense of an exclusive, direct, relationship with the individual under discussion. For example, in naming Katie's grandmother, Bob inserts the presence of Ev, Katie's father and Kate's son; in naming her own father, Bob calls up her mother and her daughter. This indirect, paratactic structure is especially important when the interlocutor is a child. Katie is reminded that she must share her relationship with her grandmother with her father, just as her maternal grandfather is shared with her maternal grandmother and her mother. What I am referring to is that young children sometimes need or want to receive the exclusive attention of adults they depend upon, that having to share attention and experiencing limits to their need can at times be threatening and unsettling. This structure also reminds us that any single relationship can be influenced by other relationships often beyond the former's control; for example, Katie's relationship with her grandmother is influenced by that of her grandmother and Ev or her grandmother and Bob.

Such a string of appellations: "Him, her husband, my father, your grandfather, Katie" (33) also creates a sense of confusion for the audience (especially in performance as opposed to a text for readers). Arguably, it is also an indication of a confusion within the dramatic characters themselves. Who is being described here? Is there one person, or four? The individual is given no proper name, just a series of structural kinship positions. This confusion complements the prevailing sense of anxiety about identity, lineage, and inheritance characteristic in Pollock's protagonists.

Finally, like a series of interlocking puzzle pieces or permutations of a figure, Pollock also uses overlapping dialogue, often from different scenes, in which similar phrases and concerns are repeated to build up the theme of family within a drama. The extended continuous flow of scenes below from *Doc* illustrates this technique as three different characters (Catherine, Bob, Oscar) in different scenes from different times contend with their fathers:

CATHERINE: *Daddy!*

EV: Katie?

(EV gets up from his chair and moves to look for CATHERINE. OSCAR may follow him. EV does not see CATHERINE, nor she him)

OSCAR: You know *my father* wishes I were you. He does. He wishes I were you. "Oscar," he says, "Oscar, look at Ev -- why can't you be like Ev."

BOB: Look at what *your father* did.

KATIE: You lie.

OSCAR: I say nothing. There's nothing to be said. "You got to have that killer instinct on the ice," he says. I play goalie -- what the hell's a killer instinct in a goalie? Then he says, "Oscar," he says, "Oscar, you are goin' into medicine."

EV: Katie?

OSCAR: *My Dad's* a doctor so I gotta be a doctor.

BOB: *Your father* hit me and I fell.

KATIE: You're always lying. (9-10, emphasis added)

Similarly, later in the play, characters ask in overlapping dialogues about the nature and influence of a string of mothers: Ev's mother, Katie's mother, Bob's mother, Oscar's mother (there's also a passage about Bob's father):

CATHERINE: Did *Gramma* really walk out to meet it?

EV: It was an accident.

CATHERINE: What was *Mummy*?

EV: You blame me for that.

CATHERINE: No.

EV: It was all my fault, go on, say it, I know what you think.

CATHERINE: It was my fault.

EV: Oh for Christ's sake!

(EV moves away from CATHERINE. He sits, takes off his glasses and rubs the bridge of his nose. He looks at CATHERINE, then back to the glasses which he holds in his hand)

. . . *Your mother* . . .

CATHERINE: Yes?

EV: *Your mother* and I --

CATHERINE: Tell me. Explain it to me.

BOB: There were eight of us, Katie, eight of us.

OSCAR: (softly) Go, go.
 BOB: How did *my mama* manage?
 (OSCAR stands up, holding two hockey sticks. He is looking at EV, whose back is to him. EV puts his glasses in his pocket)
 OSCAR: Go.
 BOB: All older than me, all born before *he* [Bob's father] went to war.
 OSCAR: Go.
 BOB: *Him, her husband, my father, your grandfather, Katie.*
 OSCAR: Go. Go!
 BOB: And *her* with the eight of us and only the pension.
 OSCAR: Go!! Go!!
 [a scene of young Oscar and Ev playing hockey]
 OSCAR: When I think of medicine I get sick. Yeah. The thought of medicine makes me ill. Physically ill. Do you think that could be *my mother* in me?
 (EV slips out of his slippers and removes his pants. OSCAR will put the pants in the trunk)
 EV: Maybe. (32-35, emphasis added)

The speed, rhythm, and flow of the scenes in performance, the layering of voices, and the competing demands for attention such memories make on Ev and Catherine, enhance the strength of these parental influences and the sense of preoccupation with members of the family. And like the paratactic grammatical structure discussed earlier, this string of references (“Gramma,” “Mummy,” “Your mother,” “my mama,” “my mother”) in the flow of performance contributes to the sense of confusion (whose mother is being discussed?) and tension about familial relations.

Finally, the rhetoric of family appears in several of the popular songs and children’s rhymes which appear throughout Pollock’s plays. Music, such as popular songs, can help establish time period, emotions, and themes. And children’s rhymes have the ability to suggest themes related to the past, childhood innocence, loss, or nostalgia. Children’s rhymes can also function as teaching tools, as one means by which children are taught and assimilated into existing cultural history and values (for example, views about gender roles, social history and taboos, and romantic ideals). Often learnt through osmosis rather than formal instruction, passed on by peers as well as elders, their rhythm at times overwhelming their sense, these songs and rhymes, within their own particular culture, can seem to have always been part of one’s

understanding. Even beneath the lens of scholarly analysis, they retain their emotional power, as Pollock's choices will demonstrate.

As previously mentioned, in the opening scene of *Walsh*, James Walsh asks Jennie in the Yukon saloon if she knew the song "Break the News to Mother" (141). Though we never hear the lyrics (Walsh's question is the only mention of the song), it does help set the initial mood and is the first appearance of the series of familial threads in the play. The title of the song alone suggests some unhappy event and communication between kin, as well as sentimentality. As discussed earlier, Pollock uses it not only to highlight familial concerns but Walsh's moral decline.

A clearer example of Pollock's use of the kinship idiom in popular lyrics is the children's rhyme she uses in *Blood Relations*: "Lizzie Borden took an ax [sic] / Gave her mother forty whacks, / When the job was nicely done, / She gave her father forty-one" (16). The rhyme's lurid fascination with violence, taboo, and rebellion helps to set the mood of the play. It also points out to audience members who are familiar with the verse (and can recite it along with the children and the Actress in the play) that, culturally, despite Lizzie Borden's legal acquittal and the audience's probable lack of solid information about the historical event, they have already participated in judging and in passing their own guilty verdict on Miss Lizzie. Culturally, then, Miss Lizzie is the rebellious child who triumphs against her parents, the criminal who got away.

Another children's rhyme about families forms the opening words of *Doc*, echoing the events and themes of the drama, ironically representing romantic ideological views of the family as well as contributing to the context of the memory play and its multi-layered ambivalence. Pollock's choice of the verse (a gender specific girls' skipping song) and her choice of speakers and generations (Catherine speaks first, Katie joins in and slowly takes over the rhyme, which is finally interrupted by Bob), enhances the rhyme's dual perspectives of time past and time present, innocence and experience, sincerity and irony, love gained and love lost.

CATHERINE: Up-on the carpet . . . you shall kneel . . .
while the grass . . . grows in the field

(KATIE's motion turns into skipping
as KATIE turns an imaginary skipping
rope and jumps to it)

Stand up straight
Upon your feet

KATIE: (speaks with CATHERINE. The murmuring

of voices can still be heard but they are fading)

Choose the one you love so sweet
 Now they're married wish them well
 First a girl, gee that's swell

(KATIE's voice is growing louder,
 taking over from CATHERINE)

KATIE &

CATHERINE: Seven years after, seven to come

KATIE: (alone)

Fire on the mountain kiss and run

(jumps "pepper" faster and faster)

Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor

Rich man, poor man, beggar man thief

BOB: Doctor

KATIE: Doc-tor!! (stops skipping) (2)

A final interesting example is Pollock's complex use of the folk song "Revolutionary Tea" in *Fair Liberty's Call*. The song initially appears as background instrumental music, performed by Major Anderson as he first appears with Daniel while George Roberts and Major Abijah Williams argue over George's and Eddie's loyalty to Britain. The text reads:

GEORGE: I had no son with the Rebels! I cut that boy [Richard] out of my heart, [. . .] I have Eddie, and Eddie is foolish and simple and easily lead!

[The MAJOR moves to replenish his rum. GEORGE follows him. Midway through GEORGE's speech, ANDERSON removes his hands from his pockets. He carries a recorder, and he begins to play "Revolutionary Tea."]

Eddie may give the appearance of a man, he may wield the gun and the sabre like a man, but Eddie needs guidance. Eddie will do whatever's required. For God's sake let's not leave it there. (34)

At this point, we do not know the lyrics of the song and, while the reader knows the title, the theatrical audience does not (unless they know the song and recognise its tune). However, the song appears again later, performed by Joan and Annie for Major Anderson, and the audience learns that "Revolutionary Tea" is about the "Boston Tea Party" of 1773, an act of colonial autonomy and rebellion against the British government cast in terms of a daughter/mother conflict:

ANNIE: Would you like the song you were playin' when you arrived?

ANDERSON: What song was that?

[ANNIE begins to sing and dance and is joined by JOAN who enjoys dancing to the song]

ANNIE AND JOAN: *There was an old lady lived over the sea
And she was an Island queen
Her daughter lived off in an new countrie
With an ocean of water between
The old lady's pockets were full of gold
But never contented was she
So she called on her daughter to pay a tax
Of three pence a pound on her tea, her tea
Of three pence a pound on her tea
The tea was conveyed to her daughter's door
All down by the ocean's side
And the bouncin' girl poured out every pound
In the dark and boilin' tide
[.....]
And then she called out to the Island Queen
Oh mother dear quoth she
Your tea you may have when 'tis steeped enough
But never a tax from me, from me (44-45)*

Here again is a clear case of the kinship idiom in which political relationships are represented as familial relationships. Pollock, in concert with the subversive and independent role of women in *Fair Liberty's Call*, has chosen a song where the rebellious American colonies are represented by a daughter, not, as much of the revolutionary images of the time depicted, as "Sons of Liberty." Similarly, the song represents England, then under the rule of George III, as a woman and mother.

The song's significance in its first appearance can only be fully understood in the context of its second appearance when we hear the lyrics. In the first scene, Pollock strategically uses it not only in association with Anderson, who is a Rebel in disguise, but to underscore George's discussion of his daughter Eddie's/Emily's allegiance to the Loyalists family compact,³⁶ itself a patriarchal attempt to define and control a rebellious son/daughter and an echo of the recent

³⁶ Major Abijah Williams is the agent for the "Committee of Fifty-five Families" (FLC 21), the Loyalist family compact which wanted to rule the new colony of New Brunswick. There was indeed a Loyalist Major Abijah Willard (1724-89) in the history of New Brunswick. Ann Gorman Condon states that Abijah Willard was the first of the signatories to "the controversial petition of the Fifty-Five Associated Loyalists" (769) requesting special land grants for themselves in Nova Scotia. He was also appointed to the New Brunswick Executive Council when the province was created in 1784, a seat he held until his death.

colonial conflict. George attempts to assert the power of his opinions both about Eddie and over Eddie: “Eddie may give the appearance of a man, he may wield the gun and the sabre like a man, but Eddie needs guidance. Eddie will do whatever’s required” (34). He fails in both cases. Eddie’s authorship of the letter in the *Gazette*, a fact of which the Major is aware and which Eddie is not afraid to acknowledge, speaks of a political consciousness and confidence neither foolish nor simple. Pollock’s stage directions also reinforce George’s powerlessness. The Major’s movement during George’s speech and George’s need to follow him in order to retain his audience further demonstrates George’s lack of authority.³⁷

In its second appearance, “Revolutionary Tea” is again linked with the Rebel Anderson and again associated with women, Joan and Annie, who would challenge the patriarchal and political status quo. As Joan and Annie finish singing, George enters and reprimands the women for singing “a Rebel ditty” (45). Annie challenges George’s authority by questioning how he defines “Rebel,” noting that he once sang the song himself (45). Hence, the song’s depiction of an independent daughter, rebelling against parental control and injustices, functions as another layer of ironic commentary on the events of both scenes.³⁸ Pollock uses a similar tactic in *Moving Pictures* where dialogue between Nell and her son is repeated twice, with its original context, full exchange, and full meaning (including her neglect of his desire for maternal attention) revealed only during the second occurrence, causing the audience to re-assess both scenes in the light of each other. This structural repetition and reflection is a feature of Pollock’s story-telling which will be further explored in the next two chapters.

³⁷ See also my discussion of this scene in Chung, “‘Lookin’ to a better world’” for another take on the issue of inheritance in this play.

³⁸ One final note of interest regarding the song and the power of the kinship idiom: folklorist Tristram Coffin suggests that it is the very use of the family metaphor which has helped the song to survive in popular folklore. He writes: “Such political songs do not, of course, survive well among the folk. [. . .] Thus, ‘Revolutionary Tea’ is found rarely, though it is found from time to time, which is more than can be said about dozens of similar parables [. . .] Perhaps the fact it is presented as a family squabble has helped. Anyone with a teen-aged daughter must understand what ‘the old lady over the sea’ had to go through” (127). Hence, the fact that Pollock chooses a song which casts nations (or a fledging nation) and political conflict in terms of familial and generation conflict is not insignificant. It is another example of her complex use of the kinship idiom. One further note, Pollock did her historical research with care. This song of the American revolution no doubt did travel with the Loyalists to the Maritime colonies and beyond. Evidence of this is that Coffin cites Edith Fowke and Alan Mills’ *Canada’s Story in Song* (Toronto, 1960) as the source for the lyrics he presents in his discussion of the song (127n15).

The presence and the importance of misalignment and kinship idiom are clear as both content and form in Pollock's work. A language can speak of many things and misalignment and family encompass a vast array of issues. Next, I will focus on a specific condition, a specific type of misalignment, which Pollock's kinship idiom explores: the topic of loss, absence, and death—a break in the familial line—and the responses of those who remain.

Chapter Three

Ghost Stories

Early in 1980, the year which saw the première productions of *One Tiger to a Hill* (in February), *Blood Relations* (in March), and *Generations* (in October), Sharon Pollock gave an important interview to James Hofsess, published in the March issue of *Homemaker's Magazine*, in which she discussed her work and her family. She spoke frankly about her parents, her childhood and adult responses to her mother's alcoholism and suicide, and her own children and (then) partner Michael Ball. The mandate and readership of *Homemaker's Magazine* no doubt encouraged such a discussion about her family while later interviews, mainly in academic literary and theatre journals, have focussed less on familial issues. Interestingly enough, only on reviewing the Hofsess article itself, after I have established the governing metaphor for the previous chapter (the jigsaw puzzle) from Pollock's 1991 interview with Zimmerman, did I realise that the image which appears on the title page of the Hofsess article is, in fact, composed of photographs of Pollock and her family (then partner Michael Ball and her children) in the form of a jigsaw puzzle (see Figure 3).



Fig. 3 Title page of Hofsess interview in *Homemaker's Magazine* 15.2 (Mar. 1980: 41-42).

At the end of the article, Hofsess writes that Pollock didn't attend a family reunion the year earlier in New Brunswick. Then he quotes Pollock:

I kept saying I couldn't go because I was still involved in my last week at Banff. But I *could* have gone, I guess, flown in for the day. The children kept saying, "Let's go to New Brunswick." They wanted to meet all those people back home that I had already . . . *met*.

But I don't like looking back. Some people who try to get back to their roots only end up discovering they don't have any. They dig down in the earth and come up with a handful of air.

I think you can be born in a place but not come from there -- do you know what I mean? The secret is to recognize places you *belong* to. Places that strike a chord within.

I believe I belong to the west. The west says something to me that I can understand. The west looks forward, it has no past to get in the way of the future. There's a sparseness here that I like -- a relationship between people, landscape and the weather that keeps us from going soft.

People are frank here, sometimes frankly stupid, but there's a refreshing lack of hypocrisy. I brought the children here so they could start fresh. They don't have to overcome all sorts of prejudices and paternalistic traditions in order to live their lives. My past in New Brunswick is a ghost story.

(qtd. in Hofsess 60, emphasis in original)

This passage is rich with imagery and issues which foreshadow Pollock plays to come such as *Generations*, *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, *Doc*, and *Fair Liberty's Call*. For example, Pollock's evocation of her relationship with the west echoes those of Old Eddy and David in *Generations*. Equally significant is the notion of the past as an obstacle to the future and the belief (or fantasy) that one can begin anew in a place with "no past." Variations of this attitude towards the past and the desire to be free of it can be found in plays such as *The Komagata Maru Incident*, *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, and *Doc*. There are ironies, however. Pollock's play most emphatically about the West, *Generations*, shows a family bound by its past with the land and its "paternalistic traditions." The image of digging into the earth for one's roots resonates with Joan's experience in *Fair Liberty's Call*. Joan doesn't find her own roots in the New Brunswick soil, but she also doesn't "come up with a handful of air"; she discovers the roots of others. As well, one is reminded of the bowl of earth the red woman gives her. Joan's experience is perhaps an indication of Pollock's evolving attitudes. Regardless of whether her attitudes have changed or not since the interview, it is safe to say that the issues themselves—family and familial storytelling, one's relation to the past and its influences, the importance of belonging and of home—remain significant in her work. In this chapter, I focus on her ending statement: "My past in New Brunswick is a ghost story." I argue that, whether or not she wanted to look back and tell "ghost stories" in her personal life, Sharon Pollock has been looking back, digging up roots, and telling "ghost stories" in her drama throughout her play-writing career. This too is part of the kinship idiom. I am not referring solely to her own family "ghost story," as mentioned in the interview,¹ or to her well-observed interest in historical subjects, but to a drama which deals with responses to the dead, often the familial dead (a disruption in the family line); with loss, absence and, in Susan Letzler Cole's words, "the absent ones"; with secrets and hauntings; with bereavement, mourning, and remembrance—and the ambivalent misalignments which these objects and conditions engender.

The subjects of loss, mourning, and hauntings have received some critical attention from Pollock scholars. In *The Buried Astrolabe*, Walker introduces Kenneth Bruffee's notion of the

¹ Sharon Pollock will tell this particular "ghost story," modified by her dramatic art, four years after the Hofsess interview with the stage premiere of *Doc* in 1984.

elegiac romance as a way of interpreting *Whiskey Six Cadenza* and, to a lesser degree, *Doc* (175-77). Bruffee, in *Elegiac Romance: Cultural Change and Loss of the Hero in Modern Fiction*, identifies the elegiac romance as a traditionally masculine form² and a modern development of the quest romance tradition, with a questing knight/hero and an accompanying squire/narrator figure but characterized by several important modernist sensibilities: a recognition of the hero as a delusion (it is inherently an anti-heroic genre), the expression of one's reaction to the "experience of catastrophic loss and rapid cultural change, and the need to come to terms with loss and change in order to survive" (15). As Walker illustrates, there is much in the elegiac romance which resonates with Pollock's two works, especially the relationship between Mr. Big and Johnny in *Whiskey Six Cadenza*. To me, the most interesting aspect is Bruffee's claim that one of the political implications of the genre is that personal change requires an understanding of "failed institutions" (including the hero and heroic values) once believed in (66), an experience common in Pollock's works.

The elegiac romance is, indeed, a useful lens through which to observe Pollock's *Whiskey Six Cadenza* and *Doc*. Each play contains a charismatic "heroic" older male figure, Mr. Big and Ev, and a younger narrator/rememberer, Johnny and Catherine. Equally in keeping with Bruffee's elegiac romance form, the narrator experiences disillusionment and gains self-knowledge through a more complex and ambivalent understanding of his or her hero (and heroic values) and his or her own relationships with him. Mr. Big's defiant and romantic vision of freedom and choice is belied by his sexual abuse of the child Leah, removing her ability to choose, and his subsequent revisionist attempt to justify his action. Ev's lack of care for his

² Bruffee's observations were based on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American, British, and Europe novels by men about male protagonists. These include: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Proust's *Remembrances of Things Past*, Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, Nabakov's *Pale Fire*, and Warren's *All the Kings Men*. He acknowledges this male bias but claims that the elegiac romance is not a gender specific genre, citing instances of works with female narrator-rememberers and/or female heroes (for example, Willa Cather's *My Mortal Enemy*), though he does not explore them further. He does not consider that women may differ from men in how they define, experience, and respond to "institutions" (heroes or otherwise), cultural change, and loss. Bruffee does mention the work of Patricia Merivale, one of the few literary scholars to have written about the elegiac romance with respect to works by female authors, with female protagonists (211-12). Unfortunately, Merivale's studies (the 1980 essay, "Through Greene-land in Drag," cited by Bruffee and a later one in 1986 on the female artist-parable, "The Search of the Other Woman," which also briefly discusses the elegiac romance) also do not comment specifically on any potential differences in the form arising from gender differences.

family belies his pioneering medical work and concern for the public.

However, there are differences between Pollock's work and the elegiac romance. For example, Bruffee stresses that the reader's knowledge of the dead hero is solely dependant on the narrator-rememberer (40) and even speaks in psychoanalytic terms of the hero being "[t]he screen upon which he [the narrator] projects his own fantasies" (141). While this may be so for Johnny and Mr. Big in *Whiskey Six Cadenze*, in *Doc*, there are two rememberers of Bob: Catherine and Ev. In addition, the child Katie is less enthralled by Ev than Johnny is by Mr. Big, partly because while Mr. Big welcomes Johnny as a surrogate son and potential heir of the family business of bootlegging (though it is questionable how willing Mr. Big is to give up authority), Katie, Ev's daughter, is neglected by Ev (as much as by Bob) and has few prospects of ascending to his place and position. What she aspires to is independence and escape from her unhappy family (in this she and Johnny are alike), including her father Ev; albeit, Ev is the only viable model for independence and authority available to Katie (and Catherine).

I would add that, from the start, both Johnny and Catherine had ambivalent feelings towards their "heroes." When Mr. Big asks rhetorically, "Why do I bestride my world like a colossus?", Johnny's reply is "Diet?" and when pressed further by Mr. Big, Johnny shrugs with disinterest (203).³ As discussed in the previous chapter, young Katie already observes critically the adults around her and their response to Bob's condition, including Ev, finding them ineffectual and reluctant to speak the truth (6-7).

I suggest there is a parallel and alternative configuration in both plays. Unlike the elegiac romance, the narratives are not inspired by nor do they contain the male hero's death. Instead, the death in each story is that of a woman, Leah and Bob.⁴ It is possible to see two "heroic" figures in the plays, male and female (Mr. Big and Leah, Ev and Bob). While disillusionment and self-knowledge accompanies the narrators' portrayal of the "heroic" male, awareness is also brought about by an increase in the appreciation of the challenges and efforts of the formerly devalued and rejected woman. Both plays explore loss and cultural change, but these relate as

³ Mr. Big is quoting Cassius's ambivalent description of Caesar, a man Cassius claims is a tyrant, in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Act I, Scene ii. It is an indication Mr. Big's grandiose ego (and perhaps ignorance) that he does so seemingly without irony.

⁴ Walker acknowledge this for *Doc* but does not comment on this for *Whiskey Six Cadenza*.

much to the death of a significant woman and a greater awareness and understanding of the social constraints on women and women's autonomy as they do to a disillusionment about patriarchal definitions of heroism and success. While the elegiac romance makes visible interesting layers of meaning in *Whiskey Six Cadenza* and, to a lesser degree, *Doc*, its traditionally masculine bias encourages one to focus on the narrator/rememberer's relationship with the charismatic male heroic figure and to give less attention and impact to the dead women in the plays (Leah and Bob) and their relation to the narrators.

Cynthia Zimmerman's and Sherrill Grace's examinations of loss in Pollock's work address this neglect. In "Transforming the Maternal," a discussion of Pollock's changing representations of the maternal figure, Zimmerman characterises the daughter (both Pollock and many of her female protagonists) as being haunted by her mother. In fact, Zimmerman explicitly uses the language of ghosts throughout her discussion.⁵ She traces a series of increasingly positive representations of the lost maternal figure, from the daughter's perspective, beginning with Bob in *Doc* and ending with Joan in *Fair Liberty's Call*. Sherrill Grace, too, looks at loss and the maternal figure. In her biography of Pollock, *Making Theatre: A Life of Sharon Pollock*, she emphasizes the influence of the life and death of Pollock's mother, Eloise Chalmers (*née* Roberts), throughout Pollock's large body of work. All these approaches focus on a one-to-one relationship: Walker, building on Bruffee's notion of the elegiac romance, looks at a "narrator"/"hero" relationship and both Zimmerman and Grace highlight the mother-daughter dyad. In this chapter, I wish to extend the discussion beyond these individual perspectives to include other losses and multiple deaths which represent loss and mourning from a broader communal perspective.

Pollock's plays contain an astonishing number of deaths and losses, the memory and presence of which haunt and influence the present and the future. These "ghosts" include: Sitting Bull and his son Crowfoot, the Sioux, and other Native peoples in *Walsh*; Hopkinson's parents (especially his mother) and his Sikh informants in *The Komagata Maru Incident*; Dede Walker, Tommy Paul, Gillie MacDermott, and Desjardin in *One Tiger to A Hill*; Andrew and Abigail Borden (as well as Lizzie's birth mother, Andrew's unnamed first wife) in *Blood Relations*; Leah

⁵ For example, Zimmerman refers to the "haunting presence" (154) of the mother in *Doc*, "Bob's ghost" (158), and writes that the "spectre of Bob inhabits all of Pollock's mother figures" (152).

and Will Farley (as well as Johnny's two other brothers) in *Whiskey Six Cadenza*; Gramma Kate, Bob, Ev's brother Georgie, Oscar's mother, and Oscar himself in *Doc*; the many war dead, Eme's father, her grandfather, and, possibly, her husband in *Getting It Straight*; Anna Mae Pictou Aquash and Sarah Moore Grimké in *The Making of Warriors*; Edward and Richard Roberts, Anderson's younger brother, Charlie Meyers the Loyalist drummer boy, Frank Taylor, John Andre, the many other war dead, and the aboriginal Dead (whose bones are observed by Joan) in *Fair Liberty's Call*; the women murdered by Jack the Ripper in *Saucy Jack*; Nell's parents, her beloved animals, and her younger selves in *Moving Pictures*; Janet Smith in *End Dream*; and Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald in *Angel's Trumpet*. This long, but not exhaustive, list may seem to belabour the point, but part of my point is the very prevalence of the dead.

Mourners in Pollock's drama include individuals, such as Johnny, Mrs. Farley, and Dolly in *Whiskey Six Cadenza* and Eme in *Getting It Straight*, as well as groups such as the Loyalist immigrants in *Fair Liberty's Call* and the women Eme addresses at the end of *Getting It Straight*. Finally, with varying degrees of explicitness, in plays such as *Walsh*, *One Tiger to a Hill*, *Getting It Straight*, *The Making of Warriors*, *End Dream*, and *Angel's Trumpet*, Pollock also attempts to position and engage the audience members themselves as mourners, such that in their affective sympathy (as much as political or moral anger) they too may be moved to transformation and action. This association between imagination, emotions, and ethical action will emerge again later in chapter five of this study.

While the absence of individuals can haunt the living, other forms of loss are equally powerful and significant. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud defines mourning in resonant terms for thinking about Pollock's work. He writes: "Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (243). Undoubtedly, abstractions such as home, country, liberty, as well as promises and hopes, honour and justice, are desired, lost, and mourned in Pollock's drama. In some cases, they are regained anew. In fact, often the loss of a beloved person and the loss of an abstraction occur together, inseparably intertwined. For example, for James Walsh, the loss of the Sioux people and of his personal friend Sitting Bull are intimately linked with a loss of his sense of identity, of his faith in himself as honourable and in the government he serves as just. For the Roberts family, the loss of home and country, as well as their sense of identity as Loyalists rather than traitors, cannot be dissociated from the loss of

family members Richard, Edward, and Emily. Here again is the presence of the kinship idiom in Pollock's work.

Freud continues in "Mourning and Melancholia," describing "normal" mourning as a long gradual detachment process of "reality-testing," which verifies that the loved object no longer exists and withdraws the libido from attachments to the object (244). In the process, "[e]ach single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it" (245). While Freud's ideas about "normal" and "abnormal" mourning (or melancholia) have been qualified by Freud himself and by subsequent researchers,⁶ his preliminary description of mourning in terms of the loss of individuals and abstractions, and the examination of memories and expectations related to the lost object (hence of an imagined future as well as the lived past), serves as a useful starting point for this chapter because it links several strands found within Pollock's work: loss, mourning, memory, and with memory, history.

The living in Pollock's plays struggle with their grief, with the stories of their dead, and with the process of mourning itself: whether or not to acknowledge or express their grief, whether or not to tell the stories of the dead, and if so, how? to whom? when? where? which stories? How to mourn? In addition, the living do not always make their choices solely as independent agents. The dead themselves seem to require actions of those who remain. In the poignant words of Annie Roberts in *Fair Liberty's Call*, "Sometimes I feel his name fillin' my head and pressin' hard on my lips to be spoke" (75). Here Annie is referring to Major John Andre, the British spy she betrayed to the Americans, but her words apply equally to the other dead who inhabit the play. In fact, Annie's experience in *Fair Liberty's Call* is shared by the protagonists in many of Pollock's dramas.

While the dead place demands on the living, so too do the living "press" upon the dead,

⁶ I am referring especially to Freud's confident belief in a clear cut end to mourning, in one's ability (and desire) to achieve complete detachment from the lost object, and to his designation of such a condition as "normal" and deviations from such as "abnormal." Kathleen Woodward suggests that the deaths of his beloved grandson Heinele at age four-and-a-half (while Freud was sixty-seven) and that of his young daughter Sophie (Heinele's mother) "[o]nly a year earlier" (87) at age twenty-six, devastated Freud and his experience prompted him to revise his observations about the possibility or desirability of an end to attachment and the pain of loss and to posit a position between "normal" mourning and pathological melancholia (87-89). Note: Woodward made a small error: Sophie died three years before Heinele, in January 1920; Heinele died in June 1923 (Freud, *Reader* xlii, xliii).

the absent, the past. For some, like Hopkinson in *The Komagata Maru Incident*, Ev in *Doc*, or Leah and her adoptive parents in *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, the struggle is an attempt to suppress and silence significant aspects of the past. As such, the living are haunted not only by their losses but also by their secrets; in these cases, family secrets. For others, like Ev Chalmers in *One Tiger to a Hill*, Catherine in *Doc*, Eme in *Getting It Straight*, and the narrator in *The Making of Warriors*, the struggle is to pay attention to the dead, to listen to and to speak their stories. In both cases, the past is a source of mystery and missing knowledge vital to the present and the future.

With loss and mourning comes an attendant focus on inheritance, what the dead and absent have left behind: a boon, a burden, or possibly both. While I have touched upon this topic in the previous chapter in the context of the demands and anxieties various forms of inheritance or inter-generational transmission create for individual characters, in this chapter I revisit the issue of inheritance, in terms of Cole's notion of the "mourner-inheritor" figure, especially the female beloved-deceased and the female mourner-inheritor. Afterwards, I will broaden my examination to touch briefly on the notion of community loss, mourning, and inheritance. Here again, we see the kinship idiom in operation.

Before I continue, I would like to clarify two different, if related, sets of responses to loss, the private and the public: feelings and emotional states such as grief and bereavement, and expressions and actions such as mourning and remembrance. Freud's psychological (and psychoanalytic) definition of mourning may be seen as focussed on the internal mental state of an individual. However, there is also a more public facet to mourning, in which it is commonly understood as the *expression* of grief and loss. As such, it is often associated with the enactment of customary ceremonies, rituals, dress, behaviour. In this sense, there are elements of the social and the performative in mourning, with everything they entail: performers, performance spaces and contexts, conventions, standards, audiences. There is also an ambivalent duality associated with the mourner. On the individual level, bereavement often places the griever or mourner in a vulnerable emotional and psychological state. However, Gail Holst-Warhaft suggests that, on the collective level, the outward expression of bereavement, what she calls the "volatile" "passion of grief" (*Cue 2*), can become a powerful force uniting a community into concerted political action or chaotic unrest (*Cue 2*). Indeed, for many of Pollock's protagonists, the *performance* of mourning is an important issue of consideration and contention. For example, in the autobiographically inspired *Doc*, Katie refuses to listen to her mother and to cry, to acknowledge

and display her vulnerability and her pain at her mother's pain, illness, and absence (115-16). Pollock's personal account of her own mother's funeral highlights explicitly her awareness of the vulnerable and performative aspects of mourning:

Then came the funeral: My father was weeping, my brother was weeping, my grandmother – who didn't forgive my father for years; she was convinced it was all his fault – was weeping. It was the most hysterically *embarrassing* event I had ever known. I said to myself, 'I won't cry in front of all these people if it kills me, I won't show my grief before this audience,' the people who had packed the church. (qtd. in Hofsess 52, emphasis in original)

On the metatheatrical level, the stage representation of mourning allows characters (and dramatists) to surmount (or collapse) the boundary of private and public through the conceit of privacy: what is withheld from other characters in a drama may be expressed to the audience. One's older self may look on as another form of audience, as in *Doc*, where Catherine observes and consoles Katie, assuring her that it is alright, it is safe, to cry—now (in Catherine's present and presence) if not earlier (at the time of her mother's illness or death). In fact, the effects of story-telling, especially autobiographical or familial story-telling, on the narrator and the re-viewing of events it facilitates are important elements in Pollock's work which I will discuss further later in this study.

Where in the previous chapter I established my argument through a broad range of plays, in this chapter I will focus my analysis chiefly on one play, *Fair Liberty's Call*, as emblematic of the themes as well as the formal structures of familial loss and mourning in Pollock's drama. A close reading of *Fair Liberty's Call* permits me to demonstrate how my ideas play out in detail and to test the usefulness of the lens of loss and mourning to observe Pollock's work. I will call attention to similarities and variations of this theme and structure in Pollock's other works to show the broader possibilities of my approach. And, as I will also demonstrate, the framework of the kinship idiom and ambivalent misalignment remains active throughout.

Familial Loss and Grief and the Liminal

JOAN: That is not Edward [*indicating EDDIE*] Edward is dead.

ANNIE: That's right, Mama; he's dead.

JOAN: Edward and Em'ly, both of them gone. Only seven minutes between them. Yes, my belly was big, and the two of them, they'd kick and tussle in there, and I'd sit, put my hands on my belly like this, and I'd feel them, kickin' in there. I'd sit in the parlour, ooohhh it was a wonderful room, it was all ... and ... and, Edward came home ...

GEORGE: Stop her.

JOAN: then where were we livin'? not livin' in Boston

ANNIE: How am I supposed to do that?

JOAN: burnt outa Boston

GEORGE: It's past, it's gone, Mama!

JOAN: and not here yet

ANNIE: Let her go. Get it over with.

(Fair Liberty's Call 23)

* * * * *

The mechanisms of the interplay of loss and mourning, memory, and inheritance within Pollock's drama can be seen clearly in *Fair Liberty's Call*. While the play is about beginnings, a "country comin' into bein'" (20), as Eddie, Annie, and Joan tell us in the verbal montage at the start of the drama, *Fair Liberty's Call* is also very much a play about endings and loss, the choices they necessitate, and the inability or refusal to mourn, its negative consequences and possible remedies. The play opens with the reunion of the surviving members of Tarleton's Loyalist Legion to enact what Pollock's stage directions call a "Remembrance Ritual" (37), complete with "totems"⁷ (36), ceremonial objects, and memory aids—flags, dress, war trophies, music, song, and story-telling:

DANIEL: Where's the bits and pieces?

GEORGE: We was just getting' to that.

DANIEL: How the hell's a man to remember with no surroundin's?

[MAJOR WILLIAMS, GEORGE and DANIEL begin to drag out the totems, souvenirs, and trophies of war from trucks, boxes and containers. They will decorate both the space and themselves as they prepare for the

⁷ Pollock's choice of the word "totem," in this context, suggests another instance of the kinship idiom at play. Originating in reference to American Indians, a totem is a "hereditary mark, emblem, or badge of a tribe, clan, or group of Indians [. . .] after which the group is named" ("Totem," def. a) and a tribe or clan is a group of persons claiming a common ancestry. In other words, the Loyalist veterans are a clan, members of a family.

Remembrance Ritual. EDDIE observes more than she assists, lending a hand when needed. An American Rebel flag is draped over one of the wagon shafts. A large picture of Tarleton pulling on his boots, and one of King George, will be raised to oversee the proceedings. The regimental drum and sticks, their Tarleton green uniforms, an elaborately embroidered, but stained, waistcoat, a uniform jacket with lace epaulettes stiff with stains, an iron helmet, a black leather cap with a white skull and the words "Or Glory" on it as well as various regimental flags and colours are all displayed]

DANIEL: Gotta fill the place up with things that speak of the past.

MAJOR: Else how's a man to know who he is. (36-37)

The veterans remember and celebrate their battle victories and mourn their dead comrades, their brothers-in-arms. The play is also filled with the remembrance of more particular deaths: the Roberts children – Richard who died fighting for the Americans (the Rebels), Edward who committed suicide, and Emily who is supposed to have died of small pox; the Rebel John Anderson's younger brother who also died in battle; Major Andre, the British spy caught and executed by the Rebels; the Legion's drummer boy Charlie Meyers who died on the exodus ship to Nova Scotia; Frank Taylor, murdered in the forest just before the play opens; and the aboriginal Dead, represented by the human bones Joan sees in the forest.

In fact, even prior to the veterans' enactment of their Remembrance Ritual, Pollock has created a context which allows an interpretation of *Fair Liberty's Call* in terms of loss and mourning on a broader symbolic basis. From the very start of the drama, her opening set description and stage directions state:

A bare stage, the floor of which radiates in a dark-hued swirl of colour, represents the "virgin" land.⁸ Although this space appears empty and uncorrupted, it projects an aura of foreboding, a sense of the unseen. A subtle sound fills the space as if the air itself is vibrating just below the level of conscious hearing. There are several lightning-like flashes, each followed by a split second of darkness. JOAN and ANNIE, each carrying a large bundle of belongings, and EDDIE, carrying a long gun, appear at the edge of the stage. They are followed by GEORGE, DANIEL, the MAJOR and WULLIE. DANIEL pulls a wagon, piled high with barrels, trunks and rough pieces of wood. GEORGE has a trunk lashed to his back, and carries a keg. The MAJOR,

⁸ The reference to the land as "virgin" is absent from the 2006 play text, although the direction, at the end of the drama that Eddie and Wullie return "the stage to some semblance of its virgin state at the beginning of the play" (FLC [1995] 78) remains the same in both published versions of texts.

DANIEL and WULLIE carry long guns. JOAN, ANNIE and EDDIE step further into the space.

*Following the lightning comes the sound of a rolling rumble of thunder, or of what might be thunder, for all sound is impressionistic, even surrealistic, rather than realistic.*⁹ (19)

Pollock's stage directions have received limited consideration. Anne Nothof likens Joan's entrance in this opening passage to that of Brecht's *Mother Courage*, though she adds that Joan "lacks *Mother Courage*'s aggressive acquisitiveness, and doubts that the land to which they have come will ever become their home: her footprints leave no mark on the soil" ("Crossing" 94). Alternatively, Craig Walker finds Pollock's landscape akin to that described by Douglas LePan's poem "A Country without a Mythology." He observes that "[t]he difficulty, as in LePan's poem, is not that there is no history but rather that its true nature is not disclosed to the observer. The sense of incipient power [in the land] effectively demands that the past be divulged truthfully, that the menacing emptiness of place be dispelled by proper attention to the collective history" (192-93). While both these interpretations have merit, they seem to me incomplete or inexact. The visual allusion of Joan's entrance to *Mother Courage* is there but, if anyone resembles the mercantile parent who sacrifices her children to the inhumanities of war to preserve her own economic survival, it is George Roberts rather than his wife. In addition, by the end of the drama, Joan does leave an impression on the soil but for reasons other than capitalist acquisition.

And the land does possess an incipient power but I believe the intent (or lack thereof) of this power is different from that identified by Walker. Like LePan's poem, Pollock's drama focuses on the history European settlers bring with them to their new home and acknowledges (through Joan's encounter with the bones of the aboriginal Dead and the red woman) the prior presence of the Native peoples, but I find Walker's additional suggestion of an ethical direction in the land (a "demand" for historical truth, collectivity, and ethical honesty) unconvincing. Unlike the prairie of *Generations*, which seems to have inspired a closer relationship with its

⁹ Also absent in the 2006 version are the "lightning-like flashes" and the sound of "a rolling rumble of thunder, or of what might be thunder [. . .] impressionistic, even surrealistic, rather than realistic." These elements are replaced by the sounds of "a horrific battle, gunfire and cannon, men yelling encouragement and despair mixed with the cries of the wounded and the thunder and scream of horses" (365). These changes reduce the abstract and ambiguous feel of the opening and focus more on the specific horrors of war and the recent past.

inhabitants (whether it is one of sacrifice or partnership), the wild primordial forest of *Fair Liberty's Call* appears to me disinterested in an elemental way. There is little evidence that it cares whether the settlers tell truths or lies, or whether they survive or perish (for example, there is no saving rain as in the conclusion of *Generations*). The difference between the characterisation of the two landscapes can be explained by the nature of the relationship between the characters and their environment. The Loyalist immigrants do not (yet) have the sense of history or generational partnership with the land which the Nurlins, as three generations of farmers, have with the prairie. Significantly, at the end of the drama, Wullie and Eddie clear the trappings of the Remembrance Ritual, “*returning the stage to some semblance of its virgin state at the beginning of the play*” (78) and “[a]s they clear areas of the space, the floor seems to glow with a dark rich swirl of colour as the lights are fading” (79). The land is, as yet, little affected by the presence of the Loyalists and the events enacted upon it. It is not the land but the people, living and dead—Joan, Eddie, Annie, Anderson, Black Wullie, the red woman, Richard, Edward, Charlie Meyers, Major John Andre, even Frank Taylor—who press their community for social responsibility, ethical collectivity, and more truthful accounts of themselves. I believe Pollock’s rich and evocative description, especially her combination of ambivalence, mystery, and danger, has something else to tell us.

While the land, in terms of its physical status is stationary, inert, Pollock’s description (note her choice of verbs) is one of intense outward energy and activity: the land “*radiates* in a [. . .] *swirl of colour,*” “*projects* an aura of foreboding,” and “*vibrat[es]*” with “subtle sound” [emphasis added]. It is a “‘virgin’ land” which “appears empty and uncorrupted” but “projects an aura of foreboding, a sense of the unseen.” Along with the “unseen,” are the unheard (“sound [. . .] vibrating just below the level of conscious hearing”) and the uncertain (“lightning-like flashes” and “thunder or [. . .] *what might be thunder*” [emphasis added]). The solid and fluid, the seen and unseen, the heard and unheard, the dark and the light, coexist in this threatening, elemental space, empty and full, inert and alive. The characters, clearly on a journey, appear poised on “the edge of the stage” before “step[ping] further into the space.” In addition, throughout the drama, Pollock describes characters emerging and departing through shadows and mists. For example, referring to the entry of Daniel and Anderson, Pollock writes: “JOHN ANDERSON, *with a long gun slung over his shoulder, with his hands in his pockets, enters the shadows on the periphery, along with DANIEL. We aren’t aware of their initial appearance,*

they are already there when, or if, we notice them" (34). Pollock has created an ambivalent fluctuating betwixt-and-between space to frame her drama.

I suggest that this ambivalent nebulous space is not only a familiar representation of the past (in the "mist of time") but that it can be interpreted, following the ideas of Arnold van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage*, as the liminal, sacred, transitional space of loss and mourning. Under Gennep's famous formulation, passage from one social status to another occurs in three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation, each with its associated rites. He adds: "[. . .] in certain ceremonial patterns where the transitional period is sufficiently elaborated to constitute an independent state, the arrangement is reduplicated" (11). Furthermore, he writes that mourning "is a transitional period for the survivors, and they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society (rites of the lifting of mourning)" (147). In fact, Gennep envisions both survivors and deceased as embarking on parallel passages. Following a death, both groups separate from the world of the living and enter a transitional, liminal zone. If all goes well, after a period of time the deceased continue onward to be incorporated into the world of the dead, their new residence, with, as Robert Hertz suggests, the new status of "ancestors" (qtd. in Lock 193). The living survivors, in their mourning, also enter a transitional zone but, at the end of mourning, they return to the world of the living. Gennep writes:

[d]uring mourning, the living mourners and the deceased constitute a special group, situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and how soon living individuals leave that group depends on the closeness of their relationship with the dead person. Mourning requirements are based on degrees of kinship and are systematized by each person according to their special way of calculating that kinship [. . .].¹⁰ (147)

Here we see again a link between the kinship idiom and loss in Pollock's work.

But what are the characteristics of this transitional or neutral space, and how is Pollock's setting similar to it? Gennep writes:

The neutral zones are ordinarily deserts, marshes, and most frequently virgin forests where everyone has full rights to travel and hunt. Because of the pivoting

¹⁰ Note how this description compliments, in part, Freud's notion of mourning as a special period of withdrawal from normal activities.

of sacredness, the territories on either side of the neutral zone are sacred in relation to whoever is in the zone, but the zone, in turn, is sacred for the inhabitants of the adjacent territories.¹¹ Whoever passes from one to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds. (18)

Liminal (or transitional/threshold) people and spaces are socially undefined or less well defined (without or between categories) and thus are both vulnerable and powerful. For example, Victor Turner points out that individuals in transition, in between social categories, are vulnerable because they lack the rights and protections associated with a given status, yet they are also powerful and dangerous because they are not bound by the rules or laws of any stable status or community (27). In Pollock's drama, Miss Lizzie in *Blood Relations*, Eme in *Getting It Straight*, Eddie/Emily and Joan in *Fair Liberty's Call*, and Kate in *Saucy Jack* (to name a few) are all examples of unbounded, vulnerable, yet powerful, individuals of Turner's description. They are also women who mourn the loss of loved ones or aspects of their identity. Here again is the ambivalence characteristic of mourning and of Pollock's drama.

The sense of license "to travel and hunt" certainly prevails in the "virgin forest" of *Fair Liberty's Call*.¹² The Roberts family and the gathering guests of the Remembrance Ritual (Frank Taylor, Daniel and the Rebel Anderson, Black Wullie) all travel through the forest. And license to "hunt" also exists in the drama. Frank Taylor is ambushed and killed in the forest. Anderson arrives intent on killing the Loyalist responsible for his brother's death. Hearing a mysterious moaning cry, George prompts the men to move into the forest stalking the wild cat he believes made the noise (40). Later, Eddie takes aim and fires her rifle at Major Williams (46). Even the Major's sexual assault on Annie and her fisted blow to free herself is described by Annie with grim wit in terms of a predatory hunt for food: "I've been at it [turning the roast pig] all day, and the smell of roast pig and cracklin' has so permeated my clothin' that the Major here has just

¹¹ "Sacred" is here used as a relative term. As Solon Kimball explains in the "Introduction" to *The Rites of Passage*: "[t]he person who enters a status at variance with the one previously held becomes 'sacred' to the others who remain in the profane state" (viii-ix). In this usage then, whoever has left a given norm, a former community, is "sacred" as observed by those in the former community (the profane).

¹² As we have seen, Pollock herself uses the term "'virgin' land" in her set description.

fallen on me as if I were a chop. Isn't that right, Major?" (31).¹³

This liminal freedom of movement and of the exercise of power and violence throws new light on the play's fascinating carnival and grotesque elements which mingle life and death. Rather than signs of madness, Joan's background muttering of "[p]ink porker, pink, pink porker, pink porker" (29) while she is "*engaged in repetitious slicing of bread, cheese and sausage*" (28-29) and her apparently incongruous but startling and powerful outburst during the Major's assault on Annie—"Like a bullet-hole in his head, like a rope catchin' you under the chin, like a narrow ravine, a depression, a dip, like a Valley! Like saltwater runnin' out of the bay, like the tide rushin' in through the gorge!" (31)—can be seen as eruptions of freedom of speech, black humour, and liminal violence.¹⁴ Her discordant laughter, song, and dance can also be seen as elements of the liminal. In fact, *Fair Liberty's Call* is full of song and dance. For example, Daniel sings to and dances with both Annie (55) and the English boots he took off a Rebel corpse (39).¹⁵ This behaviour not only reveals his clown-like and life-affirming character but also adds to the potential for unrest and disorder (another form of misalignment) which can be both destructive and productive. Turner identifies the grotesque with recombination and defamiliarization and states: "in liminality people 'play' with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them. Novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar elements"

¹³ This is another example of the loss of categories or permeability of boundaries (woman/pig) characteristic of a liminal space and of mourning. It is, of course, also an indictment of the Major's sexism.

¹⁴ Pollock's striking imagery not only evokes the sense of danger, motion, sudden and brutal violence, an environment which mirrors the sense of threatening power within the community, but Joan's speech is actually full of references to events in the drama: the many war deaths and Frank Taylor's murder, the threat of a lynching always a danger to Black Wullie, the bloody battle of (Red) Cherry Valley from which Edward returns to commit suicide, the flow of salt blood, and the military and exodus ships of the war.

In addition, Joan's references to the immediate political past challenges characterization of her as disconnected from the present. For example, Brady describes Joan, in the premiere production of the *Fair Liberty's Call*, as "eerily disconnected from the political struggle among the male characters" (273-74), albeit he was focussing on Janet Wright's performance of Joan, and Bellivue writes that "for most of the play she appears to be in a different world from the rest of the characters" ("Daddy" 170). I suggest that Joan is very much aware of the political context of the recent past, sensitive to the potential of violence and bloodshed in the present, yet mindful of her personal loss.

¹⁵ This scene is one of music, dance, laughter, and abandonment where Daniel also manages to get Eddie to play the drum, the Major to dance with George, then George with Joan. The juxtaposition of Annie (life) with the boots (death) is again a liminal dissolution of boundaries.

(27). He also supports Brian Sutton-Smith's notion of liminal environments "as the settings in which new models, symbols, paradigms, etc., arise—as seedbeds of cultural creativity" (28). Positive innovation, change, and cultural creativity are conditions to which the hopeful conclusion of Pollock's *Fair Liberty's Call* aspires.

I suggest that the nebulous, threatening, betwixt-and-between nature of the "virgin" New Brunswick forest makes it indeed such a liminal space, not only of change, but also of loss and mourning, a symbolic, psychological, as well as physical space which the characters, mourners all, enter, inhabit, and pass through on a journey from one identity to another. This interpretation of the landscape as the transitional zone of mourning in turn sheds new light on Pollock's interesting depiction of Joan's changing physical relationship to the land. Initially, Joan describes an unfamiliar land upon which her passage leaves no mark:

Up in the woods where I saw the red woman, there are bones. Leg bones of a man, maybe a man . . . Arm bones. Part of a rib Cage, and a Skull missin' the Jaw. Disarranged. When you stand there, you feel your feet restin' on top of the soil. You could slip. You could fall. Empty eyesockets catch your eye tellin' you somethin'. Your feet carry you back to the house but they leave no trace of your passing . . . This isn't home. They aren't our Dead. The red woman stands in the glade of trees, and she watches. (27)

Clearly Joan is sensitive to the cultural presence and entitlement which belong to the Native peoples. Her words also provide one of the possible formulations of home: Home is where your Dead are buried.¹⁶ At the end of *Fair Liberty's Call* Joan completes her narrative of her encounter with the red woman and of home:

I feel my feet pressin' flat 'gainst the surface of the soil now. I kneel readin' the contours of the skull and listenin' to the words spoke by the man with the missin' jawbone, and the caps of my knees make a small indentation in the dirt.
[.]

¹⁶ Here, Joan also reminds me of another immigrant mother in mourning: Margaret Atwood's Susanna Moodie. In "Death of a Young Son by Drowning," Atwood's Moodie speaks of her child who died in this new country as being "on a voyage of discovery / into the land I floated on / but could not touch to claim" (ll. 4-6) and she ends with: "I planted him in this country / like a flag" (ll. 28-29). Pauline Boss suggests that immigrants who, due to political, financial, or technological limitations in the ability to travel, could not readily visit their originating country would experience loss and a physical (geographical) as well as psychological misalignment from their family and friends left behind (1-4). I suggest that this separation and loss would extend to their "Dead," buried in the old country.

And the red woman with the baby on her back steps out from under
the glade of trees and she holds out a bowl, she offers a bowl full
of earth.

[.....]

Eat, she says. Swallow.

And I do. (79-80)

It is possible to associate Joan's new ability to make an impression upon the land to her learned ability to read and to listen to the signs and words of Native culture with her reception of the red woman's gift. But Pollock's provocative image of Joan's feet not leaving a trace on the soil and, later, her knees leaving an indentation also reminds me of a comment by Gennep regarding ceremonies in which an individual is carried above the ground by others. Such practices, he claims, are also transition rites.¹⁷ Accordingly, Joan's initial passage leaves no traces on the ground because, as a mourner, she inhabits a transitional zone removed from the world of the living. The fact that her feet and knees are able to press upon the soil at the end signals that, in the process of the drama, she has been able to express her loss to Anderson and Annie and to mourn to a degree¹⁸ which enables her to leave the transitional zone and be reincorporated into the world of the living, hence her return to the earth.

Finally, while I have discussed elsewhere Pollock's unusual scene of gift giving and receiving in terms of an adopted inheritance as an alternative to a gesture in which the colonized enables the colonizer ("Lookin' to" 160), Joan's enactment of the red woman's instruction to eat the soil can also be seen as an act of incorporation, the stage which follows transition and completes the passage from one state to another. Sharing a meal is symbolically a rite of incorporation. I also see significance in the red woman's offer of soil *as food*. Lewis Hyde, writing on the concept of gifts and their circulation, points out that:

A gift that cannot move loses its gift properties. [. . .] Another way to describe the

¹⁷ Of being carried or lifted above something, Gennep writes: "It is intended to show that at the moment in question the individual does not belong either to the sacred or to the profane world; or, if he does belong to one of the two, it is desired that he be properly reincorporated into the other, and he is therefore isolated and maintained in an intermediate position, held between heaven and earth, just as the deceased on his bier or in his temporary coffin is suspended between life and true death" (186).

¹⁸ I say "a degree" because Joan doesn't necessarily complete her mourning and I don't subscribe to the necessity of complete detachment or an end to mourning such as that proposed by Freud's early theory in "Mourning and Melancholia."

motion of the gift is to say that a gift must always be used up, consumed, eaten. *The gift is property that perishes.* [. . .] Food is one of the most common images for the gift because it is so obviously consumed. Even when the gift is not food, when it is something we would think of as a durable good, it is often referred to as a thing to be eaten. (8, emphasis in original)

Symbolically then, the land as food is a nourishing but perishable gift which cannot be hoarded. Hence, the red woman's gesture signals to Joan the nature of the relationship she intends, between the two women, between the women and the land, and, by extension, the two cultures and their relationship to the land.¹⁹ It is also significantly a gift exchange between two women, two mothers, in private, in a play which has consistently highlighted differences between women's and men's positions and methods, and between private and public actions. I will discuss these gendered differences further in chapter five.

The presence of the liminal and the transitional space of loss, death, and mourning are not unique to *Fair Liberty's Call*. For example, the co-existence of the living and the dead in a transitional space is found in the drunken, expressionist opening scene of *Walsh*, where Walsh confronts the living (Prospector and Joeie) and the dead (Sitting Bull and his son Crowfoot) together, double cast. It is also found in the questing mind and the moving car of the Woman in *The Making of Warriors*, who witnessed what may or may not have been the dead body of Anna Mae Pictou Aquash and is joined by Aquash and Grimké at the end of the drama. Throughout *Doc*, *Moving Pictures*, *End Dream*, and in the opening and closing scenes of *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, Pollock's stage directions explicitly state that all the characters (mainly the deceased and those from the past) remain on stage, sharing space with the living, observing and responding to the action on stage. She creates a sense of loss, as well as that of being observed, haunted, sometimes threatened, by "the absent ones." In addition, many of Pollock's dramas take place in an ambivalent "betwixt-and-between" space, geographic and psychic. For example, in *Getting It Straight*, Pollock's set description suggests Eme is situated both outside and inside: huddled beneath the "open seating" of an outdoor stadium and enclosed within "ribs", all "seen from the

¹⁹ Note, Cynthia Zimmerman suggests an alternate but complementary reading in which Joan's words "I do" echo those spoken in a marriage ceremony, signifying a union between Joan and her new country ("Transfiguring the Maternal" 158).

inside out” (87, italics in original). Eme’s mind hovers between confusion and clarity, madness and sanity; *End Dream* is encapsulated in the liminal moment between the life and death of Janet Smith and, in Pollock’s words, Smith’s “haunting inner and outer world” (98).

Obstacles to Mourning

In *Hamlet* it is only a secondary character, the mad Ophelia, whose mourning, *because* it is masked by madness, is allowed “full” expression in a world which provides no context for mourning. (Cole 6, emphasis in original)

* * * * *

Control of the expression of grief represents power. (Holst-Warhaft, *Cue 9*)

* * * * *

Despite the presences of the many dead in *Fair Liberty’s Call*, there is a flawed or incomplete mourning. While there may be personal and individual obstacles to the task, it is the social which form the focus of my discussion. I see at least three obstacles to the mourning process in *Fair Liberty’s Call*: a flaw in the act of remembering, ambiguous loss, and disenfranchised grief. Freud and subsequent researchers identify a meticulous testing of every memory related to the lost object as a major part of mourning. By comparison then, the Loyalist veterans’ determined refusal to remember and acknowledge their war crimes, focussing exclusively on their heroism and victories, can be seen as incomplete mourning. For example, even as the men begin their Remembrance Ritual, the Rebel banner captured by Frank Taylor, one of their comrades, reminds them of an element of the man and the battle they would rather forget:

MAJOR: There wasn’t a man in the Legion could work a bayonet or a sabre like Frank.

EDDIE: And I seen him at Waxhaws.

DANIEL: We ain’t talkin’ ’bout that.

MAJOR: It was a bloody one alright and Frank –

DANIEL: I said I don’t want to talk ’bout the battle at Waxhaws!

ANDERSON: I can understand that.

DANIEL: No, you can't. You wasn't there, but I know what you heard. Let me tell you somethin'. It was nothin' more than a little white hankie the Rebels tied to a sword. How the hell's a man to see that in the midst of a charge?

ANDERSON: Were they yellin' for quarter?²⁰

DANIEL: I was followin' Tarleton.

EDDIE: They got Tarleton's quarter alright.

GEORGE: What do you mean?

ANDERSON: Cut down, despite their cries of surrender and absence of arms.

DANIEL: We ain't here to talk about that!

MAJOR: Benny Tarleton was a bold and brutal man. The times called for that, and I for one was proud to serve him. I'll brook no talk 'gainst Tarleton.

DANIEL: I ain't listenin'!

EDDIE: Well, what we sowed at Waxhaws, we reaped at King's Mountain, Daniel, so it ends up fair all around. (38-39)

Daniel's repeated refusal to discuss the Battle at Waxhaws and Eddie's grim acknowledgment of its brutality demonstrate differing responses in Tarleton's Legion to the loss of their sense of self and of purpose as purely honourable, heroic, and just.

Eddie's naming of King's Mountain as the fruit of the Loyalists' actions at Waxhaws and her use of the word "fair" cast an ironic and ambivalent light on the values of both Loyalists and Rebels and on the title of the play. In the Battle of Waxhaws, Loyalist soldiers led by Banastre Tarleton defeated Rebel forces, whose commander, Abraham Bulford, had refused to surrender prior to the engagement. The Loyalists did not give quarter and continued to kill their opponents after victory was assured and after the Rebel soldiers themselves, and then Bulford, tried to surrender. It is unclear if the rejection of the surrender was deliberate or not (Tarleton was reportedly trapped under his horse during the battle and might not have received notice of the surrender immediately), but the result was that about 113 Rebels were killed and 150 wounded, approximately 70% percent of Bulford's troops. The Loyalists suffered only 5 deaths and about 15 wounded, roughly 10% of their number (Carrington 497-98). "Tarleton's quarter" was remembered four months later in the Battle of King's Mountain by the victorious Rebel soldiers, who refused quarter to the Loyalists until Rebel commanders regained control of their angry

²⁰ The military use of the term "quarter" refers to the "clemency or mercy shown in sparing the life of a person who surrenders" ("Quarter," def.18a).

soldiers. The Loyalists suffered over 225 deaths and 162 wounded (approximately 35% of their total number), and over 700 prisoners, while the Rebels had approximately 28 killed and 60 wounded (about 9% of their troops) (Carrington 520-21).²¹ For Eddie to speak of such brutal events and loss of lives as “fair” is Pollock’s ironic comment on the ideals and the realities of war, as well as another example of her use of dehumanising moral arithmetic and of misalignment in her work. It recalls Miss Lizzie’s un-ambivalent accounting of her own greater value compared to others and Ev Chalmers’ weighing of his wife Bob’s life against those of his patients and point towards other such measures to come, both in *Fair Liberty’s Call* and in *Angel’s Trumpet*. Each of these instances also suggest a lack (or refusal) of ethical imagination, as if such dispassionate arithmetic weighing of lives was the only means to envision the problem and come to a judgement or solution. (I will discuss these issues later in chapter five of my study.)

Eddie’s word “fair” also echoes and recontextualizes the play’s title, *Fair Liberty’s Call*, highlighting its ironic and ambivalent potential. Liberty, as a civic and personal virtue, has been personified as a female figure as early as the Roman empire (in the form of the goddess *Libertas*). As such, the adjective “fair” connotes the beauty and attractiveness associated with women and with the ideal of freedom. During the American Revolution, as in the earlier French Revolution, liberty was often depicted as female and the terms “Fair Liberty” and “fair Liberty’s call” were present in the vernacular. For example, they appeared in contemporary folk songs, which also often employed the kinship idiom to convey their political messages. Given Pollock’s interest in popular songs, the play title may have been inspired by one such song: “The Liberty Song” (pub. 1768) begins with the address: “Come, join hand in hand, brave Americans all, / And rouse your bold hearts at fair Liberty’s call” and speaks of “worthy forefathers” who “dying, bequeath’d us their freedom and fame,” nurturing the Liberty tree and crying “Now our wishes we gain, / For our children shall gather the fruits of our pain” (“Liberty Song” 283-39). Here, the rhetoric of nationalism and the kinship idiom unite. However, Eddie’s usage reminds

²¹ The numbers of deaths, wounded, and prisoners in these battles vary between sources but all are within the same order of magnitude, including those given by Pollock in her own brief descriptions of the battles which preface her 1995 playtext (*FLC* 12). The 2006 reprint of the play, in the second volume of Zimmerman’s *Sharon Pollock: Collected Works*, contains much more abbreviated descriptions of the battles than the earlier edition.

us that “fair” also means, of conduct and actions, “free from bias, fraud, or injustice; equitable” (“fair” Def. 14.a.(a)) and, of persons, “equitable or lawful [. . .]; honest [and] just” (“fair” Def. 14.a.(b)). In this sense, irony is embedded in the title, for those both answering and resisting Liberty’s call have not always acted in fairness.

In fact, there is an additional misalignment in the title. Two groups, Rebels (or Patriots) and Loyalists, were in conflict and two countries, the United States of America and Canada, eventually came into being as a result of the American Revolution. Pollock’s play focusses on a Loyalist community, one of the founding peoples of Canada, yet it is the American political rhetoric of the Rebels that speaks of slavery, freedom from British tyranny, and answering “fair Liberty’s call.”²² To whom has Liberty addressed her call? And who has answered it? Anderson would say the Rebels, yet Eddie also speaks of the “freedom of choice” from the “oppression” of the Loyalist elite (28). And Wullie initially gained his freedom, his liberty, with the Loyalists, not the Rebels. It is ambiguous . . . or, rather, ambivalent. On a broader scale, perhaps the question is also temporal. As with all of Pollock’s “history plays,” *Fair Liberty’s Call* depicts the past but addresses the present and the future. The play invites audiences to re-examine the meaning of liberty, how they will respond to its call, and the misalignment between words/intent and deeds.

Another example of a refusal to remember is George Roberts’ willed forgetfulness in disowning his elder son, Richard, for choosing to fight on the side of the Rebels. When the Major comments that he himself received a tarring from the Rebels in Boston for being a Loyalist while George escaped this fate because “[w]hat I lacked was a son in the Rebel army,” George insists, “I had no son with the Rebels! I cut that boy out of my heart, and if it takes a tarrin’ to show the world that, then I’d welcome a tarrin’!” (34).²³ In contrast, Joan and Annie defy

²² Canadian mythology identifies “peace, order, and good government” as national values in contrast to those of the United States, “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Each have been removed from their historic context. The former appears in the introductory phrase of Section 91 of the Canadian Constitution (the British North America Act of 1867) and actually refers to the scope of Parliament’s legislative powers. The second paragraph of the United State’s Declaration of Independence (1776) identifies “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” as the rights of all citizens and states that “to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men.”

²³ George’s difficulty in disowning Richard, as attested by the Major’s reference, is an interesting variation of the notion of “family of blood” and “family of choice” discussed earlier in the previous (continued...)

George's will by speaking of Richard to John Anderson. From this perspective, Joan, Annie, and Eddie, who attempt to remember more fully by acknowledging all their actions (heroic and shameful) and all their dead (sons and brothers, comrades and enemies), can be seen as the more successful mourners in the drama.

Another useful way to think about the experiences of the play's mourners is through "ambiguous loss." Pauline Boss defines ambiguous loss as incomplete or uncertain loss due to the experience that a loved one's "status as 'there' or 'not there' is indefinitely unclear" (6). She identifies two kinds of ambiguous loss: objects who are "perceived by family members as *physically absent* but psychologically present" (8, emphasis in original) (missing persons, deaths where the body is never recovered, divorced and adoptive families, countries and families left behind by immigrants and migrants) and, conversely, objects who are "perceived as physically present but *psychologically absent*" (9, emphasis in original) (individuals who have Alzheimer's disease, chronic mental illness, various types of addiction, or who have undergone religious or major life style conversions). Boss stresses that the experience of melancholia (or complicated mourning) due to ambiguous loss is not pathological but a normal reaction to a complicated situation: "The inability to resolve such ambiguous losses is due to the *outside* situation, not to internal personality defects" (10, emphasis in original). As such, it parallels the common argument in Pollock's drama that the protagonist's "madness" is not an internal psychological illness but a sane individual's reaction to an insane social environment.²⁴ Boss's formulation of "ambiguous loss" also fits into the structural theme of my study since it is precisely a misalignment between physical and psychological presence, and the experience of people as being "there" and "not there" is a significant and common form of misalignment, loss, as well as ambivalence, in many of Pollock's plays. In fact, one might argue that the loss Boss describes is less "ambiguous" (one *or* the other) than "ambivalent" (one *and* the other, the co-existence of

²³ (...continued)

chapter. At times, it is as difficult for the family to completely expel an individual member as it is for the individual to leave the family.

²⁴ Theatre reviewers, scholars, and Pollock herself have, at various times, discussed in these terms characters such as Joan, Eme in *Getting It Straight*, Zelda Fitzgerald in *Angel's Trumpet*, Bob in *Doc*, and Miss Lizzie in *Blood Relations*. See for example: Walker 188; Pollock qtd. in Prokosh 29; and Pollock, "Interview with Sharon Pollock" (by Nothof) 175.

opposing states).

In addition to Boss's notion of "ambiguous loss," Kenneth Doka's discussion of "disenfranchised grief" highlights significant social dimensions to mourning relevant to Pollock's work. Doka defines disenfranchised grief as occurring when "a person experiences a sense of loss but does not have a socially recognized right, role, or capacity to grieve" ("Disenfranchised" 3). This concept points out that societies have norms which try "to specify who, when, where, how long, and for whom people should grieve" (4), standards which may differ from an individual's actual experience. Jeffery Kauffman adds that disenfranchised grief inhibits an individual's sense of identity and attests to an unhealthy community:

One of the profoundly disturbing consequences of disenfranchised grief is that because of a lack of social sanctioning and social support, the bereaved may become disillusioned with and alienated from their community. Community is the natural support network in which one's basic sense of *identity* and *belongingness* are realized. [. . .] Communities that sanction and support the grief of their members, that have norms that are flexibly responsive to the needs of their members by recognizing and sanctioning the suffering that exists within the community—these are sane and healing communities.

(29, emphasis in original)

Doka gives three possible causes for disenfranchised grief: the *relationship* is not socially recognised or sanctioned (for example, non-kin or non-traditional relationships), the *loss* is not socially recognised as significant or treated as real (this category might include ambiguous loss), or the *griever* is not socially recognised as capable of understanding death or feeling grief (for example, the very young or the mentally ill) ("Disenfranchised" 5-6).

While a number of the characters in *Fair Liberty's Call* may be seen as mourners, arguably the chief mourner and one of the best examples of a person experiencing ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief is Joan. For example, Joan experiences ambiguous loss with respect to Edward and Emily. Edward is physically absent (he committed suicide and lies buried in Tarrytown) but psychologically present (in the figure of Eddie). As the quotation from the play at the start of this chapter section demonstrates, Joan finds it difficult to mourn for her son Edward not only because he is present as Eddie but because her family, especially her husband George, actively discourages her from remembering the past. Emily, the daughter whom the family claims died of small pox, is physically present (as Eddie) but psychologically absent (as Joan's daughter). In fact, Pollock adds a new twist to ambiguous loss since the twins, Edward and Eddie/Emily are, in a sense, both physically and psychologically present and absent! Joan

also faces social challenges in mourning Edward's death. Edward deserted from the Loyalist forces and committed suicide, shameful acts both. Therefore, from the perspective of Joan's Loyalists community, his death does not merit mourning, at least not publically.

While Joan's loss of Richard is not ambiguous ("there" but "not there"), at least not until the Rebel Anderson appears, her grief for him is equally complicated and, in Kaufman's terms, doubly disenfranchised. Because Richard chose to join the Rebels, Joan's Loyalist community sees him as an enemy traitor and his death as not meriting any mourning; thus her loss is not recognised as significant. In addition, her husband George publically disowned Richard. Recall his words to the Major: "I have no son with the Rebels! I cut that boy out of my heart" (34). Therefore, how can she adequately mourn for a son who does not exist? In this case, her relationship to Richard as mother and son is not recognised by her husband.²⁵ Of course, it can be said that all the living members of the Roberts family must, to a degree, experience the loss of Edward and Emily as ambiguous since they have all participated in and continue to maintain the family's deception about their deaths. Likewise, any grief they may feel over Richard's death may be disenfranchised by their Loyalist community. It is through the course of the drama that their loss and grief find adequate expression and acknowledgement.

In addition to the loss of her children, like other immigrants, Joan also experiences the loss of what she knew as home. The loss of this real and abstract object (in Freud's terms) of home is linked to the loss of loved ones, her family. Joan's first words after her and her daughters' ritualistic opening incantation are a symbolic and visual invocation of home and family:

JOAN: When first we come here after the revolution, when first we come . . . I saw a woman in the woods. [. . .] One mornin' I found a feather on the doorstep.

ANNIE: We don't have a doorstep, Mama. We haven't had a doorstep since

²⁵ Joan's struggle to express her grief and the themes of loss and mourning are less subtle and hence, I believe, less effective in the earlier drafts of the play. In the typescript draft of *Fair Liberty's Call*, circa 1980, from the Canadian Stage Theatre Archives (Canadian Stage Play Development series) held at the University of Guelph, Act I opens not with the bare stage nor the women's vocal montage but with Joan in a rocking chair remembering her sons Richard and Edward while Annie is above in a loft bringing down war memorabilia in preparation for the veteran's gathering. Joan explicitly states: "Richard will be remembered in this house tonight, not just them and their fallen." And when Annie tries to silence her because George is entering, Joan asserts, "I've a right to grieve!" (9).

Boston. We may never have a doorstep again.

JOAN: The feather was there. And in the sky a bird was circlin'. A bird like no bird I know. The colours were wrong, and the size. It circled three times. Three times. Then it soared up, up, wings outstretched, but not movin' its wings . . . This is a barren place. This wasn't home, isn't home, is no place I know, no, no place I know.

[.]

JOAN: Father [*indicating GEORGE with her right thumb*]. Mother [*indicating herself with her right forefinger*]. Four. Four Children [*extending four fingers of her left hand*]. Home [*her right hand folded into a fist*].

ANNIE: We're here now, Mama. New Brunswick is home. (20-21)

Pollock's Joan resembles the classic alienated settler-immigrant of post-colonial critical theory.²⁶ Indeed, Boss identifies immigration as one of the conditions which contribute to the experience of ambiguous loss (2-3). Not only has Joan lost her former home and social status, she is bereft of the language ("We don't have a doorstep, Mama.") and cultural schema (the colours and sizes of the fauna are all "wrong") to make sense of and express her experiences in her new world. As noted earlier, even Joan's "Dead" are buried elsewhere. In addition, Joan's words and hand gestures make clear that for her home is a genealogy of family,²⁷ as well as a geography of place and mind, another case of the kinship idiom at work. Joan's strange two-handed gestures represent family, a divided family, lost connections: parents on one hand, children on the other. And her fist as home is a powerful graphic image, symbolizing both strength in unity and violence. It is also highly ambivalent: read as a gesture of unity and strength, the children stand apart from its parental embrace (or grasp); read as a gesture of aggression and potential violence, the children are as likely as others to become its target.²⁸ It is an imaginative metaphor, two hands connected but separate, and it symbolises not only the generations of the Roberts family but the relation between Britain and colonial America as well as proto-Canadians and proto-Americans. Once again, lineage, misalignment, the separation in which contact remains, emerge

²⁶ I discuss this in further detail in an earlier essay. See Chung, "'Lookin' to a better'" 159.

²⁷ Zimmerman likewise notes that: "Home for Joan *is* family" ("Transfiguring" 158, emphasis in original).

²⁸ Joan's fist of parental aggression also recalls Eme's metaphoric statement that it was "parents" who dropped the bomb which killed all the people--especially, in her mind, children (*GIS* 113).

in Pollock's work.

Another common loss experienced by protagonists in Pollock's drama is the loss of faith in an ideal which is both an abstraction and a defining component of the character's self-conception. James Walsh loses his personal sense of integrity and honour in a bid for "self-preservation" (*Walsh* 162). Everett Chalmers, attorney, comes face to face with the corruption of the criminal justice system it is his profession to represent. Old Nell Shipman critically reassesses the artistic drive and idealism of her younger selves. Here, in *Fair Liberty's Call*, Eddie Roberts loses faith not only in the political honesty of her Loyalist leaders and her father but in her former political and ethical idealism. She acknowledges not only that she has murdered in battle (disregarding calls of surrender at the battle of Waxhaws) but that she is capable of murder and deceit in civil society to achieve her goals. She kills Frank Taylor to protect Wullie's freedom and she threatens and is prepared to kill, to "remove" (77), Major Williams. Eddie, like Joan, finds few within her community who would recognise and sanction her losses and any sense of grief she may have. The Major refuses to consider the Legion's massacre of the surrendering Rebels (or the preferential treatment of the colonial upper class, the "Family of the Fifty-Five") as dishonourable; Daniel, overwhelmed with guilt, refuses to remember the Waxhaws incident at all; her civilian father is unaware of the real brutalities of war;²⁹ and her mother vehemently calls her a "murderer" (25), linking her actions not only to the Rebel dead but her dead brothers. There is little room for the open recognition and acceptance of ambivalence and complexity. Even the peripheral characters such as Wullie and the red woman must contend with past, present, and the threat of future losses of freedom and equity amongst the white community. Wullie, in his relationship with Eddie, and the red woman, in her exchange with Joan, both demonstrate the willingness to risk the (or another) loss of their faith and trust in the hope of creating the better world Annie (and Pollock) envisions for them all.

Ghosts

The denial of the past and the inability to acknowledge one's losses or to have one's loss acknowledged by one's community leaves the individual or group haunted by the past and by

²⁹ For example, in the passage about Waxhaws quoted earlier, George is totally lost and does not understand the meaning of "Tarleton's quarters" (*Fair Liberty's Call* 39).

“the absent ones.” In addition, as Susan Letzler Cole suggests, the return of the dead in an altered form is also a common characteristic of mourning rituals and represented in formal elements such as doubling, split identities, (19), reversals (20), and repetition (23). As I noted in my introduction, ghosts are also structurally an instance of ambivalent misalignment: physical, cognitive, and emotional. It is a sign of the importance of the theme of loss and mourning that there is a remarkable number of doubles, ghosts, and ghostly doubles in *Fair Liberty's Call*, as in many of Pollock's other plays. Structural repetition and doubling are present not only in terms of plot structure and characters but in the geometry of character constellations, plot (events which echo each other), as well as language use. Finally, what is unspoken or unacknowledged becomes a secret which also haunts in its own way.

Already, in the previous chapter, we have seen Walsh haunted by his past denial of help to Sitting Bull and the Sioux repeated in his denial of help to the Prospector and Joeie years later in the Yukon saloon. Pollock expressly uses double casting in the Yukon characters to emphasize the “ghosts” of the past in the present: the actors who play the Prospector and young Joeie are the same as those who perform the parts of Sitting Bull and his son Crowfoot. In *Doc*, both Katie and Oscar are haunted by the mystery and absence of their mothers and the living (Catherine, Ev) are observed continuously by the dead or absent (Bob, Oscar, Katie) who are on stage at all times. Here, in *Fair Liberty's Call*, Pollock's stage abounds with doubles and ghostly repetition: two mothers, Joan and the Red woman; two sisters or daughters, Emily and Annie; several pairs of brothers or sons, Richard and Edward, Anderson and his unnamed younger brother; as well as the two warring “brothers,” the Loyalists and their “Rebel Brother[s]” (24), the “Sons of Liberty” (60). (Here again we have an example of the kinship idiom in the political domain.) Also, there are the twins Edward and Emily; and Emily herself is redoubled in (or split into) the figure of Eddie. There are even names which echo each other: John Anderson and John Andre, Charlie Meyers and (Bonnie Prince) Charlie (of Daniel's song), and George Roberts and King George III.³⁰ Even the double standard for granting freedom to Rebel-owned slaves and Loyalist-owned slaves (21-22) is mirrored by that for prisoner exchange to colonial-

³⁰ Other critics have also noted the parallel names of the patriarch of the Roberts family, George Roberts, and the paternalistic British monarch against which the Americans rebelled, George III (see for example: Nothof, “Crossing” 92)—not to mention that George was also Pollock's father's name (and Roberts her mother's maiden name), as noted in the previous chapter.

born and English-born Loyalists captured by the Rebels (27).

More importantly, in terms of loss and ghostly hauntings, many of the doubles in this play point towards individuals who are deceased. They recall Cole's observation that another common feature of mourning rituals is "the departure of the dead in one form and the return of the deceased in another form" (19). One obvious example of this is the figure of Eddie, who represents, in a new form (in Eddie's word: "changed" [78]), Edward and Emily, each dead in their own way. Eddie is also the haunting physical manifestation of the family's secrets: Edward's real death (doubly shameful as a suicide and as an act of desertion) and Emily's fake death. Eddie also replicates Edward's final choice regarding life, death, and filial obedience when she offers to present herself to Anderson during the men's debate and tells her father: "I was willin' to die for you then [when she took Edward's place in the Loyalist army]. [. . .] I'm not willin' to live for you now" (73). In fact, Eddie's rhetoric is perfectly antithetical (willin'/not willin', to die/to live, then/now), one of the formal characteristics which exemplify the ambivalence Cole identifies with mourning practices and verbal exchanges (25). Her gender impersonation is ambivalent also in the sense that it makes her and her family vulnerable to discovery and its many community and legal repercussions yet empowers her to speak and act within the male privileged public sphere.

An equally interesting and complex "ghost" in the play is Anderson. The Rebel Anderson is the ghostly double for a variety of individuals. Initially, because Anderson claims to be a member of the Loyalist Rangers, Edward's regiment, Joan confuses him with her younger son (36). However, Anderson quickly becomes associated with Richard in her mind (41). This association will grow stronger when Anderson later reveals himself as the older brother of a young man who was killed in the war, just as Richard was Edward's older brother. Joan and Annie discover another correspondence when they learn that Anderson's given name is "John":

ANNIE: I was just wonderin' . . . What I wanted to ask was . . . What's your given name, Major?

ANDERSON: John, ma'am.

ANNIE: John.

ANDERSON: Major John Anderson.

ANNIE: John Anderson!

[She laughs and claps her hands together in applause. JOAN joins in. The sound of the wind carries a hint of murmuring voices.]

JOAN: [*indicating one thumb, then the other; one finger, then the other*] Major John Anderson, who carried the plans for Benedict Arnold . . .

ANNIE: An exact correspondence in time and space is what, John Anderson?

JOAN: John Andre, who prior to his capture by Rebels, spent the night under my roof in Tarrytown . . .

ANNIE: A notable occurrence of events apparently accidental is what, John Anderson?

JOAN: John Andre travellin' under the name of Anderson . . .

ANNIE: Is coincidental, John Anderson?

JOAN: Anderson John John Anderson Anderson John Andre! John Andre while actin' for Arnold who led my Rebel son Richard . . . Richard into battle . . .

ANNIE: Hush, Mama.

JOAN: Richard. (41-42)

Note how this whole scene of discovery, peppered with repetitions and variations of Anderson's name, doubling and redoubling itself, moves from one name, "John," to another, "Richard," as if Pollock wanted to highlight the importance of the figure as "another son." In fact, "anders" in German means "other": Anders/other-son.³¹ Richard, John Andre, John Anderson—they are all relations, sons of a divided family. The repetition of the name "John Anderson" and "John Andre" also has a playful and mischievous quality, as if it were a children's rhyme. The scene, with the women's laughter and clapping, partakes of the carnival atmosphere discussed earlier.

But this is not all. Anderson, who appears to Daniel in the forest, right after Daniel's discovery of Frank Taylor's murdered corpse, can also be seen as Taylor's ghost. In fact, Daniel tells his companions during their debate about the murder: "You wasn't with me when I seen him [Anderson] under the trees. The hair came up on the back of my neck, was like seein' a ghost" (69). Finally, after Joan's account of Anderson's mysterious and symbolic departure, vanishing, with a string of horses, "on a path of light right into the [rising] sun" (77), Eddie provides one last important interpretation of John Anderson as the ghostly dead:

DANIEL: We're saved, Major, don't you realize that? Jesus, I was gettin' to the point of sayin' ain't none of us worth nothin'—'cept Wullie here who's worth thirty pounds, eh Wullie?

MAJOR: Tell her to put the gun down! We gotta get out and after him

³¹ I wish to thank Prof. Richard Plant for the useful insight of "Anderson" as an "other-son."

[Anderson], guns or no guns!

EDDIE: What for?

MAJOR: To capture the bugger!

ANNIE: What's he done?

MAJOR: Illegal detainment, kidnappin', attempted murder—

[GEORGE *is slowly removing the Rebel's waistcoat. He folds it carefully. He continues to hold it clasped to his chest.*]

EDDIE: Seemed kind of a Tarleton caper for merry-makin' by an unknown soldier to me—eh Daniel? (76)

John Anderson is virtually Everyman (Everyson, Everybrother). To Joan and Annie and, at times, Eddie, he is the ghostly return of Edward, Richard, and John Andre. To Daniel, he is the ghost of Frank Taylor. And finally, Pollock's Eddie suggests he is the "unknown soldier," the name given by nations to the corpse of one unidentified soldier chosen to represent all their war dead.³²

I prefer to see John Anderson as the sum of many things: a spirit, a ghost, a devil, an angel, a man, a grieving brother. He both tests and is tested. Appearing unnoticed from the edge of the stage, "*already there when, or if, we notice [him]*" (34), he represents all the war dead (the Rebels and the Loyalists, sons and brothers, neighbours and fellow citizens—"family"), "already there," haunting and prompting the living to speak their names and tell their stories. He is like one of those folk devils who has no power over the community until he is invited (by Daniel) to enter the community and/or to share a meal with them. In fact, Major Williams, in angry hindsight, tells Daniel, "You brought a viper into the nest, Corporal" (69). He is the mischievous angel who returns to tempt and to test the community once again with denial, forgetfulness, inequity, and violence:

GEORGE: What is it you want?

ANDERSON: Responsibility acknowledged, and twice you refuse.

EDDIE: Even St. Peter got three cracks at denyin'. Ask the question again. (63)

Finally, he is the grieving brother seeking both revenge for and recognition of his loss who is himself tested by Joan and Annie:

³² While the concept of the "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier" originated following the First World War and hence is technically anachronistic for the period of the drama, Pollock is writing for a contemporary audience for whom the term would certainly carry such a symbolic meaning.

ANNIE: Chose to. It's not them choosin', is it? It's you. Will killin' me ease the ache in your heart for your brother? Why not kill us all? Maybe that would wipe away his final terror and pain.

JOAN: You were never at Cherry Valley, were you? What's your name? Real name. Name yourself. Are you Richard or Edward? Are you someone I know? (71)

Annie's challenge to Anderson to chose a peaceful solution and Joan's injunction that he name himself demand that Anderson take responsibility for the present and the future. They also invite him to build with them, together, a new relationship, one which will transform the threatening stranger and avenging ghost to fellow mourner and fictive kin. It is an ethical decision which I will examine further in chapter five of this study.

Secrets

Just as the loss or death of a loved one can haunt the living, so too can secrets. Secrets are also inherently ambivalent and a component of the kinship idiom: they unite and they divide; they strengthen and they make vulnerable. A secret instantly creates divisions and communities: those who know and those who don't. Secrets also function in a reciprocal relationship with families. Membership in a family often obligates one in the common purpose to keep the family's secrets because the family, "an inherent partisan of the good-of-the-many" (Stone 24), demands loyalty from its members. The Roberts family in *Fair Liberty's Call*, which keeps the secrets of Edward's death and Emily's life, exemplifies this behaviour. Conversely, agreeing to keep a secret or even merely being exposed to a one binds individuals into a (metaphoric) family. For example, members of criminal organisations, like the mafia, often speak of themselves in terms of kin. This kinship function of secrets is explicitly highlighted by Pollock in *End Dream*, where Doris tells Janet a private joke, thereby imposing a familial relationship upon her:

DORIS: Willie. It's an odd name, don't you think? For him [Wong Foon Sing]? But I'll tell you something. It's a private joke. His name? A private joke? A very silly private joke and you must promise not to breathe a word of it. Never never never! Not to a living soul. See? You're a member of the family already. Privy to private jokes and sworn to secrecy. Oh yes.
(104)

This scene also illustrates the ambivalent misalignment inherent in secrets: its ability to unite and strengthen individuals and groups, while at the same time making them vulnerable. A secret can be used to bind individuals to a group, even against their intent, as Doris demonstrates.

So strong are secrets' coercive power in culture that often one must guard against knowledge of a secret to preserve one's safety and independence from its communal obligation and its adherents. While the common need to protect a secret may unite and strengthen a group, the collective is also vulnerable to exposure should its secret be revealed by one of its members or discovered by an outsider.

In Pollock's drama such secrets are often themselves associated with loss and death. Again *Fair Liberty's Call* offers ample examples of the secrets which haunt individuals and communities, secrets which prevent healing expressions of grief because such mourning would require the recollection and telling of not only what is lost but of what has been kept hidden and unspoken. I have already discussed the ways in which the secrets of Edward's suicide and Emily's disguise, and the unspoken, unacknowledged, relation of Richard prevent the Roberts family, especially Joan, from mourning the loss of their loved ones. The secret of Edward and Emily not only obstructs mourning but functions as an ever present necessity and threat to the Roberts family since the family's financial survival in the new colony depends on its maintenance. As the Major reminds George: "The greater part of the cash you'll see in a year is Eddie's half-pay captain's pension, and your largest allotment's his acreage for Loyalist Legion service" (31). Of course, the unspoken assumption is that the community will punish, rather than celebrate, Emily for her military service should her masquerade be revealed.

Other secrets also haunt the community. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the men of Tarleton's Legion have kept unspoken their massacre of surrendering Rebel soldiers in the battle at Waxhaws. Ashamed of their conduct, "Tarleton's quarter," they either try to forget the event (like Daniel) or explain it as the brutal necessities of war (like the Major) (39). The entrance of Anderson functions like a haunting requiring the community to acknowledge their actions and to speak their secrets. In the course of their dialogue, Eddie points out that both Loyalists and Rebels have behaved unethically during the war, that just as the Rebels received Tarleton's quarter, so have they given it. Picking up on Daniel's circular image of the boots of a dead man going round and round, a passage which immediately precedes the men's discussion of Waxhaws and Tarleton's quarter, Eddie concludes: "Well, what we sowed at Waxhaws, we reaped at King's Mountain, Daniel, so it ends up fair all around" (39).

Another secret is held by Eddie, at least for part of the drama: she murdered Frank Taylor to protect Wullie's freedom. Ironically, when she reveals her secret to the men, they refuse to

accept it (for reasons upon which I will elaborate in chapter five). In this case, her actions, like her later threat to Major Williams (to “remove” him), also signal a kind of loss: a loss of faith in ethical solutions, in the efficacy of current political and judicial systems, in a former understanding of self (as someone who is idealistically ethical, just). Eddie is an ambivalent figure not only because she is a woman who lives as a man, a daughter who masquerades as a son, a twin who becomes her other, but that, like several of Pollock’s other characters (Lizzie/The Actress in *Blood Relations*, Eme in *Getting It Straight*), she has chosen action, even if it is unethical and violent action, in her pursuit of justice and equality.

One last example of haunting secrets related to the dead centres around Annie. In the latter part of Act II, while the men debate amongst themselves trying to determine who will be sacrificed to Anderson’s demand for a death, Joan and Annie converse with Anderson. The women reveal that not only did Annie allow Loyalist soldiers to have sex with her in return for allowing her to visit her Rebel brother Richard, held captive in a prison ship on the East River (67), but that, equally important in Annie’s own mind, she betrayed the English spy John Andre to the Rebels. Andre, carrying Benedict Arnold’s battle plans, had been sheltering in the Roberts’ home and Annie gave him false directions which led him to his capture and death rather than to safety. In addition, her action was (not unlike Anderson’s) one of personal revenge for a familial loss rather than political patriotism. She tells Anderson: “I was thinkin’ of Arnold, not the Arnold who betrayed the Rebel cause, but the Arnold who betrayed my brother Richard. Can you understand that?” (74). Like the other secrets in the drama, Annie’s secret of John Andre involves past actions, betrayal, and death. And, like the other characters in the drama, Annie is haunted by her secret and its attendant ghost. Pollock explicitly links the many deaths and secrets together, as well as the theme of kinship and of the nation as family, when Annie addresses Anderson at the end of the play:

ANNIE: [. . .] I know it [her betrayal of Andre] changes nothin’ for Richard. Or Edward. Sweet Major Andre. I wonder if he thought of me at the end . . . Sometimes I feel his name fillin’ my head and pressin’ hard on my lips to be spoke . . . There’s nothin’ I can do for him now. There’s nothin’ I can do to put paid to my brothers or you to put paid to yours. We oughta be lookin’ to a better world for our children. That’s the only way to serve our brothers.” (75).

There is another way in which Pollock associates secrets with national identity and collective responsibility. At the start of Act II, Anderson tells the men that if the one responsible

for his brother's death did not step forward or if they did not choose one amongst themselves to step forward, then he would choose for them. He demonstrates by choosing Annie, telling them "[a]n innocent, which is fitting and proper. Historically accurate" (63). With Annie's revelation Pollock makes several points. One, that history is seldom fully accurate. Those who are recorded and remembered as innocent may harbour secrets which belie their innocence. Equally, Pollock shows that the men's easy assumptions of women's innocence and of women's lack of involvement, power, or ability, in affairs of the state, war, or the making of history, are also inaccurate. Finally, like the boots of a dead man going round and round, Pollock reveals to us: no one is innocent – everyone makes choices and everyone is responsible, then and now. Everyone is haunted by ghosts. *Fair Liberty's Call* itself, like many of Pollock's plays, may be seen as a returning ghost story from the collective past and communal family (in this case, Canada's national history), invoked to confront those of us who, in Daniel's words, "don't want to remember [. . .] spend time forgettin'" (62) with neglected facets of our national history and to encourage us to remember more fully. At the same time, historian Ernst Renan suggests that secrets and forgetting can be constructive national forces, however oppressive. He writes:

Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial.

Unity is always effected by means of brutality [. . .].³³ (11)

The long-term effectiveness of forgetting and viability of keeping secrets is open to debate. What is certain, however, is the ambivalent misalignment inherent in secrets and in Pollock's work.

Mourning

Despite attempts at silence and forgetfulness, the secrets and losses of the community in *Fair Liberty's Call* are revealed, remembered, and recognised to varying degrees in the course of the

³³ Renan's comments on brutality and national unity recalls Pollock's early image of the family (or national) jigsaw puzzle where the piece which doesn't fit is pounded in until it does.

drama. Joan tells us of Edward's suicide, Emily's disguise, and Richard's departure. While Daniel insists that he doesn't want to remember Waxhaws and Tarleton's quarter, both are discussed by the men. The unsavoury parts of Frank Taylor's character, his brutality in battle and his greed, deception, and racism in civilian life, are exposed. Anderson reveals his Rebel identity and speaks of his brother's death. Annie recounts her visit with Richard and her betrayal of "Sweet Major Andre." Eddie admits to murdering Frank Taylor and voices her angry loss of faith in the honesty of her leaders. George finally acknowledges his rejection of Richard and coercion of Edward and Emily. Remembrance and expressions of shame, loss, and grief—in other words, mourning—take place in the drama but within specific contexts, in specific ways, to specific interlocutors.

There is a clear distinction in the form and the context in which the Loyalist veterans and the Roberts women mourn their war dead. The veterans perform an elaborate ritual of remembrance. As we have seen, there are necessary "bits and pieces" and "surroundin's" to help them remember the past and even determine their identity:

DANIEL: Gotta fill the place up with things that speak of the past.

MAJOR: Else how's a man to know who he is. (37)

While the memorial objects and "totems," war souvenirs and military dress, flags and songs and ritual remembering help verify and reinforce one's identity as a brave soldier and a loyal citizen, it is the deeds and character of the group, Tarleton's Legion, which dominate over those of the individual. In fact, when recollections of individuals do surface, such as the description of Frank Taylor's duplicity or Charlie Meyers "unheroic" death, they disrupt the ritual and fracture the unity of the group. By contrast, the women, Joan and Annie, remember their war dead without props or ceremony, in relative privacy. Their accounts (of Edward, Richard, John Andre), mainly personal stories confided quietly to John Anderson, focus not on heroism and glory but loss, suffering, guilt, and death. Meanwhile, fittingly as a transitional in-between character, Eddie stays on the periphery of both forms of recollection and mourning. She helps construct the set for the Remembrance Ritual but does not participate in the military story-telling. After Anderson claims to have served with the Loyalist Rangers, she tells him she knew a boy with the Rangers who went home after Cherry Hill and killed himself (41). While the comment is obviously a reference to her brother Edward, she does not name him or their relationship to Anderson, and the comment remains only a partial revelation of personal loss (pointedly unheroic) and a subtle

challenge to Anderson's disguise. In the second half of the drama Eddie is grouped with the men in their deliberations and does not join her mother and sister in their sharing of familial loss with John Anderson.

This contrast between the mourning practices of the veterans and the women can be considered within two separate but related frameworks: gender and socio-political differences in mourning forms. Gail Holst-Warhaft in *Dangerous Voices*, her study of women's lament, argues that men and women mourn differently. She writes that in traditional cultures it is women who composed and performed (sang) laments (1).³⁴ Focussing on Western, particularly Greek, development, Holst-Warhaft argues that the power of women's funeral laments is dangerous to the "more complex social unit of the city or city-state" because it "can be used as a means of inciting an uncontrolled sequence of reciprocal violence (a potential which the state may conceivably co-opt to its own advantage). Secondly, by focussing as it does on mourning and loss rather than praise of the dead, it denies the value of death for the community or state, making it difficult for authorities to recruit an obedient army" (3). Finally, women as child-bearers already have a degree of control over birth; as mourners, they would also gain "the potential authority over the rites of death" (3). She argues that women's lament as a public expression of grief was gradually replaced by men's funeral oration. In the case of the war dead, this meant that a mourning whose tone commonly stresses "personal loss in terms of emotional, economic and social deprivation" was replaced by one which "makes a virtue of death, provided it is death in the service of the state" (5).

Returning to *Fair Liberty's Call*, the different forms of mourning performed by the Loyalist veterans, the men, and by the Roberts women, Joan and Annie, seem to bear out the male and female modes of mourning described by Holst-Warhaft. Certainly, the men's Remembrance Ritual focuses on funeral orations and tales of heroism and fortitude which make death in the service of the Loyalist cause a virtue, while the tone of the women's mourning is indeed a more passionate expression of grief, focussed on loss, pain, and hardship.³⁵ It may be

³⁴ While laments are mainly sung for the dead, Holst-Warhaft notes that they are also composed for other forms of departure and loss such as emigration and marriage (women leaving one family for another) (*Dangerous* 1).

³⁵ This observation about the gender differences in mourning is again exemplified in Pollock's
(continued...)

argued that my reference to Holst-Warhaft is imprecise because, in the strict generic sense, Joan and Annie do not lament (i.e., they do not perform a song or poem of mourning or sorrow). Yet, there are songs in the drama. In fact, there are five songs in *Fair Liberty's Call* and the value of Holst-Warhaft's exploration of women's laments to my study lies as much in her attention to laments, *songs*, as instruments of mourning, as in her argument of gender differences in mourning. I will elaborate and qualify the latter shortly but first, I wish to look more carefully at the songs in *Fair Liberty's Call*.

All the songs in the drama save one ("Revolutionary Tea," which I discussed in the previous chapter) are related to loss or mourning in some way. For example, Daniel's carnivalesque improvised dance and song "to ANNIE, to a stick of wood, [. . .] to his boots" (39) point to loss in two ways. First, Daniel's actions are an attempt to avoid, to drown out, the ensuing discussion of the Legion's massacre of surrendering Rebels at the Battle of Waxhaws, an event through which the Loyalists' military honour and moral authority were irrevocably lost. Second, Daniel's song of love to his boots, both nonsensical and sensible,³⁶ is addressed to objects steeped in the endless repetition of death (and theft). As Daniel explains:

These boots got a history, Major. I took 'em off of a Rebel, but a fella I know says they're English boots these boots, so that Rebel stole 'em off an English corpse---and I stole 'em off of the Rebel's corpse—so what do you say, eh? Round and round, eh, Major? (37)

"World Turned Upside Down" and "Who'll Be King But Charlie" are also associated with loss. The former, as Pollock's stage directions explain, is the song Tarleton's Legion sang defiantly as they surrendered to the Rebel forces (51). It appears four times in the drama: sung by

³⁵ (...continued)

Getting It Straight, where women's mourning, from that of Eme to the mothers of Hiroshima and the women silently holding up photos of their lost beloved, focuses predominantly on the pain, loss, and hardship of war. Even when there are courageous acts, Pollock's characters stress that they are carried out on behalf of the immediate family rather than the nation. Like Annie, who betrayed John Andre for her brother Richard, not the Loyalists, Eme, speaking as a child recalling her family's actions, says: "my mother was brave too for she held the flag / up even though it was forbidden she didn't do it for / the flag she did it for my brother!" (109).

³⁶ The song, ("[. . .] *dah da da da da dah Da da dah Eh Annie boots fine pair of boots look at my boots Da da da da dah I love Annie and I love my boots dah da dah da dah [. . .]*" [39]), with its lack of narrative connections, its profusion of nonsense words, and its assignment of equal statuses to Annie and the boots as objects of affection seems nonsensical, but it is also sensible because adequate footwear is crucial for the survival of a soldier.

the Major and Daniel as they complete setting up the stage at the start of Act I (26); initiated by Daniel, solemnly, “as he would a hymn” (51) at the beginning of the “formal ritual of their Remembrance Ceremony” (50) with the Major and George joining in (Eddie does not participate here and pointedly comments after the men’s refrain: “And not such a bad thing if it were [a world turned upside down]” [51]); and it serves as the background transition music at the close of Act I and start of Act II (58-59). For the men, the song suggests that their military loss to the Rebels and the many other ensuing losses (of family, home, country, occupation, and social status) which followed could only be explained by a world turned upside down. The song’s conditional terms represent their defiance of the state of things. Eddie finds a different meaning in the song, welcoming a world upside down because she realises that her Loyalist community leaders (for example, the Family of the Fifty-Five) are interested only in maintaining their social position, wealth, and political power, and that they have not kept their promises of land and assistance made to the many ordinary citizens who supported the Loyalists.

“Who’ll Be King But Charlie” (54-55) also conjures up memories of lost hope and the dead. Bonnie Prince Charlie, the literal subject of the song, is the romantic figure associated with the last, failed, attempt by the Jacobite house to regain the throne of England in 1745-46. While Charles was, in fact, a pretender to the power of kingship, Daniel’s invocation of the youthful prince is likely linked as much to the popular nostalgic and romantic sentiments of lost hopes and military defeat shared by the Loyalists as to ambivalent notions of monarchical ambition or paternalism. However, the greater significance of the song is created by Pollock’s choice to place it immediately after Daniel’s insistent remembrance of another Charlie, young Charlie Meyers (54). Seen in this context, Daniel’s song functions ironically as a lament for the young man who, sadly, will never grow up to “kiss the girls” and “[like] the brandy” like his royal namesake (55).

Finally, the song most formally a lament is one sung by Joan. When Daniel and Anderson first arrive at the Roberts’ camp, Joan sings two lines of a song to Anderson:

JOAN [*sings to ANDERSON*]: *Hi says the little mournin’ dove.*

ANNIE: Hush, Mama.

[.]

JOAN: [*sings*] *I’ll tell you how to win his love.*

DANIEL: Where was I? (36)

Joan does not continue her song but later, in conversation with Anderson, she returns to it and

Pollock reveals to the audience the song's full significance:

JOAN: Annie would sit in the rocker with both of them, arm round each of 'em,
Edward and Em'ly, and Richard would rock 'em, stand behind them and
push and the rocker would rock and Richard would sing sweet and clear,
clear and sweet

*[sings] Hi says the little leather winged bat
I will tell you the reason that*

[The sound of a child's voice is heard singing faintly, joining JOAN's]

*The reason that I cry in the night
Is because I lost my heart's delight*

[The child's voice continues to sing alone as others speak]

*Hi says the little mourning dove
I'll tell you how to win her love*

ANNIE: It's alright, Mama, hush.

JOAN: *[whispers to ANDERSON]* Do you know that song? (64-65)

Joan's song, a folk ballad, turns out to be both a lullaby and a lament.³⁷ In addition, the ballad has dual performers and references. Sung by Richard to his siblings, it is a lullaby and a romantic ballad of lost love. Sung by Joan to Anderson and Annie, it is a lament which recalls a time of peace and the familial unity and security the Roberts children once possessed before the war. For Joan, it is also a remembrance of her dead sons, especially Richard himself (with whom Joan associates Anderson), whose ghostly voice returns to join hers in song. Joan's description is also an oddly mis-aligned family portrait in which the older siblings, Richard and Annie, take the place of parents who are absent from this scene of domestic harmony. In some sense it recalls Joan's two-fisted image of the family in which the parents are separated from the children. While Joan's song is more restrained and subtle than the dramatic, passionate laments characterised by Holst-Warhaft, it is an example of the feminine expression of grief Holst-Warhaft contrasts with masculine oratory.

However, looking further into Sharon Pollock's use of songs and rhymes, one notes that there are also interesting differences from the gender specific women's laments of which Holst-

³⁷ This traditional English, Scottish, and American folk ballad which has also been sung as a lullaby known as "The Bird Song," "Says the Blackbird to the Crow," and other variants, has its origins from at least the seventeenth century (Nelson-Burns n.p.). There are many verses each with a different bird commenting on the loss of and the search for a female mate. Pollock has chosen to present only those lines which stress loss and mourning (rather than the active search for a mate).

Warhaft wrote. First, unlike the traditional passionate laments in that historical study, Pollock's songs of loss are more subtle, both in emotional tone and meaning (since their references are often oblique). Second, they are not composed nor exclusively sung by women and the speaker, or "voice," in the song or rhyme is not necessarily female. This holds true for other Pollock plays. For example, while Jennie sings "Break the News to Mother" in *Walsh*, it is James Walsh who requests the song and the sentimental lyrics are a dying son's last message to his comrades to "break the news [of his death] to [his] mother."³⁸

While the frame of gender is useful, Pollock's work has always both courted such a gender-specific perspective and resisted any absolute placement within its boundaries. As such, in addition to Holst-Warhaft's "masculine" and "feminine" formulation, I find Kenneth L Doka and Terry L. Martin's observation of "instrumental" and "intuitive" patterns of mourning and John Bodnar's "official" and "vernacular" modes relevant to Pollock's work. I believe Bodnar's ideas form a more productive lens through which to observe Pollock's work so I will discuss Doka and Martin briefly and then focus on Bodnar's theory.

Doka and Martin suggest that there is a "continuum of grieving styles from intuitive to instrumental" (*Grieving* 10). They characterise the intuitive style as one in which mourners "experience and express grief in an affective way" and "will find adaptive strategies that are oriented toward the expression of affect" (4). In contrast, the instrumental style is one in which "grief is experienced physically, such as in a restlessness or cognition" and, in response, "adaptive strategies [. . .] tend to be [. . .] cognitive and active as well" (4). One might recognise the common stereotype of masculine grief as instrumental and feminine grief as intuitive, but Doka and Martin stress that the behaviours are "*influenced* by gender but not *determined* by it" (4, emphasis in the original). Both woman and men can exhibit either pattern and neither is more beneficial than the other, though social biases and expectations exist (5-6). Doka and Martin suggest those who have a greater range of strategies and the ability to function in both modes are

³⁸ "Laments" in other Pollock plays include: "Little one" sung by Sitting Bull and "Glengarry" in *Walsh*; "Some Mother's Son," sung by Mrs. Farley (143,152) and the song sung by Cec and Old Sump about an orphan whose father was a miner and whose mother is dead (186, 225) in *Whiskey Six Cadenza*; the children's rhyme "Upon the carpet you shall kneel" in *Doc* (2); and Eme's song of the "green shutters," about the loss of home, in *Getting It Straight* (101, 109).

likely to respond better to crises (11-12).³⁹

If we apply the instrumental/intuitive perspective to Pollock's *Fair Liberty's Call*, it is possible to characterise Eddie and the Loyalist veterans, with their elaborate physical mourning rituals as operating predominantly in the instrumental style of grieving, while Joan and Annie, with their affective expressions of grief, exhibit the intuitive style. It might be possible to argue that the men's refusal to express grief and other feelings like remorse need not only be a sign of flawed mourning and responsibility denied but also of a different style of mourning. While it is beyond the scope of the present discussion, it would also be interesting to apply Doka and Martin's perspective to other Pollock plays, such as *Doc*. Might Ev's incessant activity be explained, in part, as the instrumental pattern of grieving in response to the loss of his father, his brother George, and the losses of his many patients? Such an interpretation need not invalidate any critical analysis of his neglect of his family. As Doka and Martin point out, the instrumental and intuitive strategies "may be either effective or ineffective, depending upon the particular strategy and circumstances" (9).

Next, John Bodnar offers a socio-political approach to mourning which is different from but complements that of gender. Bodnar identifies an "official" and a "vernacular" mode of mourning in the realm of public memory, modes which represent the conflict between national and personal interests. He characterises official culture as that sanctioned and promoted by "cultural leaders or authorities at all levels of society" interested in "social unity, the continuity of existing institutions, and loyalty to the status quo" (75). Bodnar states that official culture presents "reality in ideal rather than complex or ambiguous terms" and "desires to present the past on an abstract basis of timelessness and sacredness" (75). Thus, official commemorations speak "the ideal language of patriotism rather than [. . .] the real language of grief and sorrow" (75). Alternatively, vernacular culture is associated with groups within a whole and "reality derived from firsthand experience in small-scale communities rather than the 'imagined communities' of a large nation" (75). It tends to express what "social reality feels like rather than what it should be like" (75) and its commemoration tends towards an expression of loss and

³⁹ One can see an interesting resonance between Doka and Martin's instrumental and intuitive mode in mourning style to Carol Gilligan's identification of a justice and care orientation in ethical decision making.

suffering. Bodnar also notes that individuals can participate in both official and vernacular cultures.

While I do not wish to lose completely the specifics of gender in Pollock's plays and while Bodnar may be presenting his terms in stark extremes (patriotism may be as real and complex as grief and sorrow to the participants and survivors of war), his formulation of official and vernacular modes of commemoration is useful in exploring a set of social dynamics related to but different from gender. Clearly, the men's Remembrance Ritual in *Fair Liberty's Call*, with its focus on and support of nationalist group identity (Tarleton's Loyalist Legion), military valour, and glorious sacrifice, is a prime example of official culture. Likewise, the women's family stories, with their focus on individual deaths and personal suffering (Edward's suicide, Richard's imprisonment and death, and Joan and Annie's grief for their lost home, sons, and brothers), express vernacular culture.⁴⁰ Thus, within Bodnar's framework, Joan and Annie's mode of mourning is marginalised not only because it is feminine but also because it is vernacular. (Here, we can see a parallel and complementary mapping of masculine/feminine and official/vernacular modes of mourning.) Bodnar's formulation also allows us to see links between actions which a strictly gendered typography might overlook, actions by Daniel, Anderson, and the women.

In particular, the "official"/"vernacular" frame helps us better understand another scene of mourning in *Fair Liberty's Call*. In the midst of the men's Remembrance Ritual, there is a moment in which differences within official culture become visible:

MAJOR: Marchin' out, layin' down our arms, men weepin'---

DANIEL: And little Charlie Meyers who busted his drum rather than give it over to Rebels--no Rebel drummer boy'd beat on his drum--this here's the drum Charlie was give in New York, the only belongin' the boy had to transport when we sailed to this place--

MAJOR: The beat of the drum, the scream of the fifes, and the--

DANIEL: I want to remember Charlie Meyers.

MAJOR: Charlie died after the war.

⁴⁰ Recall also how Annie stresses to Anderson that she gave the British spy John Andre directions which led to his capture and execution by the Rebels because of personal ("vernacular"), not nationalistic ("official"), reasons. She "was thinkin' of [Matthew] Arnold, not the Arnold who betrayed the Rebel cause, but the Arnold who betrayed my brother Richard" (74).

DANIEL: I don't give a damn! This is his drum and I want to remember him, eh Eddie?

MAJOR: Later, Corporal.

DANIEL: Now, Major! I'm going to remember little Charlie Meyers who died in my arms of—What did he die of, Eddie?

ANNIE: The cold and the crowdin' and the stinkin' smells of the exodus ship.

DANIEL: . . . who died . . . in my arms. He was a good boy and would have been . . . an asset! to this god forsaken place . . . had he got here! (53-54)

Here, with Daniel's insistence on mourning the death of Charlie Meyers, we have an example, as Bodnar states, of an individual participating in both official and vernacular culture or a contest between the official and the vernacular *within the official*, another instance of a misalignment between an individual and his or her own community or family in Pollock's work. Both official and vernacular communities make moral and political judgements about who is worthy of being remembered and mourned. Major Williams, the chief representative of official culture (and the agent of the elite Family of Fifty-Five), attempts to exclude Charlie Meyers from remembrance because, while the young man participated in the war as the legion's drummer boy, he did not die heroically in battle but of illness and starvation following the Loyalist defeat. For Daniel, Charlie has a personal, emotional significance; the boy's integrity and bravery touched him. Charlie was "a good boy," he embodied a promise of the future, and he died in Daniel's arms. In effect, Daniel's grief is disenfranchised by the Major and the official culture the Major represents because the lost object, Charlie Meyers, is deemed insignificant. Pollock shows Daniel struggling to find a testimony which would give Charlie Meyers meaning in the language of official culture and stumbling on the awkward, objectifying, legal, and financial term "asset."⁴¹

Interestingly, while Daniel seeks the participation and support of Eddie to validate his remembrance of Charlie Meyers, she remains silent, weary of participation in both the official culture of the colonial elite and the vernacular culture of Daniel and her mother and sister. It is Annie who answers him in a shared act of narration and testimony, a means of community building and validation of grief. In fact, the call and response, question and answer structure of

⁴¹ Note how the question of who is "worthy" of being mourned is also present in other plays like *One Tiger to a Hill*, *Walsh*, *Moving Pictures* (does Nell mourn her father, what are the appropriate ways of mourning?), and *Angel's Trumpet* (where Zelda's insistence that her life matters also implies that it is worthy of mourning, of remembrance).

Daniel and Annie's exchange may be seen as an example of the antiphony which Cole identifies as a feature of tragic drama dating back to ancient Greek lament and classical tragedy. Margaret Alexiou writes that: "Antiphony, dialogue and refrain, among the oldest structural features of the Greek lament, are still vital and dynamic elements of the modern *moirólógia*.⁴² They have survived [. . .] because antiphony is still imbedded in the ritual performance, with more than one group of mourners, sometimes representing the living and the dead and singing in response to each other" (150). While Pollock's drama seems removed from Greek ritual or tragedy, I believe a case can be made for antiphony, an antiphonal exchange associated with or regarding the dead, as one of her characteristic linguistic structures. A clear use of this vocal technique occurs at the start of the drama in a scene where Joan, with Annie's assistance, publicly establishes and validates her losses and her reality in an act of ritualistic communal story-telling:

ANNIE: Let her go. Get it over with.

JOAN: Tarrytown! Livin' at the farm in Tarrytown! And Edward came home from—from where did he come from?

ANNIE: Cherry Valley.

JOAN: And the Loyalist Rangers and he lay on the bed and his eyes, what were his eyes?

ANNIE: They were open.

JOAN: And the pistol was where?

ANNIE: On the table beside the bed.

JOAN: And he wasn't the same. Sixteen he was—and—"He can't go back," I said to his father.

GEORGE: Edward would do what was right.

[.]

JOAN: [. . .] First the noise, and after the noise, the sound of the gun as it fell to the floor. A small kind of noise, not like the other, and then . . . no noise at all. I stood there . . . holdin' my breath, not breathin' . . . and knowin' . . . we . . .

ANNIE: Buried him.

JOAN: We buried Edward and we said—

ANNIE: It was Em'ly. We said it was my sister Em'ly. (23-24)

Finally, while I have explored Pollock's representation of gendered differences in

⁴² *Moirólógia* are Greek funeral laments, many of which are composed and sung by women.

mourning practises, I wish to return briefly to the relationship between the “mourner-inheritor” and the “beloved deceased,” from the perspective of women in Pollock’s plays. As noted earlier, Cole’s notion of “the mourner-inheritor” and “the beloved deceased” are predominantly masculine (son and father figures), deriving from her analysis of classical and modern tragedy. While she argues that both female and male mourners experience ambivalence, a core response to loss, she acknowledges that, due to gender differences in familial, social, and political power and authority, the role of mourner as inheritor is different for women. Cole writes that this is outside the scope of her study, but I would like to comment briefly the figure of the female mourner-inheritor and her relation to the beloved deceased, male and female, in Pollock’s work.

In chapter two, I explored inheritance in terms of children’s anxieties of biological inheritance from their parents, for example: Miss Lizzie’s fear of inheriting some fundamental flaw from her mother, Katie’s fear of inheriting her grandmother’s and her mother’s suicidal behaviour; Oscar’s fear of his father’s claim that his lack of initiative and his aversion to a career in medicine came from his mother, Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald accusing each other of exhibiting the negative traits of their parents (Scott, his father’s drinking and physical violence; Zelda, her mother’s vanity). In an earlier essay, I examined not genetic and biological but more material, social, and cultural forms of inheritance such as property, social status, political responsibilities, and cultural discourses in *Fair Liberty’s Call*.⁴³ I noted that women are usually not perceived as legitimate or capable heirs to their fathers, in the private or public sphere. Pollock demonstrates this in many of her plays. Not only do women have little access to masculine power and authority in terms of land, money, social connections and roles, often they reject the father’s heritage or view it with ambivalence because it was a source of oppression, injustice, and pain. This is the case for Lizzie Borden, who rejects patriarchal authority and expectations and yet desires her father’s wealth and social status, an inheritance denied to her, enough to kill for it. Similarly, others like Bob and Katie, Magaret and Bonnie, Leah, Eme, Sarah Grimké, Helen-Nell-Shipman, and Zelda Fitzgerald are excluded as inheritors of masculine power. The only real exceptions are Emily/Eddie and Catherine. Eddie, by virtue of assuming her twin brother’s identity and fighting as a Loyalist soldier, possesses the rights and privileges of the masculine

⁴³ See Chung, “‘Lookin’ to a Better World for Our Children’.”

social order, in public if not at home. In fact, in a reversal of traditional orders of inheritance, what property and wealth the Roberts family possesses in the new colony of New Brunswick comes from Eddie (because of her military service) and not George Roberts.⁴⁴ Catherine offers a different example. She adopts her father's "heritage" of a devotion to work and an ambition for success, his brisk manner, his coarse language, but she refuses to repeat his neglect of his family by avoiding a family of her own.

At the same time, the women in Pollock's plays are also ambivalent about their role as mourner-inheritors of their mothers. In most cases, while these daughters yearn for maternal care and attachment, they are also angry at their mothers for being physically and/or emotionally absent. As such, these daughters both mourn and refuse to mourn the loss of their mothers.⁴⁵ In addition, their mothers are presented as having little desirable to give to their daughters and few of the women mourners wish to be their mothers' inheritors. Pollock's mothers are excluded from familial, social, and political power and authority and have none to bequeath to their children. But power and authority are not the only things one can inherit, nor are they necessarily the most important. Adrienne Rich suggests: "As daughters we need mothers who want their own freedom and ours. We need not to be the vessels of another woman's self-denial and frustration. The quality of the mother's life—however embattled and unprotected—is her primary bequest to her daughter, because a woman who can believe in herself, who is a fighter, and who continues to struggle to create livable space around her, is demonstrating to her daughter that these possibilities exist" (*Of Women Born* 247). In many of Pollock's plays, not only have the mothers' lives been ones of limitations, oppression, bitterness, selfless domesticity, or service to the patriarchal order, but more importantly, the mothers have either given up their struggle for their own "livable space" or abandoned their children in the course of fulfilling their own needs.⁴⁶ There are exceptions (such as Bob's mother and Bob herself, Joan, Eme, Zelda's

⁴⁴ See my discussion of this lineal reversal in Chung, "'Lookin''" 154-55.

⁴⁵ Prime examples of this are Katie, who both wishes to know and to be cared for by her mother and seeks to escape from Bob's own pain and loss, ultimately refusing to cry at her death, and Lizzie Borden, who masks her pain and loss by re-visioning her abandonment by her mother as love and her mother's death as a positive liberation.

⁴⁶ Examples of this include: Lizzie Borden's mother and Abigail Borden, Mrs. Farley, Mama
(continued...)

mother, and even Clarence's mother) but it will take time and greater understanding for the daughters (and sons) to recognise and appreciate their mothers' struggles, overshadowed by their apparent defeat.

What this means is that many of Pollock's female mourner-inheritors are, in a sense, disinherited. They mourn without the promise of any beneficial empowering inheritance. This can be a liberating, as well as a vulnerable, condition. While inheritances may offer security and advantage, they can be conservative, welcoming one into an existing role in an existing order, bestowing one with the obligations and demands, as well as the benefits, of one's ancestors. A lack of inheritance may mean familial, social, and political disadvantages, but one may be more free to make different choices and to act differently, without the binding influences of the past. Earlier, I had considered the choices and values of Margaret Nurlin and Bonnie in *Generations* from the perspective of dependance and connection. Another way of looking at their two positions is via loss and inheritance. Both women mourn the loss of their family farms. Even if they might wish to carry on the farm and try to revive it (as the Nurlin sons are expected to do), neither of them were seen as inheritors of the land. Margaret's choice was to join another family and assume part of another, similar, inheritance. In exchange for security and a sense of belonging, Margaret gives up her freedom and her own, possibly different, aspirations (though, as Pollock says in her interview, Margaret might not see her lack of freedom as a sacrifice or loss). Bonnie refuses her farming heritage and risks a lack of connection to seek something different. Eme, in *Getting It Straight* (and others like Sarah Grimké and the Woman in *The Making of Warriors*), also rejects her familial, social, and political inheritance—a blinkered North American middle-class (upper class for Grimké) existence—for a life devoted to critique, protest, and change. While no one is completely free from the influences of the dead and the past, a reduced or lack of inheritance might better allow one to imagine and create different futures. As Pollock suggests, situated in a different position and having a different angle of observation allows one to see and to tell different stories.

⁴⁶ (...continued)

George, Margaret, Bonnie, Bob, Ev's mother Kate, Eme's mother, Helen-Nell-Shipman's mother, Nell herself, and Doris Clarke-Evans (Robert's wife in *End Dream*).

Chapter Four

The Crystal and the Beams of Light

In the previous chapter, I argued that Pollock's dramas explore mourning as a necessary response to familial loss and that one of the primary means by which her characters express a mourner's grief is to speak the names of the dead and tell stories of the past and of loss. The present chapter considers in broader terms the nature of stories and story-telling in her work and, as I shall show, the presence and effects of ambivalence and misalignment therein. I begin with an image from Pollock, who stated, in the 1991 *CTR* interview with Cynthia Zimmerman cited earlier:

[. . .] I think it so important that many stories are told. My stories reveal my perspective, my truth. [. . .] I think of truth as a huge multi-faceted crystal which hangs in the dark. I shine my flashlight on it but I can't illuminate the entire crystal. No matter how I try I can't be completely free from the blind spots of my racist, classist, sexist world. I need the person beside me to be illuminating their part of the crystal. Then I don't have to try to light the whole bloody thing. Which would be impossible. Anyway, that's sort of how I think about it. (*Pollock laughs.*) ("Towards a Better" 35-36)

While it would be unwise to push a metaphor too far, I cite this crystal one here because it both resonates with and further inspires elements of this chapter on story-telling, especially what I will call relational story-telling, its contexts and challenges, its forms, and its effects. Various relations between stories and between people engaged in story-telling will be examined in this chapter; these include inter-textual relationships, *inter*-relationships, and *intra*-relationships.

Pollock's crystal metaphor suggests that different tellers and different stories are imperative to illuminating any truth because "the whole bloody thing" is larger than any one story and its teller. This means the possibility of "mis-aligned" or conflicting narratives is ever-present in the revelation of truth. In fact, misalignment is not only possible but necessary and positive; otherwise, you'd be lighting the same limited facet of the crystal from the same perspective. As Pollock's writing progresses, the number of different story-tellers and the number of different stories about an event or issue increases and the authority of any one story decreases – at least, the ability of any one story to comprehensively describe, explain, or evaluate any event decreases. This is not to say that all stories are of equal validity or ethical authority or that there

is no hierarchy of stories. How the misalignments and differences are interpreted and accommodated (or not) depends as much on the community of narrators and listeners involved, their power relationships, expectations, needs, and desires as it does on truth and authority.

In addition, Pollock's image highlights the nature of the stories, those different beams of light, and their forms. The metaphor is actually a more simplified version of the one which is presented in many of her plays or, for that matter, by physics. Pursuing the scientific metaphor, we know beams of light actually influence each other; they can amplify each other or they can interfere with each other and even cancel each other out. Likewise, one story often influences the meaning and effect of another. Often Pollock structures her plays so that one story alters another. This is achieved not only through the content of the stories but through the structure of the telling itself: for example, the rhythm and sequence of dialogue, co-narration, the use of repetition and interruptions, the placement of intertexts. This structural practice is prominent in a variety of ways in her later plays such as *Getting It Straight*, *Moving Pictures*, *End Dream*, and *Angel's Trumpet*, as well as in earlier ones like *Blood Relations* and *Doc*. I propose that, just as developments in relational psychology suggest that individuals exist in-relation, that individual identity is always an identity in-relation, and that the smallest unit of observation is at least two people, so too with stories. Rather than simply familial stories or stories *of* relations, in this chapter I will consider *relational* stories.

Returning to Pollock's fruitful metaphor, physics also tells us that light beams are not even always straight, but can bend around corners or be diverted by objects of sufficient mass. Similarly, stories are seldom as "straight," continuous, and apparently effortless as the initial metaphor suggests. In fact, they are often tortured, discontinuous, and circuitous, due to a variety of interrelated reasons: the narrator may lack pieces of the story or the skill to tell it; the content of the story itself may be difficult or painful to express; the narrator may be interrupted or prevented from telling her story, or the audience may refuse to listen. The concentration of these factors is especially evident in Pollock's drama where the story is about threats to and the destruction of the family by its own members. Here, Bennett Simon's observation that the propagation of stories is linked to the propagation of generations will be a useful concept to keep in mind, especially in plays such as *Doc*, *Getting It Straight*, *Moving Pictures*, and *Angel's Trumpet*, where difficulties in telling stories about a family arise partly due to the fact that it is a difficult family or that there are family difficulties which are hard to express. (I would add that

the availability of family stories is vital to the continuation of the family.) Again, the content (difficult subjects) and form (how stories are told/propagated) are intimately related.

Finally, Pollock's metaphor leads me to explore the nature of "truth" as it functions in her work and, by extension, the purpose and effect of story-telling and the stories themselves in her drama (beyond that of mourning discussed in the previous chapter). For example, crystals are solid and, beneath their surface, they have an orderly structure. Pollock's image suggests that, for one thing, truth is not completely relative or fluid. In addition, her crystalline truth may be multi-faceted, but it is singular and whole. If it seems incomplete, it is because each light beam illuminates a part and not the whole; we see the individual components and not (yet) the complex relationships joining them. In fact, it may be that what each teller thought was the main story will prove to be otherwise. As Zelda Fitzgerald observes in *Angel's Trumpet*: "Each of us thought we were the major character in our own sensational tale but, we never read through to the end" (194).

Zelda's comment is revealing and paradoxical. In addition to highlighting how an individual tends to see events from her own (limited) subjective position, it exemplifies Zelda as another of Pollock's many characters who consciously speak of themselves as characters in a story, characters for whom the roles of storyteller and character are blurred. Second, there is the paradox: How can one be a character in a tale and also "read [the tale] through to the end"? At one level, again, we have a series of misalignments: misalignments between tale and teller, between the teller and the audience/reader, between different positions within and without the frame, between then and now. We also have the ambivalent desire to encompass and inhabit both opposing poles. The statement also clearly touches upon the notion of self-awareness and self-reflexivity (or lack thereof), which is another of Pollock's important themes. Finally, I think it also says something about the need to enlarge one's imagination (the capacity to imagine how this story will – or may – end and how it will influence its teller and listeners), a point with ethical ramifications which I will explore further in the next chapter.

Pollock's crystal and light beam metaphor also suggests that "truth" is revealed (illuminated), not created. It, or some form of it, exists prior to its exposition, independent of the story-teller, historian, artist. Yet, as Pollock's drama demonstrates over and over again, there is an ambivalence between the subjective facet ("my stories, [. . .] my perspective, my truth") and the obscure (perhaps ideal) objective whole ("a huge multi-faceted crystal which hangs in the

dark”). In fact, which is subjective and which is objective is a persistent question and object of power struggles in the plays. However, the revelation of the truth, difficult as it is, is simply one important step. There still remains a contest about the *meaning* of that truth. For example, in *Doc*, it is true that Ev’s mother died, struck by a train while she was walking across a railway bridge. That is what happened. However, as important as whether it was an act of suicide or not is the meaning of this event, which continues to be contested by the characters in the play, with significant implications for each of them. As Kristin M. Langellier points out: “The existential significance of a personal narrative is not resolved by decisions about whether an incident is true or whether it involves real people but by how it produces meanings which count as real or true” and that “[t]he question of the existential import of a personal narrative – what it means and whose interest it serves – cannot be answered outside its performance, where text and context, story and discourse, are given together in their concrete embodiment” (“Personal Narratives” 270). If one approaches Pollock’s plays such as *Doc*, *Getting It Straight*, *Moving Pictures*, or *Angel’s Trumpet* with Langellier’s observation in mind, then one of the sources of conflict and ambivalence in Pollock’s work becomes more apparent: there seems to be a misalignment regarding which is the important issue of the conflict or struggle and whether the question is really one of competing “truths” or of competing meanings.

It is clear that, in life and in drama, stories are rarely told simply to illuminate facets of the familial truth or of what happened; and rarely do they serve only one purpose. As many of Pollock’s demonstrate, some stories are told to obscure, deflect, or mislead, in other words, prevent understanding (*Getting It Straight* and *Whiskey Six Cadenza*); some stories are spoken to convince and to control (*Angel’s Trumpet*, *End Dream*); others are meant to hurt or to express moral judgment (*Moving Pictures*, *Angel’s Trumpet*); still others are meant to interpret or to inspire (*The Making of Warriors*). And, of course, one can never be sure that one’s story achieves its intended effect. The misalignment between a story-teller’s intention and the story’s resultant meaning or effect on the receiver, and even the teller, is another common source of ambivalence in Pollock’s plays. George Robert’s story of the “trophy” he took from a dead young Rebel soldier is a good example of this misalignment between the story-teller’s intentions and the effects of the story.

Finally, I would argue that, one important and under-examined purpose of story-telling in Pollock’s drama is to question or to establish worth—the worth of persons (including whether

they are worthy of trust), the worth of choices, the worth of actions—a moral and ethical enterprise often expressed in relation to the creative and destructive powers of story-telling (or art and work) and to the issue of competing priorities within the context of familial relations. This question of worth is increasingly noted in critical analyses of her work, including those by Pollock herself (“Playwright” 300) and Zimmerman (“Sharon Pollock: Anatomising” 6). I will consider Pollock’s exploration of the ethical questions of responsibility and worth further in the next chapter.

Other researchers have approached what I call “story-telling” in Pollock’s drama through different terms and from different perspectives. For example, critics such as Ric Knowles and Heider Holder, responding to Pollock’s earlier plays and their challenging of received political and social history, were interested in “history,” “meta-history,” and meta-narratives. Later scholars, influenced by her plays of the 1980s and 1990s, were interested in the more personal past which is still linked to the social. Craig Walker has explored Pollock’s work in terms of “memory” and the establishment of personal identity, sanity, and truth/reality in his chapter on Pollock in *The Buried Astrolabe*. George Belliveau also explored Pollock’s dramas in terms of memory and “memory trials” and their function as instruments for “moral investigations” (“Daddy” 162). Sherrill Grace’s later works have examined Pollock’s plays in terms of “autobiography” and the creation of the self, especially the self as a woman artist.¹

There are significant overlaps in all these terms and approaches, my own included. By choosing “story-telling,” I am highlighting the constructed nature of the communication, its relation to an established genre or genres (fiction, myth, fairy-tale), and its performative, artistic, nature (the *telling* of the story, its context, and its reception). While I see that the past and memory, one of the means through which the past is experienced, continue to be significant and powerful influential forces in Pollock’s drama, and despite Pollock’s metaphor of the crystal hanging in the dark, I am here less interested in the authenticity or veracity of history or memory as achievable goals, whether in the service of truth, sanity, or morality. I am not saying that truth, sanity, and morality are not at issue in Pollock’s work or in my study, but that her drama

¹ See Knowles, “Re-playing History”; Holder, “Broken Toys”; Walker, *The Buried Astrolabe*, chapter three; Grace, “Sharon Pollock’s Portraits of the Artist,” “Creating the Girl from God’s Country,” and *Making Theatre*.

often illustrates that these terms depend as much on performance, believability, and relationships between people and between stories—in other words, context—as on memory, authenticity, and fact. Lastly, “story” or “stories” is the term Pollock² and her characters themselves³ use to name what they are creating or articulating, and what they have lived. “Story” is the colloquial, the immediate and intimate language of the everyday, between family and friends. It is democratic in the sense that while artists (like Scott Fitzgerald) write “literature” and scholars speak of “narratives” and “auto/biography,” everyone tells “stories.”

This chapter focuses on two facets of relational story-telling, two ways in which stories and story-telling are relational. The first is the multiplicity of stories about one subject (the many light beams) and how they relate to each other. The second is story-telling as a way of “doing” relationships, an issue of purpose and effect. The presence of many stories creates the possibility of both productive and destructive misalignments in Pollock’s work and involves questions of authority and entitlement in story-telling, of reception, but also of structural context. In earlier chapters, I explored stories *of* relations, stories about kin and fictive kin. Here I explore *relational* stories, especially in terms of both the relation of one story with other stories *within* a play and the relation of one story to other stories *outside* the play (what literary scholars might call “intertexts”). In both cases, I am interested in the effects and meaning produced by the presence and interaction of multiple stories and story-tellers. This will involve an examination not only of content but of the form of the individual stories themselves and of the play as a whole. There are many fascinating structural characteristics in Pollock’s work, ways in which stories relate to each other within the drama. In this chapter, I limit my discussion to those which relate to my focus on the kinship idiom and ambivalent misalignment. These are forms which are not “straight”: repetition, reflexivity, competing voices and stories, interruptions, silences. Pollock’s drama highlights the difficulties in and obstacles (internal and external, personal and communal) to speaking, naming, and telling stories.

² In fact, in hindsight, I realise that the quotations I chose to preface each chapter of this study so far all include Pollock’s use of the term “story”: “I have to tell a story here”, “My past in New Brunswick is a ghost story”, “My stories reveal my perspective, my truth.”

³ This is especially so for characters such as Mr. Big, Mama George, Leah, and Johnny in *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, Helen-Nell-Shipman in *Moving Pictures*, and Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald in *Angel’s Trumpet*.

One of the ways of telling a story which is of special interest to me is Pollock's use of repetition, a form which has already woven itself into the fabric of this study of her work. Earlier, in chapter two, I discussed familial repetition in terms of character names, double casting, the anxieties of biological and psychological inheritance, and a grammatical, syntactical multiplicity of terms. In chapter three, repetition appears as a condition of mourning, in the form of remembrance and ghosts, doubles, and ghostly doubles. In this chapter, I wish to explore repetition in terms of cyclical and spiral narrative structures, as well as repeated dialogues and scenes. Another formal element of interest is the condition of reflexivity and self-consciousness in Pollock's drama. This occurs as both an internal, individual experience and an external, socially imposed or affected condition of a self-in-relation. Also of interest are misalignments in the form of intrusions and disruptions, not only in the flow of the stream of consciousness and in conflict narratives, but in formal choices like the use of co-narration, mis-matched dialogues, multiple addressees, and parallel stories which do not seem to focus on the same issue at all. Finally, there is Pollock's use of silences, the ambivalent counterpart to speech. Not telling stories at all and not listening to them are also modes of relational story-telling. And, within a story, within a relationship, what is not said (or cannot be said) can be as influential as what is said.

The second focus of this chapter is the purpose and effect of story-telling (that is, strategic story-telling), specifically story-telling as a way of "doing" relationships. I observed that Pollock's crystal and light beam metaphor suggests that the role of the story-teller is to reveal, not create, truth. This vision of the revelatory story-teller/artist and the nature of her work exist in tension with at least one other earlier, alternative vision of the artist/story-teller as both a destroyer and a creator of reality (or "truth"):

We think of art as creation, but it's also destruction. It's destroying what you see around you and then creating your own version of it. The act of destruction is an essential part of art because of its energy and the ego or gall that says, "This isn't good enough, I don't accept this." [. . .]. I think all artists are criminals. They should be engaged in the art of tearing down and reconstructing.

(Pollock, "Sharon Pollock Interview" 211)

The boundaries between these two accounts of the story-teller, artist, playwright—one who destroys and creates (the artist as criminal) and one who illuminates and reveals (the artist as

archeologist)—are fluid. The roles are not necessarily oppositional. For example, the revelation of previously unknown information, hidden facets of the larger story, may change or destroy existing received narratives, prompting one to revise and create a new version of the story. I would add that, as we shall see later, both the destruction and re-creation of art or story-telling can be both positive and negative.

This dual function of Pollock's work (crime and archeology) has received significant attention in Pollock scholarship to date in terms of her work as social criticism and political drama: the challenge to and destruction of received history and the revelation (mixed with a bit of creation) of lesser known facets of history in plays such as *The Komagata Maru Incident*, *Walsh*, and *One Tiger to a Hill*. In this chapter, I explore story-telling from the perspective of the kinship idiom, one which begins on the scale of the familial and the personal, and I consider two alternative ways of looking at relational story-telling and relational stories as a way of "doing" relationships. First is the use of story-telling by individuals as a means to create a relationship between speaker and listener, self and other, where there was none before, or to maintain an existing one. These *inter*-relationships range from the caring and constructive to the hurtful and destructive. Second is the use of story-telling as a means for one to relate to oneself. However, my interest here is not so much in what Grace, building upon Paul John Eakin's notion of relational selves and "intrasubjective dialogue" (*How Our Lives* 93), describes as "intrarelatational" ("Creating" 93), where an individual literally addresses herself as an other, but rather the self-reflexivity and self-consciousness which occur when the story-teller, during the telling, becomes both speaker and listener at the same time. In Grace's case, the "I" addresses herself in the second or third person, as "you" or "she" or by her proper names—for example, in *Moving Pictures*. The case which interests me is when the individual recognises the storied self as "I" (not "you" or "she"), but from a new, different, perspective.

Pollock's work, her story-telling and her characters' story-telling, attempts to illuminate a more accurate and comprehensive version of reality (that crystal of truth hanging in the dark) and to create a context which permits more speakers to tell their stories (present their angle of observation). However, her work also reveals the ambivalent dangers and limits of story-telling; the powerlessness, as well as the desire for voice and agency, of those who attempt to speak; and the persistence of both positive and negative misalignments in our search for effective communication and community. In addition, where Bennett Simon saw the form of a narrative

as a reflection of the state, or the health, of a family and its progeny, in some of Pollock's drama, the stories take precedence over the family, and the generation of stories threatens or replaces the generation of progeny (i.e., the future of the family or community). Finally, on a more existential level, as demonstrated most forcefully in plays such as *Moving Pictures* and *Angel's Trumpet*, story-telling functions as an existential act of self-expression, self-creation, endurance, and survival: it is a metaphor for living life itself. This too can have positive and negative ramifications, as we shall see.

Relational Stories

No story is ever told just once. Whether a memory or funny hideous scandal, we will return to it an hour later and retell the story with additions and this time a few judgements thrown in. In this way history is organized.

(Ondaatje 19)

* * * * *

[. . .] any one family story derives its meaning not only from daily family life but from the family's entire jigsaw puzzle of stories. The meaning of any single family story will therefore appear as inevitable, from narrative context alone, to the family members who know the story and tell it.

(Stone 106)

* * * * *

I would like to begin my exploration of relational story-telling in terms of the interaction of light beams shining on an event with a consideration of *Moving Pictures*, a play focussing on the life of early twentieth-century film maker Nell Shipman. The central character is represented by the self in three ages, described by Pollock as: "HELEN, the young vaudeville and stock actress; NELL, the successful film star, director, screenwriter and producer; and SHIPMAN, the elderly

has-been” (16).⁴ *Moving Pictures* is also a play very self-consciously about story-telling: its conventions, its uses, and its reception. In the drama, story-tellers do not have full control of their stories and the roles of teller and listener change and exchange in a contest of power and interests. The authority of the teller is continually challenged and the story, *as story*, is critiqued. In fact, the very word “story” is used as a weapon of moral evaluation and critical attack. The drama shows us story-telling, autobiography, biography, and memory, as establishing *active* relationships between facets of the self and between the self and others. It is ambivalent, refusing ultimate moral or ethical judgement, while insisting on an ethical consciousness. It maintains the intriguing tension between a persistence of artistic vision that is illusory and one that is real.

Right from the start, Pollock brings up the issue of story-telling and structure and alerts the audience to the self-reflexive element of the drama. She also highlights one of the play’s (and Pollock’s) central and emotional themes: family relations, especially that between parent and child.⁵

SHIPMAN: So what are you doing now – considering sub-text?

NELL: I’m making something up.

SHIPMAN: You’re a lousy mother, make something of that.

NELL: I could. (19)

Nell, the younger, more confident and vibrant self, is certain of her creative ability. Shipman, the self in old age, facing news of ill health and questioning the choices she has made, the actions she has taken, and the value of her work, is discouraged.

NELL: What can you make of it [news of her ill health]?

SHIPMAN: Nothing.

NELL: Make something.

[.....]

⁴ Pollock gives us three actors on stage, representing three ages of one woman: Helen, Nell, and Shipman. Throughout my analysis, I will refer to the singular person, the unity of the three facets, as “Helen-Nell-Shipman,” to differentiate Pollock’s fictional character from references to Nell Shipman, the historic woman.

⁵ Zimmerman, in “Transforming the Maternal,” states that plays following *Fair Liberty’s Call* contained no figure whose “role as mother is important to the plot” (159), though she notes that Doris in *End Dream* resembles Bob in *Doc*. I believe for characters like Helen-Nell-Shipman, Shipman’s mother, and Zelda Fitzgerald, their role as mother (in the case of Shipman and Fitzgerald, as *non-maternal* mothers) is central to their identity, if not their respective plots.

NELL: You always could.
 SHIPMAN: Nothing to say.
 HELEN: So play.
 SHIPMAN: “The End.” How’s that?
 NELL: Noo. The beginning, the middle, the bits in between, then the end, make something of it. Go on!
 HELEN: Do it! (*She offers her script to SHIPMAN who refuses to take it.*)
 NELL: Oh for God’s sake! Play!

NELL grabs a pair of glasses from the desk and shoves them on her face; snatches the script and resumé from HELEN’s hand, and plays, has fun with, sending up Mr. Glimore, a Chicago producer of a third rate national stock touring company. He sounds like a Mafia wiseguy or Brando’s Godfather. (22-23)

Nell’s comment about narrative structure, repeating the well-known Western tripartite notion of what constitutes a proper and satisfying story (a beginning, middle, and end—so self-consciously reflected in the tripartite self of Helen-Nell-Shipman on stage) alerts us to our standards and expectations.⁶ An abrupt “the End” just won’t do. The language choice in this scene and throughout the play also highlights another important theme of the drama: “Make something,” “Play!” Pollock’s stage directions add that Nell “*plays, has fun with, sending up Mr. Gilmore,*” making him sound “*like a Mafia wiseguy or Brando’s Godfather.*” Right from the start, then, we are also reminded that story-telling is not only about the revelation of truth, it is also about creative fun, playing with and within a generic structure, fulfilling audience expectations (or not), as well as the very serious need to create meanings: to “make something of it.” And for Helen-Nell-Shipman, when there is “nothing to say,” no words, then one must act, do, create, “play.” Ultimately, story-telling *is* playing. Story-telling “play” here is also *playing along with others* (in this case, facets of the self) and this is what Shipman refuses to do.

The self-conscious debate over structure and form persists in *Moving Pictures*. Nell’s

⁶ It is also interesting to note the contrast between the fluidity of Pollock’s plays, the playwright’s story-telling, with the obstructed story-telling of her characters. Pollock’s plays usually ask for no, or very few, breaks in the acts or scenes; performers who are not in the scene to be visible and on the periphery of the stage; fluid scene changes; etc. Her character’s story-telling is often interrupted, fragmented, frustrated, lacking audience, desperate. Albeit, Pollock’s fluidity can give the sense of chaos and speed (stream of consciousness) and her present but peripheral figures a sense of surveillance and menace.

account of Sam Goldwyn and her refusal of his lucrative studio acting contract because it was exploitive and “onerous” (58) is yet another instance. In Nell’s story and re-enactment, she is confident, smart, and sassy, while he is oafish and stupid. However, Helen and Shipman question Nell’s version of history. They point out Goldwyn was important and powerful and even Helen, who tends to play the role of the appeaser rather than critic, notes: “we can make him stupid – but was he?” (60). This leads to one of the most meta-theatrical and funny moments of the play:

SHIPMAN: And you know another thing you do?
 NELL: What is it now?
 SHIPMAN: You dick around with time, and with place – And with people! It complicates things.
 NELL: It clarifies things!
 SHIPMAN: How?
 NELL: Gets to the essence, you know, fresh insight when you rearrange life? when you
 SHIPMAN: Critics would differ.
 NELL: “Cri-tics would differ?”
 HELEN: It’s alright to differ.
 NELL: (*to SHIPMAN*) First structure, then critics? What the hell has that got to do with the story? (*to HELEN*) Why am I even talking to her? (*to SHIPMAN*) Maybe the real problem’s content eh? (*to HELEN*) I bet that it’s content. She – does not know – her own life!
 SHIPMAN: Not the way that you tell it! (60-61)

Anyone who has told a story will understand the issues and ambivalence voiced by Nell and Shipman. The scene is funny, entertaining, and serious. Nell both acknowledges and defends her modification of the facts. In one sense, “dick[ing] around” with time, place, and people is what turns a chronicle into a narrative story. The more useful questions are ones of degree, purpose, transparency, and audience expectations.

Yet, if, for Nell, form (“structure”), historical accuracy (“time,” “place,” and “people”), and audience response (“critics”) have nothing to do with the story, what does? Of course, there are the story-teller/author/creator, purpose, and context. Nell does focus on the story-teller (but not purpose). She defends the accuracy of her “content” in her claim to know her own life, but are not time, place, and people part of content? In addition, we already know that she “sent up”

Mr. Gilmour and later she will exaggerate the handsomeness of Ernie Shipman (52-53), as she does the stupidity of Sam Goldwyn (57-60), to justify her actions.

Nell's claim that one gets "*fresh insight* when you rearrange life" (emphasis added) echoes Pollock's statements about structure, nine years earlier, in her 1990 interview with Rita Much:

I also have a greater awareness of structure now, or how the angle of observation, which is how I define structure, gives *fresh insight* [emphasis added] into old stories or old situations that are recognized. It's much easier to think up new stories, which are really old stories, than it is to think up new structures. [. . .] I can't tell you what it is but as I start to write I know that this "fits" and that doesn't. I think that in the future I'll be playing more with structure or ways of telling the story.

(“Sharon Pollock Interview” 219)

In *Moving Pictures*, structure and changing structure do give new insight, but the insight is less about the story or the subject of the story than about the story-teller and her *relationships* with her subject and her listener(s).

Perhaps the more important point in the passage between Shipman and Nell about playing around with structure and content in story-telling is Helen's interjection. Ever the peace-maker and youthful optimist, Helen attempts to smooth the tension between Nell and Shipman and is ignored by both. So easily obscured by the older women's argument and dismissed as characteristic behaviour and empty platitudes, Helen's words, "It's alright to differ," take on additional meaning in light of the focus of both this chapter and Pollock's metaphor: it is alright (in fact, necessary and better) to have different stories and different story-tellers. Clearly, Nell and Shipman differ in purpose and expectations, and this is not alright for them. Each woman is interested in promoting her own version of the story and discrediting the other's; each desires only one light beam and one facet of the crystalline truth. But it is the ambivalent presence of multiple stories which ultimately enriches the audience⁷—and, possibly, the story-tellers. Difference and different stories both complicate and simplify things. And there are positive and negative meanings to both terms. In this scene, Nell and Shipman disagree over whether Nell's

⁷ For example, in *Moving Picture*, Pollock gives us many versions of Helen-Nell-Shipman, not only those of Helen, Nell, and Shipman, but of Goldwyn, Ernie, Barry, and Bert (who has a changing portrayal of Nell, one I will discuss later in the chapter). These together give us a more complex view than any one version.

story complicates or clarifies, but they agree over the value assigned to each term: to complicate is negative, to clarify is positive. But life is complex and what Nell calls clarification is arguably simplification through omission and modification. Adrienne Rich stated: “There is no ‘the truth,’ ‘a truth’—truth is not one thing, or even a system. It is an increasing complexity. [. . .] This is why the effort to speak honestly is so important. Lies are usually attempts to make everything simpler—for the liar—than it really is, or ought to be” (“Women and Honor” 187-88). And, indeed, later, Shipman will characterise Nell, the “maker of fiction,” as a “liar” (75).

Many Light Beams: “true family history”

SHIPMAN So finish the story!
 NELL My story!
 SHIPMAN The Daddy story?
 NELL My way!
 SHIPMAN I can hardly wait.

(Moving Pictures 39)

* * * * *

Moving Pictures is full of family stories and one story calls forth another in response, each inspired or provoked by its predecessor. They influence each other and, together, they create new and more complex meanings. A good example of this form of relational story-telling is the sequence of familial stories initiated by Helen’s reminiscence of her vaudeville experience. This prompts Nell to recall that she missed her parents during her youthful tours. Shipman disagrees and challenges her to prove her claim:

HELEN: Wrote letters home and never told them a thing that was true! (*an exceptional and fantastic achievement*)
 NELL: Missed them.
 SHIPMAN: Not really.
 NELL: Not true.
 SHIPMAN: Play then. (*She’ll force NELL to acknowledge true family history.*)
(34-35)

This initiates a series of stories by Helen and Nell, with Shipman interrupting whenever she feels her younger selves to be glossing over harsher realities. In this masterful sequence, Pollock gives us at least two “Mummy stories,” four “Daddy stories,” a repetition of a scene with (or a story about) Barry and, of course, all these stories are also stories about Helen-Nell-Shipman. In addition, the three women refer to the past *as stories* throughout the play and terms such as “the real Mummy story” (46) and “the Daddy story” (39) suggest set stories, known and familiar to them all. The use of the definite article “the” also suggests, ironically, singularity.

The sequence culminates in one of the emotional and narrative climaxes of the drama, Shipman’s powerful and devastating “real Mummy story” (46), followed by a *dénouement* in which Helen attempts an impassioned recovery from Shipman’s extraordinary narrative. Pollock’s stage direction states that the goal of Shipman’s behaviour and strategic story-telling is to “*force NELL to acknowledge true family history*” (35). I would like to examine in detail this sequence of stories to explore how they relate to each other and create meanings. I will also undertake a closer reading of Shipman’s “real Mummy story” (46) and make suggestions about some of the sources of its power. Overall, this sequence is a prime illustration of stories *about* relations, stories *in* relation, and telling stories as a way of *doing* relationships. It demonstrates the elusiveness of truth (that crystal in the dark) in (familial) story-telling, the complex relation between stories, and the telling and retelling which is the fate of tales if they persist in the family or the community. While I will not describe each story in detail (except for the “real Mummy story” later), I will sketch out the overall sequence and performance of the stories.

Initially, in response to Shipman’s challenge to “play,” Nell and Helen begin with their first “Mummy story,” celebrating their mother’s resourcefulness in being able to “make something out of nothing” (35), a skill in which the daughter also excels. Here again is ambivalence at play. The ability to “make something out of nothing” has both positive and negative connotations. It can mean creative resourcefulness and practical ingenuity, as in Mummy feeding her family with limited funds, or pure fantasy and even harmful deception (or self-deception) as in Shipman’s belief that some of Nell’s stories, visions of the future, are dangerous and harmful (74-75). Nell’s image of their mother is immediately expanded, made more complex, by Shipman who points out their mother’s creativity was necessitated by their reduced economic and social status (for they were surviving on their father’s remittance cheques from English relatives). Helen’s immediate response to Shipman is to tell Nell: “Don’t listen to

her! Mummy was ‘an English Lady’” (35). Helen’s urgent plea indicates that stories have a threatening power and influence. Thus begins a whole sequence of family stories which I schematise here to help illustrate my following discussion. My focus is less on the individual stories than the relationship between them.

Story/Description (“story-tellers”, page reference); colour coded to highlight pattern of stories	Comments
1. The first Mummy story: Mummy was “an English Lady” who “could make something out of nothing.” (Helen and Nell, 35)	Narrated. Ambivalent memory of Mummy as admirable and socially displaced.
2. The first Daddy story: Daddy as English gentlemen, initiated by Shipman’s mention of the war and Daddy and the dogs. (Helen and Nell, 35-37)	Narrated. Daddy’s war effort/Daddy and the rabbits. Mummy the English Lady leads to Daddy the English Gentleman. Helen and Nell take Shipman’s lead but avoid the story of the dogs (which is really about her father’s death), focussing instead on Daddy’s war effort.
3. Interruption by Shipman: second mention of Daddy and the dogs (37)	Challenge to image of English gentleman: Daddy as one of the “dogs.” Helen making a mistake in her story, getting side-tracked by Shipman back towards the story of Daddy’s death.
4. The second Daddy story: Daddy as gentle clown, performer of Gilbert and Sullivan songs, dancer. (Helen and Nell, 37).	Narrated. Attempted recovery of the authoritative story about Daddy.
5. Interruption by Shipman: “dance with (death)” (38)	Shipman using Nell’s word “dance” to move, again, back to the story of Daddy’s death.

Story/Description (“story-tellers”, page reference); colour coded to highlight pattern of stories	Comments
6. Song : “Three Little Maids” from Gilbert and Sullivan’s <i>The Mikado</i> . (Helen and Nell, 38-39)	An attempt by Helen and Nell to avoid the story of Daddy’s death, to drown out Shipman, and yet the lyrics express an ironic message which is in concord with Shipman’s views. Leads to Shipman challenging Nell to “finish the [Daddy] story.”
7. The third Daddy story and first version of Daddy’s death: Daddy’s fatal stroke while walking his dogs and Nell’s response to news of his death. (Nell and Ernie, 40-42).	Enacted by Nell and Ernie. Response to Shipman’s challenge to “finish the story.” First “Play”/scene enactment of the family stories.
8. Interruption : Shipman’s attack on Nell (42-43)	In quick succession, Shipman accuses Nell of loving her work more than Daddy, Ernie, and her son Barry. Leads to the Barry story.
9. The Barry story : “I hate it when you do that!” Barry’s complaint of Nell’s focus on her writing and lack of attention to him. (Barry and Nell, 44-45)	Enacted. Barrie as voice-over only. Repeat of dialogue in opening scene. Reveals opening scene was a quotation of this scene (more relational story-telling).
10. Interruption : Nell and Shipman’s argument about Daddy; “She leaves the picture to go to her father.” Also discussion about what “counts.” (Shipman and Nell, 45-46)	In their discussion, Nell refers to a fourth self, “she,” while Shipman replies with “I” and “you.” Discussion about “what counts” and Nell’s use of ambiguous pronouns to avoid naming unpleasant things.
11. The second Mummy story : the “real Mummy story,” “How Mummy Died for Nell.” (Shipman, 46-47)	Narrated. Narrative and emotional climax of this sequence.
12. <i>Silent pause</i>	

Story/Description (“story-tellers”, page reference); colour coded to highlight pattern of stories	Comments
13. Dénouement, Part One: The fourth Daddy story and second version of his death: Daddy’s death in the company of his loving dogs and Nell’s sorrow in the company of her caring dogs. Edison intertext. (Helen, Edison, 48)	Narrated. This is the second version of their father’s death and Nell’s response. It is Helen’s valiant and powerful revision of her father’s death and Helen-Nell-Shipman’s relationship with her father. Edison speaks about using three cameras to capture a subject.
14. Dénouement, Part Two: Helen’s Alaskan epiphany. Edison intertext. (Helen, Edison, 48-49)	Narrated. This story ends the sequence and changes the topic from Helen-Nell-Shipman and her family to Helen-Nell-Shipman alone. From here on, the women make no more references to their parents and son. Edison speaks of the need to keep film, in a projector, a minimum distance from the light source.

This sequence illustrates how words, phrases, topics in one story engender subsequent stories and how a teller can lose control of her story, how she can be interrupted and her story diverted towards a different purpose, a different ending, a different meaning. This is what happens with Helen and Nell. Their initial positive story of a resourceful mother is modified by Shipman into one of familial, social, and cultural alienation (35). Shipman then introduces the topic of the war and “Daddy and the dogs” (37), the latter being the story of their father’s death, but Helen and Nell resist this by focussing on their father’s war effort. However, their tragi-comedy of Daddy and the rabbits allows Shipman to slip in a dangerous substitution: the dogs in place of the rabbits. And Helen, carried away by the pleasure of the story and the story-telling, makes a careless move and joins in with Shipman’s dangerous memory/story: Helen adds a loving and critical image of Daddy himself as the fourth “dog.” This gives Shipman an opening to redirect the narrative back to *her* Daddy story. Nell intervenes and Helen attempts a frantic recovery.

SHIPMAN: The dogs, the three of them, Daddy and the dogs.

HELEN: Four of them counting Daddy.

SHIPMAN: Out for a walk and a sit on the bench and a good smoke of that Navy Cut. He was old then.

NELL: No.
 SHIPMAN: No what? Go on?
 NELL: No!
 HELEN: So take it back! New Play. Play! He loves being silly and singing his songs what were the songs? Come on Nell! (37)

Helen and Nell, in turn, divert Shipman's Daddy and the dogs story to an image of their father as a gentle clown, a performer of Gilbert and Sullivan tunes, but again their story gets interrupted and high-jacked by Shipman, who takes Nell's musical description of her father and turns it back (with a different performance reference) to her own more sombre subject:

NELL: Gilbert and Sullivan.
 SHIPMAN: And?
 NELL: And he'd sing and he'd whirl round!
 SHIPMAN: Yes, in a dance with – what? Come on, alliteration, you love it, dance with–what, with Death?⁸ (37-38)

In a desperate attempt to avert the painful story of their father's death, Nell and Helen try to drown out Shipman by performing "Three Little Maids," a song from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*. The women's choice may seem to have flowed naturally from the previous discussion about their British father and his love for Gilbert and Sullivan but, like all the songs and music in Pollock's drama, it fulfils additional dramatic purposes. Ironically, Helen and Nell's song makes an intertextual comment (another form of relational story-telling) on the women's behaviour and their life, resonating with themes and observations made elsewhere by Shipman, Barry, and Bert:

HELEN & NELL: Everything is a source of fun
Nobody's safe for we care for none
 [.]
 HELEN & NELL Life is a joke that's just begun
 Three little maids from school! (39, emphasis added)

Here is another example of Pollock's careful selection and effective use of song, both

⁸ This emotionally charged and dynamic sequence of stories is, in one sense, itself a dance of death: Helen-Nell-Shipman dances around the story and the telling of the story of her parents' deaths and her responses to them. It is also possible to see the course of the scene as a movement towards destruction followed by re-creation: Pollock moves the women's conversation towards Shipman's devastating "real Mummy story," which silences everyone, and then re-creation again, with Helen's revision of the "Daddy story," followed by her Alaskan epiphany.

contextually and inter-textually, as multiply resonant with the time period, with Helen-Nell-Shipman's world of theatre and performance, with British colonialism and as a critique of Helen-Nell-Shipman's disregard for her family and friends/lovers. At the same time, Pollock uses the familiarity and teamwork required in joint performance and narration to indicate agreement and unity between Nell and Helen.⁹ Finally, the artifice of song itself and its playful tone, within the context of a serious discussion about family history, is another example of the use of structural misalignment to indicate misalignment at a personal, relational, level.

From here on, Shipman is on the attack and her weapons are stories. She taunts Nell to tell the story of their father's death, which leads to the third story about Daddy and the first of two about his death. It is a story in which Daddy dies alone except for the company of his dogs, while Nell is away shooting a film. It is also the first of the family stories which is enacted (by Nell and Ernie) rather than narrated, giving an impression of objectivity. The charge is that Nell loves her work more than her father or her family. The dialogue between Nell and Ernie, who arrives on set to inform Nell of her father's death and burial (after the fact, because he intuited that she would not wish to have her work interrupted), is interspersed with critical comments from Shipman, emphasising Nell's neglect. Nell attempts to defend herself, only to be strongly challenged by Shipman, in quick succession, about her disregard of her father, her husband Ernie, and her son Barry:

NELL: I loved Daddy!

SHIPMAN: You loved work more. I heard that was the story.

NELL: No.

SHIPMAN: And "Ernie he matters." Did you ever love Ernie?

NELL: Yes but—

[.]

SHIPMAN: And Barry, what about Barry?

NELL: Barry?

⁹ Pollock uses the technique of joint narrators and performance again in *Angel's Trumpet* when, in the midst of a heated argument about the past, suddenly the structure of Scott and Zelda's exchange turns into rhyming couplets, at the end of which, the stage directions indicate: "*ZELDA and SCOTT laugh. Pause and silence*" (191). The companionship and creative pleasure, so evident in the creation and performance of the rhyming exchange, give the audience a rare glimpse into a more loving and joyful relationship between Scott and Zelda.

SHIPMAN: Your son, Ernie's son, where've you parked him this time? (43)

Note Shipman's use of the definite article: "You loved work more. I heard that was *the* story [emphasis added]." Here, Pollock plays with the nature of public domain stories and their ambivalent power. Shipman's argument is that "the story" is not hers alone but shared and acknowledged (the definitive article) by others. In addition, her use of the term "*the* story" and the fact that she *heard* it emphasize the objective (hence, within Western modes of rational argument, more convincing) quality of her claim. Of course, public discourse is ambivalent. It may be more objective and supported by many independent observers, but it may also be groundless rumour, lacking in the identification of the source and its credibility.¹⁰ In this case, Nell finds it hard to refute the public narrative, whether it is fully accurate or not, because there is a degree of ambivalent truth to the claim. She did love work more than her family. Or, perhaps more accurately, family affections and work (art, self-expression) seem profoundly incompatible for many of Pollock's characters, ranging from early figures such as James Walsh in *Walsh* and Everett Chalmers in *Doc* to Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald in *Angel's Trumpet*.

Nell and Shipman's exchange about Daddy leads to Shipman initiating another relational story, one about Nell and her son Barry. Nell says, "Play something different!" (43), and asserts, "I don't have to listen" (44), but she does and actually performs this story with Barry, who appears only via a voice-over. Here again we have an example of how one story (one light beam) elicits and influences another story (the Daddy story leads to a story about Barry) and of story-tellers in conflict with each other, as well as how one can be both the teller and listener of a given story. In this case, Nell is a reluctant story-teller and listener. The Barry story encapsulates several recurring themes in *Moving Pictures* and in Pollock's oeuvre: the ambivalent desires of work and familial relations (or, in Shipman's word "love"), familial neglect, the parent/child relationship, the need to be heard, truth and lie. For example, Barry tells Nell: "You're not

¹⁰ The power of the public narrative, its appearance of consensus, truth, and validity, has appeared before in Pollock's drama. Lizzie Borden, in *Blood Relations*, is unable to escape the children's rhyme which asserts her murder of her parents, a crime for which she was legally acquitted. Similarly, Leah, in *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, is unable to escape the prescriptive stories about her, whether they be the fantastic stories of Mr. Big which require her to be without flaw or the moralistic judgmental stories of the town's citizens. In Wasserman's words, Leah did not have "the therapeutic power of the meta-narrative; her/story remains his [Mr. Big's] story" ("Daddy's Girl" 31). The only escape she saw was through death.

paying one bit of attention to me. [. . .] Listen to me! Some things are important you know. [. . .] You're not listening to me. You're writing" (44).

This scene also highlights one of the key silences and absences in the drama. In *Moving Pictures*, Pollock's stage directions require that characters and performers who are not in a scene "are always present on stage and observing the action" (16). Yet, of all the significant individuals mentioned by Helen-Nell-Shipman, the only figures who are not physically represented are her mother, her father, and her son. Barry, here, is at least present as a voice-over. By contrast, Mummy and Daddy do not even speak. Pollock's dramaturgical choice stages her central figure's ambivalent relationship with her family and their physical absence in this memory play is symbolic of Helen-Nell-Shipman's need to keep them distant within her own psyche.

In addition, this scene exemplifies one of Pollock's characteristic writing techniques: overlapping dialogue and the repetitive use of homonyms and phrases to create a sense of confusion, urgency, tension.

BARRY: [. . .] Inside your head you're writing. You're not listening to me. You're writing.

NELL: (*Her dialogue overlaps with BARRY's voiceover.*) No

BARRY: (*voiceover*) No what! . . . No what!

NELL: What

BARRY: (*voiceover*) Exactly!

NELL: What did you say

BARRY: (*voiceover*) I said no, what!

NELL: I don't know what you're talking about

BARRY: (*voiceover*) And I said exactly. You're not listening to me, you're writing. You said no and I said no what. I said no what meaning go on, and you don't know what I'm talking about so you can't go on because you aren't listening and I said exactly!

NELL: I said I don't know— [what you're talking about]

BARRY: (*voiceover*) Pay attention to me! I just want to hear you say no I'm not writing! Inside my head I'm not writing! Say it!

NELL: Why would I want to say that?

BARRY: (*voiceover*) Because it would be a great big lie! (*pause*)

SHIPMAN: True?

NELL: Not like that, no, you're twisting the story.

The shadow of the child starts to fade away.

BARRY: (*voiceover, distant*) Mummy! Mummy! (44-45)

The barrage of “I”s and “you”s emphasises Barry’s anger and oppositional stance, while the use of the homonyms “no “ and “know” (“no what” and “know what”) creates a sense of confusion and lack of communication. Also note that Nell repeatedly lacks answers or clarity; she needs to ask “what?” “what did you say?” and repeats “I don’t know what you are talking about.”

The Barry story exemplifies relational stories not only in terms of being a family story but it is also related to and changes the meaning of an earlier story. In this case, the audience suddenly realises that the present dialogue between Nell and Barry is a repeat of the play’s opening scene between Shipman and Nell (18-19). But that is wrong; it is the other way around. The opening scene is a repeat of the present dialogue between Nell and Barry. Narrative time and chronological time are reversed. Suddenly, we realise that Shipman was quoting her son to Nell, who, preoccupied, does not give any indication that she recognises this as a quotation or a repetition of the past. However, the audience does, especially the reading audience (and the actors) who have the luxury of the play text for consultation. In the opening scene, Nell is not only ignoring the claims of an inner voice (Shipman), but an outer one as well (Barry). The audience also has new (and old at the same time) evidence that Nell’s self-absorbed behaviour is life-long. Pollock’s structural manipulation of time produces a temporal misalignment: what one thought was present is also the past. The audience realises, through experiential awareness and knowledge, that its understanding is flawed or incomplete. The present is, or can be, the past.¹¹ It may be argued that such dramaturgical choices create the sense of life as repetitive, of individuals as incapable of change, though I would argue that Pollock uses this to invoke the desire for and the will towards change in her audiences, even as her characters seem caught in a repetition of the past.

Barry’s last haunting words in the scene are “Mummy! Mummy!” and, soon, Shipman will invoke the ghost of her own mother in her strategic story-telling, but first, Pollock gives us another revealing interlude. In a preamble before the “real Mummy story” (46), Nell and Shipman argue over values and choices by invoking a fourth self whom Nell speaks of in the

¹¹ Pollock used this technique of temporal quotation in the opening scene of *Walsh*, where James Walsh denies help to individuals in the Alaskan tavern, re-enacting the encounter he had years earlier with Sitting Bull. In the case of *Walsh*, Pollock emphasizes the repetition by double casting the roles of Sitting Bull and the Prospector and of Crowfoot and Joeie with the same actors.

third person. Shipman introduces this fourth self in an ironic comment, in quotations, as if referencing a title or caption in a silent film, but Nell takes her seriously:

NELL: I'd have gone to him [her dying father] yes I would!

SHIPMAN: "She leaves the picture to go to her father."

NELL: Maybe she would. I don't know if she would.

SHIPMAN: I do.

NELL: You're old. She never grows old.

SHIPMAN: You will.

NELL: She never grows old like you.

SHIPMAN: You will.

NELL: She never forgets the things that count.

SHIPMAN: What things would they be? Lay them out! Let's see! A list of her movies? The stories she's written? Is that what you mean?

HELEN: Stop!

NELL: I cried for Daddy. Not with Ernie. Not in front of the crew or the cast or the people milling around. I kept it inside. I said why wasn't I there, how could I leave him, what was I thinking. But – I thought I was doing something that mattered.

SHIPMAN: You thought recognition would come.

NELL: Now that you're old and no one remembers and you can't even remember you wonder if it was worth it! I know it was worth it!

SHIPMAN: Worth it. What is "it", what is it?

HELEN: Start over! (45-46)

This exchange between Nell and Shipman clearly demonstrates the great multiplicity of selves experienced by Helen-Nell-Shipman and it highlights another set of recurring themes: values (what counts), worth, and the price which is paid (and by whom) for "the things that count." Nell moves from first person to third person, and from certainty ("I would") immediately to equivocation ("Maybe she would. I don't know if she would."). Nell speaks of an idealised "she" who never grows old and never forgets her values, but Shipman insists on the real, using the pronoun "you." Nell avoids naming her priorities by using vague terms ("things", "something", "it"), while Shipman insists on specifics ("What things would they be?", "what is it?"). Nell asserts "I know it was worth it!" Even within one sentence, the same pronoun ("it") refers to two different things. Pollock uses this linguistic misalignment to reflect a communicative misalignment, as she did in her earlier use of homonyms ("no" and "know"). The question of worth has arisen in Pollock's drama before, for example in *Doc*, and I will

examine it more closely at the end of this study. Suffice to say, for now, that Nell has no answers for Shipman. Some things, some truths, are too difficult or painful to voice (another significant silence/absence in Pollock's work). At the same time, Pollock acknowledges Nell's perspective and makes us aware of the very human tendency to privilege hindsight (Shipman's view) and judge the past by the present.

In response to Helen's plea to "[s]tart over" and tell another story, Shipman presses on with her powerful Mummy story. Here, Pollock brings us full circle, for it was a story about Mummy (Helen and Nell's story of their resourceful mother) which started this series of parental tales (35). However, if we look closer at what Shipman calls "the real Mummy story" (46), one which silences Nell and Helen and enables Shipman to proclaim in bitter triumph "I win" (47), we notice that there is much in it which is un-real.¹²

SHIPMAN: 1918. (*to HELEN*) Yes, a bad flu. And Mummy tended poor Nell. Washed the flushed face, wet the dry lips, hovered over her like an angel. Looked after Barry. And poor Nell fell into a sleep. Like the princess no one could waken? A terrible sleep. Then do you know what happened? Once Mummy had made a pact with God. And she'd almost forgotten. God hadn't forgotten. (*to NELL*) She'd made a pact with God when you were ten days old on the night the doctor said you were dead. That night, she ran to the hill overlooking the bay with you in her arms. She held you tight in her arms, you, a little blue baby. She made a pact. And a light breath of wind off the water, hardly a wind, an ever so slight movement of air rose up from the water below and spiralled around her. And the dead baby started to cry. The night of the flu and your terrible sleep, she sat by your bed. When there was nothing more to be done, could be done, would be done, except wait for the sleep to take its terrible toll, Mummy remembered. Mummy went up and lay on her bed. She had made a pact. And in the morning, you woke up. She didn't. (*silence*) Play. (*no response*) Somebody. (*no response*)

NELL: No

SHIPMAN: (*defeated*) I win. (*silence*) (47)

Shipman's story is surprising. Unless one believed in a supernatural bargain-making deity and the dead returning to life, the story seems far from "real." Of course, there might be logical explanations for such implausible events (the doctor may have mis-diagnosed the severity of the

¹² Recall Michael Ondaatje's statement about the nature of history which prefaced this section. Coincidentally, he too was speaking in the context of family history.

baby's illness, the mother might have died from the exhaustion and the flu) but that is clearly not the point here, and neither Nell nor Helen challenges the verity of Shipman's story. As Langellier observed, narratives (personal or otherwise) and the production of "meanings which count as real or true" rest on the performance, the text, and the context ("Personal Narratives" 270).

At the start of this sequence of family stories, Pollock's stage direction tells us that Shipman's objective was to speak truth, "*true family history*" (35). In fact, what Shipman presents us is more than an objective account of family history, true or otherwise. It is a prime example of story-telling as strategic performance. Earlier, Helen tells Nell and Shipman: "So stop fighting and tell it! [Nell's Daddy story]" (39). But, all along, telling is another form of fighting. If the audience were not aware of this already at the beginning of this series of stories, and even if we are so aware, Pollock confronts us directly with an abrupt reminder. She has Shipman announce, in another example of ambivalent misalignment: "*(defeated)* I win." What has been won? Was there a battle, contest, or game ("play") here? Has "true family history" been acknowledged? More interestingly: how did Shipman "win"? What are the criteria for evaluation or the rules of engagement? If Shipman's "Mummy story" is, in fact, so un-real, what then is the source of its power, both for Helen and Nell, and for the audience of *Moving Pictures*? I believe there are three main reasons: personal, generic, and rhetorical. The first reason relates to familial and historical context and, in this case, it is emotional rather than factual truth which triumphs. The latter two reasons relate to cultural and artistic inheritances, as well as artistic and performance skills: text and performance.

One undeniable and obvious reason for the story's impact is that it speaks an emotional and psychological, more than factual, truth. It expresses a daughter's guilt (founded or not) for her mother's death and for choosing her own life's path, one which removes her from her parents—geographically, culturally, and psychologically. Physically and geographically, she is absent during their old age and death; culturally and psychologically, she has embraced the North American wilderness and the bohemian life of the independent artist rather than the middle-class values and heritage of her family and "the British tribe" (35). In addition, if Mummy represented the conventional "angel in the house," domestic, maternal, nurturing, self-sacrificing, then Helen-Nell-Shipman, independent professional artist and lover of the wilderness and of wild animals, did symbolically kill her.

In fact, Nell's rejection of the conventional *maternal role* of mother crosses generations, affecting her relationship with her child as well as her mother. In a later moment of frustration and exasperation, when her eight-year-old son Barry asks for her attention, addressing her as "Mummy," Nell snaps at him and instructs him:

NELL: (*a strong vicious attack springing from her impotence in other areas of her life*) You don't call Brownie bear do you! And you don't call Laddie dog, and you don't call Angelic Nikisia panama deer! You don't call King horse! and I don't want to be called mum or mummy or mother!

BARRY: (*voiceover*) Okay.

NELL: I'm!

BARRY: (*voiceover*) Okay.

NELL: I am your mother. That's What I am. But it's not Who I am. Call me Nell please call me Nell and I'll call you Barry, Okay?" (83)

This scene is emotionally honest, humorous, and sad at the same time. It shows Nell's ambivalent recognition and rejection of the kinship idiom (literally and symbolically), with its attendant ties and responsibilities. As such, the scene is also a companion to that between Nell and Burt at the end of the drama, in which Nell rejects her relationship with her lover who, in another significant example of ambivalence, both hates her and implores her to stay with him (93)—another form of repetition and relational story-telling in Pollock's drama.

The relationship which Nell demands of and pleads for from Barry is also a distortion or misalignment of the roles of kinship. Barry, the young child, wants his mother; he wants to be mothered. Nell, in rejecting the names "mum," "mummy," and "mother," is also rejecting the task of mothering. In asking her son to "call me Nell and I'll call you Barry," she is asking him to be her equal: an adult who doesn't need mothering. This is additionally ironic since, throughout the drama, Helen-Nell-Shipman refers to her parents by "what" they were: "Mummy" and "Daddy." And poignantly, Barry acquiesces to his mother's demand, envisioning a relationship not unlike those of the heroines and heroes in her adventure films: "Let's run away Nell. Let's pack a lunch and go. Let's run away and find happiness over the hills. Do you think we can do that, Nell?" (83). It's hard not to hear irony in Barry's last words, but the voice-over of Barry need not emphasize this because Shipman provides it right afterwards when she repeats his lines: "Pack a lunch and find happiness over the hill Do you think we could do that Nell?" (83)

Nell has no response to Barry or Shipman, and Helen's response to the scene is

fascinating and revealing. Pollock's stage directions say:

Silence. Although HELEN feels unable to "sing" or "perform" at this moment, she tries to provide some image of affection, love, happiness. The shadow of the child fades away during her speech.

HELEN: Brownie the bear sings. She has five songs that she sings. The sweetest when Barry and you lie down on a bed of pine needles beside her; most blissful when she sucks her paw pads; the saddest when she sees you leave with the huskies. Brownie still sings. She still can sing. (83)

Despite Pollock's directions, Helen's story of Brownie the bear seems at first out of place, misaligned with the previous subject of maternal neglect. Yet, it makes sense as a more comprehensive picture of Helen-Nell-Shipman, if one views Helen's story in relation to the stories of Nell's response to her father's death. Helen-Nell-Shipman seems unable to express affection and love directly to her son. As it was with her father, she is only able to do so through her relationship with animals. If she wasn't there to express her love to Daddy, then she did so to her dogs, and his dogs expressed their/her love for him. Here, the dogs are replaced by Brownie the bear. While Helen's image is moving, note that the main relationship, the affection and love, is between Nell and Brownie, "you" and "her." Barry's presence is virtually incidental. At the same time, in the last lines, Barry and Brownie merge, as the one left behind by Nell. The insistence that "Brownie still sings. She still can sing" may be interpreted as a wish to minimize the effects of Nell's neglect: that despite being abandoned by her, the child and the bear can still "sing."

To return to the scene that is central to the concepts of relational stories and ambivalent relationships, the second reason Shipman's "real Mummy story" is so effective is that it has as its resources a host of culturally resonant intertexts, relational stories from the history and art of Western story-telling. Shipman's story is filled with elements of the fairy tale and the folk tale, the gothic supernatural, and melodrama. From the fairy tale and folk tale, we have Mummy, the selfless nurturing "angel" (in the house) who tends both her daughter and grandson; "poor Nell," the sleeping "princess;"¹³ and the long forgotten pact with God (the inverse of a deal with the Devil) made "once" (upon a time?), "on a hill overlooking the bay," a liminal transitional space where the elements (earth, air, water) meet. Shipman herself signals the fairy tale nature of her

¹³ The repeated phrase "poor Nell" also calls to mind heroines of Victorian melodrama and Dickens' long suffering "Little Nell."

story by commenting on her own description of the flu-stricken Nell: “Like the princess no one would waken?”¹⁴ The gothic and melodrama’s interest in illness, death, night, the sublime landscape, the supernatural, the curse or past which haunts the present, the double, and the fantastic can all be found in the story of the blue baby and the flu, the night scene on the hill over the bay, the supernatural “breath of wind” which brings life to the dead, the forgotten pact which awaits repayment, Mummy’s heroic final sacrifice, and the miraculous exchange of lives. Finally, from the vaudeville and variety shows of Shipman’s youth as well as the silent films of her prime, we have the title which precedes an act or scene, “How Mummy Died for Nell” (46), both a sarcastic judgment and evidence of the narrative desire in Helen-Nell-Shipman, for whom everything is, or can be, a fiction.¹⁵

Such stock elements of past and enduring narrative forms remain familiar to Pollock’s contemporary audiences. Even as I am sceptical of the literal truth of Shipman’s story, I am moved by its emotional and psychological force. How much more resonant and immediately powerful then, must they be for Helen, Nell, and Shipman: actor, writer, and director, steeped in the dramatic story-telling tradition of vaudeville and melodrama, a woman for whom the line between artist/creator and creation blur, and self and story of the self are often one. As Nell proclaimed to Carl Laemmle: “Everyone wants to see *The Girl from God’s Country*. I am *The Girl from God’s Country!*” (31).

¹⁴ This reference to the sleeping princess is another interesting source of misalignment and tension. A sleeping princess reminds one of *Sleeping Beauty*. In the traditional fairy tale, a curse is placed on a princess at her birth that when she reaches adulthood she will prick her finger on a spindle and die. Through the mitigation of a good fairy, the curse of death is reduced to one of sleep wherein the princess will only be awakened by her true love, a prince. In Pollock’s version, the mother/Mummy seems to function as both the good fairy, who mitigates the baby’s death, and the male lover, who revives the sleeping princess. Note that in her autobiography, Nell Shipman recounts a similar story of origins right at the start of the first chapter, complete with herself as a blue baby and her theory that the coastal air of Victoria, British Columbia, imbued with the vitality of the west coast wilderness, brought her back to life (1-2). Nell Shipman also posits that her mother had made a pact with God, but only during Shipman’s adult struggle with influenza, not at her birth. However, the image of a sleeping princess wakened by her mother’s sacrifice is Pollock’s creation.

¹⁵ Even nature is a story-teller or a story, the distinction blurring in ambivalence. As Nell tries to convince Bert, following their business mishaps with the studios, to start their own independent production company in the wilderness of Priest Lake, Helen enthusiastically adds: “It [the landscape of Priest Lake] changes in colour. It tells different stories different times of the day, different times of the year. See? Fiction. Even in nature” (73). Of course, the stories are created by the observer(s) of nature, not nature itself.

In addition to content and genre, the linguistic structure of Shipman's speech influences the dramatic and rhetorical impact of her story. The structure of the monologue can be organised in two ways. From the perspective of addressees, it can be divided into two parts: the first addressed to Helen and the second addressed to Nell, an example of a speaker fluctuating abruptly between multiple addressees. Simultaneously, from the perspective of narrative time, the monologue can be seen as being divided in three sections: an inner story-within-a-story of baby Helen's birth, death, and rebirth, framed in the beginning and end by the account of Mummy's death years later. The opening frame is composed of short, simple sentences of the (noun-)verb-adjective-object pattern, which not only provide background information quickly but mirror the urgent chaotic sense of past events and build Shipman's argument, block by blunt and rhythmic block: "Mummy tended poor Nell. Washed the flushed face, wet the dry lips, hovered over her like an angel. Looked after Barry." However, with the description that "poor Nell fell into a sleep," the rhythm of the passage changes, the pace slows, and the term "sleep" is repeated at the end of this segment with emphasis: "A terrible sleep." Pollock economically establishes the mood and the difference here between mother and daughter, presence and absence, movement and stasis. She also presents a reversal of the customary difference between the two women: mother at home and stationary; daughter away and in motion, walking on planes, swimming in frozen rivers, running with dogs beneath the Alaskan aurora.

The first part of Shipman's story ends with a leading question, common in story-telling for young listeners: "Then do you know what happened?" This direct address initiates a new section, a story-within-the story and a past-within-the-past, introduced by the word which begins so many fairy tales: "Once [and we add, without thinking, "upon a time"] Mummy had made a pact with God." This could be the older Shipman assuming an elder's role (a sarcastic one?) with respect to Helen and Nell. It could also be another form of relational story-telling. The "Mummy story" is not only a story *about* Mummy *by* her daughter, it may also be, in part, a story *by* Mummy (or another person, maybe Daddy?) told to her daughter. In fact, I am reminded of the genre of family stories or myths an adult tells a child (or an elder tells a younger individual) about the latter's even younger self, a self the listener doesn't or couldn't have remembered. The ten-day-old baby Helen is unlikely to have been aware of or able to witness this episode of family history; likewise, the ill and unconscious Nell could not have witnessed or been directly

responsible for the actual events of her mother's death.¹⁶ From here on, Shipman changes her direct addressee from Helen to Nell. In the drama, Shipman's attacks are directed at the resilient part of herself, the adult Nell, never the youthful, more vulnerable Helen.

It is in this more remote past, "once [upon a time]," that the elements of the supernatural and melodrama, described earlier, flourish. Here is the night scene of the distraught mother with her blue baby at the edge of a hill above the sea. Here is the scene of the mythic pact with God and the answering life-giving "breath of wind." Here is also where the rhetoric shifts. Sentences become longer and more descriptive, slowing down the pace of the story, painting the background, allowing the magic and the fantastic to emerge: "She'd made a pact with God when you were ten days old on the night the doctor said you were dead. That night, she ran to the hill overlooking the bay with you in her arms." Where the first section keeps a tight focus (flushed face; dry lips; Mummy, Nell, Barry), here we step back and see the scale and panorama of the sublime.

There are also effective new applications of repetition. Pollock uses two sentences which echo each other in structure, each in itself containing a sequence of three repeated phrases restating and requalifying itself.¹⁷ They also bracket the start and end of Mummy's pact with God. The first uses a technique of progressive diminishment which nevertheless builds suspense and hope: "And *a light breath of wind* off the water, *hardly a wind*, *an ever so slight movement of air* rose from the water below and spiralled around her. And the dead baby started to cry" (emphasis added). Note how the movement of the sentence mimics carefully holding one's breath, becoming still in order not to disturb a fragile, precious situation. This is a common technique in (children's) story-telling which also creates a sense of ambiguity and ambivalence: whose animate breath is a wind? was there a wind or not? was there a presence or not? We are in the liminal world of the supernatural. The sentence also ends the middle, distant past, section of the monologue. Shipman abruptly shifts back to the framing story signalled by another repeated phrase, "your terrible sleep." This is followed by the second tripartite sentence: "When

¹⁶ In fact, in her autobiography, Nell Shipman states that she did not recover from the influenza and regain consciousness until after her mother's body had been buried. Though by some inexplicable psychic ability, she insists on having seen her mother's dead body (66-67).

¹⁷ Of course, three is also the resonant, symbolic number of fairy tale and myth.

there was nothing more *to be done, could be done, would be done*, except wait for the sleep to take its terrible toll, Mummy remembered” (emphasis added). This repetition is much more structured and formulaic than the fluid description of the “breath of wind,” and it returns us to the rhythm and sense of the opening segment: short, blunt, abrupt statements. This time, the repetition creates a sense of doom and finality rather than hope and suspense.

Finally, repetition occurs within the whole “real Mummy story.” Key words and images repeat with forceful effect. Pollock’s Shipman uses the term “sleep” and “terrible sleep” four times in the monologue. Likewise, the phrase “made a pact” appears four times. Finally, during Shipman’s address to Nell, she uses the pronoun “you” eight times: for example, “*you* were ten days old,” “*you* were dead,” “*you* in her arms,” “*your* terrible sleep,” “*your* bed,” ending with the final short accusatory “*you* woke up. She didn’t” (emphasis added). All these repetitions create an intense attack on Nell which ends in an abrupt switch in focus from the awakened Nell to her sacrificial, dead, mother. Pollock gives her Shipman impressive rhetorical skills. And Shipman is effective in having the last word. She leaves her audience in stunned silence, unable to speak in their own defence and refute her version of the story. In conclusion, Shipman’s “real Mummy story” is, amongst other things, a *tour de force* of relational story-telling and strategic performance.

But, in this case, Shipman is in danger of being too good a story-teller:

SHIPMAN: [. . .] And in the morning, you woke up. She didn’t. (*silence*) Play.
(*no response*) Somebody. (*no response*) Play.

NELL: No

SHIPMAN: (*defeated*) I win. (*silence*) (47)

There is no rebuttal to her version of Mummy’s death and its cause. She and Nell have exchanged positions from those at the very start of the play, where it was Nell who invited Shipman to “play” and Shipman who refused (17). With characteristic ambivalence, Pollock’s Shipman both “wins” and is “defeated.” What do victory and defeat mean in this context? It is arguable whether Shipman has managed to get Nell to acknowledge “*true* family history” (emphasis added), but, unarguably, at this point, Shipman has told the most irrefutable story. One might deduce that to win is to have the last word, to tell the last story, to be the last story-teller standing. And defeat? All three selves of Helen-Nell-Shipman feel abjectly guilty for the death of their mother. They are emotionally defeated. They are also left without words, without further stories, unable to “play.” Not only is Shipman’s “real Mummy story” the last story about

Mummy in the drama, it threatens to be the last story, period. And having the last story is dangerous if life, play, depends on “continuous movement,” continuous story-telling.

However, the drama is far from over. For Pollock, as for her characters, re-telling is possibly more important than any one telling and her stage directions indicate that Helen, the youthful life force of the person, makes a “*valiant attempt to start a new story*” (47). It is the fourth Daddy story in the sequence and the second version of his death. Helen’s story-telling is not just a revision of Shipman’s account of Daddy’s death but an act of resuscitation and self-preservation. And she is successful. At the same time, Pollock weaves Edison’s second speech in and out of Helen’s narrative. This second appearance and passage by Edison, again ostensibly about the mechanics of motion picture production, serves as a critical internal intertext to Helen’s words. I will comment on this important Edison intertext, but, first, I would like to look at Helen’s Daddy story.

The story is addressed first to Nell, then to Shipman, both still unable to speak. To Nell, Helen describes Daddy collapsed on the sidewalk but protected and accompanied by his loving dogs. Later, the dogs stay by his bedside and Helen tells Nell: “They look after him, Nell, like you said. Really, they do. That is the story” (48). Note how Helen reinforces Nell’s version of history (“Nell, like you said”). She also re-frames Shipman’s early words: “*really*” and “that is *the story*” (emphasis added), as if this is “the real Daddy story” just as Shipman’s was “the real Mummy story.” Then Helen turns to Shipman and describes Nell’s mourning for her father, insisting again that “This is the story!” (48). Nell, who will not cry in front of other people,¹⁸ weeps in the company of her dogs:

HELEN: (to SHIPMAN) This is the story! [. . .] She [Nell] sits between them [her Great Danes Tresore and Rex] and she cries for Daddy. She cries, while Tresore and Rex each stretch to the end of their chains, put their heads in her lap and make small little comforting sounds. They love her. (48)

Helen’s voice gains strength and she triumphantly asserts: “It’s a love story, Shipman! Not old and not dying but living!” (48). Helen’s Daddy story is a companion and antidote to Shipman’s real Mummy story (more relational stories). The story of Mummy’s death is too powerful and

¹⁸ Nell’s behaviour echoes Katie’s refusal to cry at her mother’s funeral in front of her neighbours in *Doc* and Pollock’s own refusal to cry in public at her own mother’s funeral—another example of relational stories.

cannot be revised but the story of Daddy's death can be re-visioned, as can Nell's response to it. In Shipman's telling, the Daddy story is one of a daughter's neglect and abandonment of her father and his lonely death. Helen re-tells the story as one of love, expressed not directly between father and daughter but mediated by the companionship of gentle, caring animals. Both stories are about the death of a parent and the life of a child; where the former's emphasis is on death, the latter's is on life. A cynic and careful reader might argue that, strictly speaking, Helen's story describes only care and love between humans and their animals: Daddy and his dogs, Nell and her dogs. While Nell does cry about her father's death, Helen is unable to say that Nell loves him; we encounter one of the silences in this drama and one of the limits to the story-telling. Clearly, there is a misalignment here and it is resolved through a psychic substitution or transference: Daddy and his dogs love each other, Nell and her dogs love each other, therefore Daddy and Nell love each other. The intended message is that Nell loves her father and he experienced her love.¹⁹

But that is not all. Helen's evocation of life (rather than death) leads her to a second story of origins and spiritual birth, an awakening into existential meaning:

HELEN: It's a love story, Shipman! Not old and not dying but living! National stock theatre on tour in Alaska? Exhilarating, Shipman! Going broke in Alaska? Stimulating, Shipman! Playing on pool tables shoved together for a stage? Galvanizing, Energizing – and bloody dangerous, Shipman! Why can't you remember?!

SHIPMAN: I remember. (48)

Helen continues, with as much rhetorical skill as Shipman exercised in her "real Mummy story," urging Shipman to "remember" three more times the spiritual epiphany she experienced years ago, as a youth, in the Alaskan wilderness. And it *is* a love story (a second love story)—but not between people. Helen remembers for Shipman:

HELEN: I know you remember. Boarding with an old lady and her forty canaries in Alaska? [. . .] Educational Shipman, remember? Before movies and Ernie. Remember. That's when you fall in love. Really in love. In love for keeps. With the sky and the earth and the mountains.

SHIPMAN: I did do that . . . I did. (48-49)

¹⁹ Helen's reparative story-telling here is related and parallel to her story of Brownie the Bear, who "still can sing" (83), in response to Nell's neglect of her son Barry.

In the end, Helen-Nell-Shipman becomes the titular figure from her play: “The Girl From Alaska” (49) and Helen asks and answers a vitally important question:

HELEN: Everyone thinks you’re the girl from Somewhere Away. From Not Where You’re At. Isn’t that funny? What does it mean?

EDISON: There is a tendency to overheat if the picture passes too close to the light source.

HELEN: I know what it means! Our last night in Alaska, I go for a walk with a husky. A big black silver-tipped dog. The Northern Lights are out, and I run with the dog, my feet pounding the ground with great shafts of light overhead. I run and I run with the dog. *I’m turning the earth with my running under a kaleidoscope sky.* That’s what it means. We can play that Nell. Because that’s how it was, and that’s how it is, and that’s how it always will be! (49, emphasis in original)

At first, Helen’s answer and interpretation of meaning seem strange, somehow “mis-aligned” with her question, as if she were answering a different question altogether. On the surface, it seems to me Helen’s question is about place, origins, belonging: everyone thinks she is from away, not from around here. A plausible meaning might be that Helen-Nell-Shipman doesn’t fit in, doesn’t belong; she feels like, and/or is perceived by others to be, a stranger. Yet her answer to “what does it mean?” is that her running, her motion, keeps the world turning! However, on a different plane, from a “different angle of observation” (to quote Pollock), through a psychological translation or transference, Helen’s answer does make sense: it is about origins and being from away—not physical or geographical origins (not where she came from or belongs) but a psychological, spiritual, existential type of origins.

Helen’s “meaning” is that, indeed, she is strange—because she is different, special, powerful. This is the great foundational story, the personal myth, of Helen-Nell-Shipman. The northern wilderness is her true love and she can run and move effortlessly through this spiritual home as easily as its native inhabitant, the husky. And, the two lovers (Helen and the wilderness/earth), in a reciprocal relationship, give life to each other. Helen’s astonishing and audacious realisation says as much: “*I’m turning the earth with my running under a kaleidoscope sky*” (49). Notice the reappearance of the tripartite structure, here, religious in its overtones: “We can play that Nell. Because that’s how it was, and that’s how it is, and that’s how it always will be!” One can imagine “Amen!” at the end of Helen’s explanation. We are in the realm of faith and what is personally spiritually meaningful and life-giving. No wonder Helen-Nell-Shipman can’t stop moving, writing, film-making, talking, story-telling, playing.

Helen's Alaskan epiphany adds several layers of meaning to and deepens the multiple associations with the concept of "play" in *Moving Pictures*. As a noun, "play" means a dramatic script or a stage performance. And, of course, the word "play" in a drama, a play, all about acting, vaudeville, theatre, and film, invites meta-theatrical associations. We know the theatre metaphors for life itself have a long illustrious history. But Pollock uses "play" mainly as a verb in *Moving Pictures* and there is an element of fun and entertainment, as well as seriousness, risk, and productivity, in "play." To "play" can mean to perform, to enact a script; hence actors were commonly called "players." I have noted earlier that, for Helen-Nell-Shipman, to "play" can also mean "playing along," a willingness to join in the game or the performance, whether this is with earnest or dishonest intentions (another potential for misalignment, here between actions and intentions). "Play," for Helen-Nell-Shipman, whether in terms of telling a story, or singing a song, or running/projecting a film, always involves remembrance, performance and, in effect, re-living the events.²⁰ "Play" can also become "play with," in terms of playing around with something, testing alternatives, pushing boundaries, exploring different variations, a re-telling and exploration of something new. But, here, Helen uses the term in an interesting way, especially given the context of her speech. She says: "We can play that Nell." Helen's comment points to believability as well as viability: there are some stories which one "can play" and, by extension, some which one can't play or will find difficult to play (for example, the Priest Lake story). Her words also suggest an element of evaluation and choice, as if she and Nell were actors and directors—theatre-makers—reviewing several available scripts for performance. But from which perspective will judgment be made? Again, Pollock gives us multiple possibilities in her drama. What is playable can be seen in terms of the artistic merit of the story, the technical (artistic, athletic, etc.) skills of the players, the costs involved (financial, emotional, material, and physical), believability (from both the performer's and the audience's perspective), and entertainment value.

Given the context of Helen's remark (in reference to a myth of personal identity and purpose) and her subsequent avoidance of the Priest Lake story ("We aren't playing that story yet." [49]), I would suggest that the concept of "playability" here also connotes an existential

²⁰ Which is how Helen uses the term when she says at the end of the passage, "We aren't playing that story," and how Shipman and Nell understand it when they agree with her (49).

viability: will it be a good life story/game? Will the story/game be flexible, meaningful, satisfying? Is it one which can sustain and inspire a life-time of “play” and effort and sacrifice? (Here, as at the end of the drama, playing is synonymous with living.) Helen’s Alaskan epiphany *is* life-giving. Shipman’s cynicism and antagonism against herself/Nell are finally mitigated. The three selves even agree to a momentary truce.

But Pollock is nothing if not clear-eyed and ambivalent. There is always more than one version of the story. In this case, she weaves a companion narrative, a relational story, in and out of Helen’s heroic revision of the Daddy story and evocation of her Alaskan epiphany, another light beam which interferes with Helen’s narrative and functions as a commentary, forcing the audience to see Helen’s story in a different light. This is the function of Thomas Edison and his statements in the play. While present and visible until, significantly, the last few seconds of the drama, Edison never interacts with the other characters and his dialogue focuses exclusively on the nature of motion pictures and the phonograph (two media in which he pioneered), and on the illusion of seeing movement and hearing music. However, his brief statements function as a complex intertext to the play and, from the start, film-making is an ironic and ambivalent metaphor for the life of Helen-Nell-Shipman. Pollock instructs her audience on this dramaturgical role of Edison right from the beginning of the play where she gives Edison and Shipman the exact same words, with diametrically different meanings:

EDISON: (*a victorious public statement describing his greatest achievement; savours the words as they grow in volume and power*) The . . . illusion . . . of . . . continuous . . . movement . . . through persistence . . . of vision the . . . illusion of continuous movement . . . through . . . persistence of vision
The Illusion of Continuous Movement (*the film freezes*) through
Persistence of Vision! (17)

Edison’s statement ²¹ ends the short tableau of Shipman, Nell, and Helen, their bodies

²¹ Edison’s words themselves repeat and loop like a reel of film and their frequency is three, like the number of cameras he later describes as required to capture a moving subject (48), the three facets/embodiments of Helen-Nell-Shipman on stage, and the tripartite narrative structure (beginning, middle, end) Nell earlier demanded of Shipman (22). In fact, the frequency of three appears throughout *Moving Pictures*. Additional examples include: Pollock’s stage direction of the opening tableau of Helen, Nell, and Shipman as “*three in one*” (17); Shipman’s use of sets of three phrases in her “real Mummy story” for rhetorical effect (47) and the significance of the number three in myth, fairy tale, and folklore (so much part of Shipman’s story); and even Helen’s assertion, in her Alaskan epiphany, about what was, is, and will be (49).

functioning as a screen even as they themselves seem to watch a film. This is followed by a brief pause and silence. Pollock's stage directions then say "*The image of the 'three in one' breaks apart*" (17) and the three women assume their separate activities. The next words, a repetition of Edison's, belong to Shipman:

SHIPMAN: (*considering the implications of the words as they apply to her – a personal intimate statement of her failure*) The illusion of continuous . . . movement . . . through persistence of vision The illusion of . . . (*pause*) I . . . have nothing to say [. . .] (18)

The public male voice is of authority and success; the private female voice is of powerlessness and failure—though, of course, contrary to Shipman's claim, she will have much to say. The irony and ambivalence are elegantly established.

But that is not all. The very words of Edison's statement, articulating one of the central metaphors of the whole play, contain inherently ambivalent meanings. In Western culture, "illusion" usually has a negative moral connotation. An illusion is something false and manipulative, as well as something performative and entertaining (and we know that the idea of theatre, entertainment, has its own negative moral valuations); an illusionist is a magician, someone who both creates wonder (through ingenuity and skill) and fools people; illusions have elements of the occult and the scientific. "Persistence" and "movement," in a society which values hard work, tenaciousness, enterprise, progress, speed, and change, usually have positive connotations. "Vision" is again an ambivalent term. In its positive connotation, it means sight and, in the spiritual or aspirational sense, it means far-seeing, imaginative, creative²² (we speak of visionaries). But "vision" also partakes in the sense of "illusion,"²³ suggesting something false, a mirage, or the "supernatural,"²⁴ an apparition, a ghost.

Because Edison doesn't interact with other characters on stage, nor is he acknowledged in any way (except at the very end when Shipman looks at him and dismisses him and his words [96]), he appears to be a disinterested analytical presence in the drama. Also, the language and diction Pollock gives Edison are, on the literal level, technical, mechanical, scientific. His is the

²² "vision, n." Def. 1c, Def. 2. *OED Online*.

²³ "vision, n." *Merriam-Webster Online*, see synonyms.

²⁴ "vision, n." Def. 1a. *OED Online*.

proud but, on the whole, “objective” voice of science and descriptive observation, contrasted with the emotional, conflicted, and very subjective voices of Helen-Nell-Shipman and the other characters. However, there is yet another irony and a relational story in the figure of Edison: while he appears as the triumphant and objective voice of science and invention, it is well known that Thomas Edison was also a showman who was willing to bend the truth to achieve his goals.²⁵ Specifically, in the context of *Moving Pictures*, Edison’s enterprise, the business of his invention, is the creation of an illusion. His cameras and his films only give the *appearance* of capturing their subject in motion.

Let us now return to Helen’s heroic story-telling and focus our attention on what I have so far bracketed: the companion speech of Edison in this scene. It is Edison’s second and most extended passage in the drama and it weaves in and out of Helen’s retelling of her father’s death, all the way to the end of her Alaskan epiphany. As Helen begins her story, addressing Nell and then Shipman, Edison describes the use of three cameras to capture a subject’s movement, just as Pollock uses Helen, Nell, and Shipman to represent one woman. Is Pollock alerting the audience to the illusion she is creating for us on stage? And, if the three women are like Edison’s three cameras, then who, or what subject, do they capture? The easy answer would be the “real” Nell Shipman, never fully to be illuminated by any one or group of stories, like Pollock’s crystalline truth hanging in the dark. Certainly, we are reminded of Nell’s earlier reference to a fourth Nell Shipman. Though, clearly, this fourth Nell Shipman, who never grows old, is no more “real” than any other. However, of more interest is the possibility that *Moving Pictures* captures not only some facet of a historical woman but another subject (or subjects) all together: for example, story-telling, truth and lie, artistic ambition, the relational tensions between self and family/community. After all, recalling the film metaphor, cameras are usually not their own subject(s).

Indeed, as Helen re-envisioned Daddy’s death and Nell’s mourning, Edison speaks of illusions: “Persistence of Vision is the Central Illusion,” he pronounces (48). And as Helen

²⁵ Edison, inventor and proponent of DC current, famously tried to discredit the use of AC current (invented by Nicolas Tesla) as a standard for the distribution of electricity, by exaggerating its danger through staged demonstrations where he or his employees publically electrocuted animals using AC current. In 1903, Edison even killed an elephant by electrocution, filmed the event, and released the film later as *Electrocuting an Elephant* (Long n.p.).

describes her foundational experience, running under the Alaskan aurora with her husky companion, and articulates its personal meaning for her, Edison brackets her speech with cautionary advice:

HELEN: Everyone thinks you're the girl from Somewhere Away. From Not Where You're At. Isn't that funny? What does it mean?

EDISON: There is a tendency to overheat if the picture passes too close to the light source.

HELEN: I know what it means! [. . .] The Northern Lights are out, and I run with the dog, my feet pounding the ground with great shafts of light overhead. [. . .] *I'm turning the earth with my running under a kaleidoscope sky.* [. . .] that's how it was, and that's how it is, and that's how it always will be!

SHIPMAN: Was it ever really like that?

EDISON: (*fading although still audible*) This defect is not a major problem so long as the moving picture stays within certain parameters and distance from the source.

NELL: Priest Lake?

HELEN: We aren't playing that story.

SHIPMAN: Not yet.

NELL: But soon. (49)

Clearly, Pollock invites the audience to connect Edison's words to Helen's account of the past and the women's subsequent dialogue, to interpret the relational stories together, to see the connection between the stories and not just the individual stories themselves.

Pollock gives us two light sources in the scene: Helen's Northern Lights and the light bulb in Edison's film projector. Both light sources illuminate and make possible a vision. The projected film which is too close to its light source overheats and melts, destroying the illusion of movement. In Western culture, light is often associated with clarity and truth. The suggestion is that, for Helen-Nell-Shipman, getting too close to the truth endangers the illusion of movement, the artistic endeavour, the story and the telling of the story—which, for Helen-Nell-Shipman, is also the life and the living of the life. This also echoes the issues of truth and trust in the Dumka the Wolf story (which I will discuss later in the chapter) and with Shipman's later assertion that Nell is "a danger" (74) "[t]o herself. And to others" (75) as a "maker of fiction [. . .] [a] liar" (75). It is also an example of the ambivalent duality of distance and proximity which is one of the broader concerns of this study.

Thus we have examples of multiple and relational stories on many different levels in

Moving Pictures. The whole sequence of multiple familial stories we have just explored (the four Mummy stories, two Daddy stories, the Barry story, and Helen’s Alaskan epiphany) are related to each other like a series of internal intertexts: one story prompts the telling of another, a subsequent story changes the meaning of an earlier one, and the combination of sequential stories creates meanings different from those of each discrete story. We also see that story-telling can serve both as a means to avoid getting too close to a truth and as a life-sustaining activity. This points to the second perspective from which I explore relational story-telling: story-telling as a way of “doing” relationships.

The Purposes and Effects of Relational Story-Telling: “Doing” Relationships

There are myriad ways of enacting a relationship, of being in-relation with others. For example, cleaning a polluted river together, playing on a sports team, singing in a choir, sitting in silent meditation together, are all ways of being in-relation which do not necessarily or specifically involve story-telling. One might argue that in each situation a “story” is being created and enacted, whether it is one of individuals uniting to improve the environment, the creation of art and beauty, or community through joint action. However, here, I am using the notion of story and story-telling in a more literal sense. For a significant number of Pollock’s characters, the act of story-telling is a primary means of relating to one another. Let me illustrate briefly what I have in mind through a scene from one of Pollock’s plays. *Doc* contains many good examples, including Bob’s impassioned story of Red Roberts, but the one which first inspired my notion of story-telling as a way of “doing” relationships is the quiet short scene between young Katie and her “Uncle” Oscar. I discussed the second half of this scene, with respect to inheritance, in chapter two of this study:

(Shift)

CATHERINE: Uncle Oscar?

(OSCAR looks at KATIE as if it was she who had spoken. KATIE holds her shoe out to him.)

Fix my shoe.

KATIE: It’s got about a million knots – but keep talking.

CATHERINE: I want to know everything.

OSCAR: Construction work in the summer, hockey in the winter, and when we went to McGill, they’d bring him home on the overnight train to play the big games, the important games - and that’s how he

paid his way through medical school.

KATIE: Keep talking.

OSCAR: My father was their family doctor – I was there at his house the night his brother George died from the influenza – and that left him, and his sister Millie and his Mum and Dad.

CATHERINE: My Gramma.

KATIE: What was she like?

OSCAR: Proper. United Church. Poor and proper.

(OSCAR gives KATIE back her shoe)

That's all I remember.

(KATIE hits OSCAR with the shoe)

KATIE: Remember more! (41-42)

Pollock creates a moment of gentleness and caring, and a rare instance of a need fulfilled, within a play full of tension, conflict, and unmet needs and desires. Here, Katie explicitly asks Oscar for stories about her parents—“keep talking” and “remember more!” she insists—and Oscar complies. In this case, the act of telling-stories brings Oscar and Katie together. It also brings Katie closer to her parent and her grandparent.

Grace discusses the positive relational possibilities of “mirror talk,” the autobiographical story-telling with a sympathetic and empathetic other/interlocutor, in her exploration of Pollock’s *Blood Relations* (*Making Theatre* 208-221). But individuals have multiple and often conflicting desires, and thus story-telling, even such as that between Miss Lizzie and the Actress, fulfills multiple functions.²⁶ And not all relationships are positive and caring. If story-telling can be a

²⁶ I believe the relationship between the two women and the purposes and effects of their joint story-telling are more ambivalent. There is malice and violence at work as well as empathy. The theatre of Miss Lizzie demands of the Actress method acting at its most stereotypical extreme: literally experiencing and living the traumatic experiences of Miss Lizzie’s life as she re-creates it. Pollock once observed, in a comparison of the original 1980 Theatre Three and the subsequent 1981 National Arts Centre productions of *Blood Relations*:

Now the way it [the opening scene between Miss Lizzie and the Actress] was done at the National Arts Centre, with very little change in the lines, Miss Lizzy played the game not out of an effort to bring the Actress closer, but out of impatience – you know, you keep asking me that and asking me that; all right, you want to know what it’s like, I’ll show you what it’s like. Here. You live it. You feel what it was like to live in this God damned house. Maybe then you’ll stop asking me that fucking question. It was much more of an angry reaction, even malicious. I found that more interesting than the way we

(continued...)

means of being in relationship, then it can also be used to harm, punish, inflict pain, confuse, lie, control. For example, when you force someone, against their will, to tell a painful story, to recall and perhaps re-live a painful experience, to tell a story which is hard to tell, or to listen to a story which is painful to hear, then story-telling can be an expression of anger and a form of punishment or revenge. Surely, this is part of Shipman's objective in telling the "real Mummy story" (recall, once again, Pollock's stage directions that Shipman will "**force NELL to acknowledge true family history**" [35, emphasis added in bold]) and she achieves her goal. In a play where continuous "playing"—story-telling, speaking, noise-making—is parallel to living and life itself, then her assault on Nell and Helen and the silence she achieves can be seen as a violent act. And this use of story-telling is not new in Pollock's work, though it is perhaps most explicit in *Moving Pictures*.²⁷

In addition to story-telling as a means of enacting relationships, Pollock also uses the structure and form of a *joint* story-telling to symbolize a collaborative, close, or affectionate relationship. We have seen, in Helen and Nell's performance of "Three Little Maids," their collaboration, their shared skill in performance, their enjoyment of the activity of singing and dancing (playing together), and their shared resistance to Shipman's attacks. An even more fascinating example is a passage in *Angel's Trumpet* where Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, in the midst of a heated argument, mutual accusations, and bitter critiques of each other, suddenly break into rhyming couplets.

SCOTT: [. . .] You want to try opening that door when your head pounds! and
the bank's called! and her hand is out for a fox fur! and there's too many
parties we can't miss and

ZELDA: You're in a rage because of a kiss!

SCOTT: the damn car's on the fritz again

²⁶ (...continued)

had done it first time around. ("Sharon Pollock" 124)

²⁷ For example, in Pollock's drama, stories of ancestry and parental conduct (or misconduct) are often used to characterize (often negatively) the child. For example, Hopkinson's likely mixed ancestry is used in *The Komagata Maru Incident* to threaten and manipulate him. In *Angel's Trumpet*, Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald use stories about each other's parents to hurt each other: Zelda associates Scott's ambition and alcoholism with his poor alcoholic Irish father and Scott criticizes Zelda and attributes what he sees as her fickle and unrealistic self-indulgent behaviour to her permissive, rich, privileged mother and father.

ZELDA: We're up for an interview times ten!

SCOTT: Scribner's late with a small advance

ZELDA: you can't find a jacket to match your pants?

SCOTT: the literary hacks are hoping I fail

ZELDA: and the eviction notice?

SCOTT: has come in the mail!

ZELDA and SCOTT laugh. Pause and silence.

ZELDA: But you wrote. Marvelous stories. (191)

This leads to a gentler remembrance of a more companionable period in their lives, to an expression of love, but the respite from their fierce conflict is brief and they return to their antagonistic attacks.

ZELDA: My room was always thick with the fragrance of pears. . . . Sometimes I would slice off a piece and send it to you in a letter.

SCOTT: I love you. You know that. (*to RENTON*) She knows it.

ZELDA: (*to SCOTT*) But it's not about love, is it? (*to RENTON*) He tries to get into my room, and I'm asking you not to let him destroy my work.

SCOTT: Darling, darling, listen to me. I am at your door. I am trying to get in. The reason being, when you lock yourself in none of us in the house can rest easy.

ZELDA: I'm working in there. (192)

It seems to me the joint biographical story-telling and creation of poetry by Zelda and Scott, individuals whose sense of identity is constructed so much around being a writer and an artist, are excellent examples of “doing” relationship. The spontaneous play and risk taking (will my partner continue the rhyme or will I be left foolishly in an inappropriate mode of conversation?) demonstrate a level of trust and the challenge of poetry making allows them to delight in their skills as writers and to reinforce each other's identity as writers. The action of story-telling and poetry making, the fun they have together, the mutual affection and attention expressed, *is* the relationship, symbolizing a mutual knowing and familiarity—just as argument, insult, and telling damning stories of each other are the manifestations of the antagonistic, hurtful, form of their relationship. This passage is also an example of ambivalent misalignment in the relationship of Scott and Zelda and in Pollock's use of structure and form to represent it; conflict and mutual accusation co-exist with laughter and play; the rhythm of ordinary speech blends instantly into the artifice of formal poetry.

Another significant example of “doing relationships” via story-telling is Nell's account of

her relationship with the wild animals in the process of film-making. It is also an important comment by Pollock on her central figure Helen-Nell-Shipman and on story-telling itself. Typically, it also exhibits the ambivalence which is characteristic of Pollock's work. Here, Nell describes her communication with and manner of relating to her animals in a potentially dangerous situation. There are three central elements to Nell's practice of pacifying and controlling the dangerous animals: show no fear, maintain eye contact, talk and keep talking.

NELL: Never show fear. It grows and it spreads. Let them do what they want. Keep the film rolling. If Dumka the wolf wants to chew on my hair, don't move. Don't move. Pretend a slow soft awakening. Low baby babble of sound. Always that sound. Open eyes. Brown eye sees yellow. All caught by glass eye in black box. Lock brown eye with yellow. Film rolling. Keep rolling. If Brownie the bear hugs a little too tight, no fear. No fear. Glass eye, black box, babble words, almost words, always words, hear the words babble words always words you know me you trust me, trust me and know me and trust, the glass eye, the black box, the film, and the story. (75)

For me, the most intriguing element in this passage is that the verbal content of Nell's speech or "story" to the animals is unimportant. In fact, Pollock emphasises the *lack* of meaning; Nell's speech is a "baby babble of sound," "babble words," "almost words." The important elements are its continuity and contact through sight and sound. This continuous sound, showing no fear, and maintenance of eye contact ("brown eye with yellow") create a trance-like state which is echoed by Nell's speech pattern. Repetition is used heavily in this passage: the repetition of ideas ("Never show fear," "no fear," "No fear"; "babble sound," "babble words," "almost words"; "trust"), the repetition of phrases ("If Dumka the wolf wants to chew on my hair," "If Brownie the bear hugs a little too tight"), the repetition of words ("eyes," "sound," "you," "me").

At the same time, the very form of this passage mimics film, as it is articulated in the play. The sequence of short sentence fragments function as a montage, shifting the audience's focus amongst the sound, the animal, Nell, their eyes, and the camera with the rolling film. The sequence builds up to the final, long, breathless sentence, one third the length of the whole passage, repetitive and hypnotic. Nell's words lead to an assertion of relational closeness between Nell and her beloved animals—"you know me you trust me"—then continues seamlessly into the inanimate and mechanical world of the "glass eye, the black box, the film, and the story." If the sentence fragments in the first two thirds of the passage are individual frames of film, then this last sentence is, in Nell's words: "[f]ilm rolling. Keep rolling." In the

midst of this barrage of words, Nell names three key issues which permeate this play and much of Pollock's work—knowing, in terms of relationships; trust; and story: “you know me you trust me, trust me and know me and trust, the glass eye, the black box, the film, and the story.”²⁸ Pollock's writing captivates the audience just as Nell captivates her semi-wild animals. And Shipman's response, immediately following Nell's hypnotic monologue, is equally important: “Trust? . . . Trust you? . . . And the story. . . . Trust in the Story, and Telling the Story?” (75). Notice also Shipman's capitalization of the word “Story,” both elevating it into superior status and casting ironic doubt on it. What Shipman (like Pollock) questions here is the ethics of story-telling: issues of responsibility, trust, and truth.²⁹

In terms of story-telling and story-telling as a means of doing relationships, this story of Dumka the wolf can be interpreted in at least two ambivalent ways. On one hand, it can be seen as an example of a more truthful and honest form of communication which does not depend on the verbal content of the speech act, but rather, exists on the level of phatic communication where sociability dominates ideas, where truthful emotions are conveyed rather than truthful words due to a more elemental pre-verbal means of communication. Recalling one of Nell's favourite concepts, the “essence” of the relationship between human and animal is enacted without meaningful human words. The real Nell Shipman had written in her autobiography, *The Silent Screen and My Talking Heart*: “Animals did not speak and therefore did not lie. They made no false promises, betrayed no trusts. To the least of them they lived in truth, acted as Nature dictated, wore no false masks of pretended friendship. [. . .] They killed to feed, not as Humans who murdered with words and left a mangled victim” (13). Here, between human and animal, there are no words with which to lie or kill. Truth and trust are established through an inarticulate but very real connection, empathy, mutual “know[ing].” On the other hand, a more

²⁸ In fact, this use of the concept “to know” and to be known and the particular phrasing: “you know me” appeared years earlier in *Blood Relations*, in Miss Lizzie's description of her relationship with her beloved birds: “Most of the time they were dull . . . and stupid perhaps . . . but they weren't really. They were . . . hiding I think . . . They knew me. . . . They liked me” (29).

²⁹ Later in the play, Helen, Nell, and Shipman will all concur that Bert was “[t]oo trusting” (80), a point I will discuss later in the chapter. Pollock has been interested in the issues of responsibility, trust, and truth in story-telling through out her career. To name one of many examples: in *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, a play first produced 16 years earlier, she uses the effects of the charismatic story-teller Mr. Big and examines the power relationships between people, the stories they tell each other, and issues such as truth, lie, and belief.

cynical interpretation of Nell's story is possible, one that observes the hiding of emotions ("Never show fear"), the pretense of connection ("Pretend a slow awakening"), and the very insignificance and absence of meaningful words and their specificity. After all, while Nell's narrative ends with a sudden reference to truth and trust, the immediate and ultimate goal of her communication is to produce a desired performance from her animals before the camera. Here, again, is ambivalence, the co-existence of opposing attitudes.

This second, more critical, interpretation is supported by the surrounding context of this passage as well as the network of stories in the play which relate to and resonate with it. Nell's story is inserted, almost as a non-sequitur, amidst a discussion between Nell and Shipman about truth and lie, which is itself placed within an account of Nell convincing Bert to join her in establishing a remote wilderness film studio at Priest Lake. Immediately before Nell's hypnotic speech, Shipman had just stated that when Nell says she is unafraid and thinks she can do anything, she is a liar and a danger to herself and to others (74-75). This conversation is abruptly interrupted by the voice of Pollock's Edison, which immediately prefaces Nell's story of Dumka the Wolf and the glass eye and black box:

EDISON: (*faintly*) the illusion of continuous movement with the appearance of truth is achieved through a persistence of vision in which the image dwells on the eye.

NELL: Never show fear. It grows and it spreads. [. . .] (75)

As elsewhere, Pollock uses Edison and the metaphor of film to comment on Nell's behaviour and enlarge the depth of meaning in the play. Key words and concepts resonate between Edison's and Nell's passages: illusion, appearance, pretense, image; persistence and continuity of eye contact, and the movement of film and sound/words; vision, image, and eyes; truth.

I can't help but see this striking story in terms of Nell's relation not only to her animals but to the people in her life, especially Bert. In a sense, Bert is like one of the wild animals in Nell's menagerie. All along, Pollock has portrayed Nell sharing her artistic vision with Bert, convincing him to join her in each of her projects. Like the animals, he too is mesmerized by her words and by her persistent vision of film-making. As the play traces Helen-Nell-Shipman's life, so it traces Bert's changing relationship with Nell. At their first encounter, Bert is cautious, as indicated by his "ah-huh"s:

BERT: So I say where are you shooting this film? And Nell looks over at Ernie and she knocks back her drink, bangs the glass down on the table, and she

says, she leans forward and says “God’s Country Mr. Van Tuyle.” I say ah-huh. She says “where elephants can walk on water, and so can I.” I say ah-huh. Ernie says “cut the bullshit Nell! It’s Lesser Slave Lake, middle of winter, so what do you say, Bert.” (28)

(Notice also that Bert, too, is a good story-teller.) In his next appearance a little later, Bert is already mesmerized by Nell and his caution has turned quickly to praise and admiration:

BERT: She’s got sparks coming out of her hair and ideas pouring out of her head, she’s got an eye for film and story, and a kick-ass attitude and by God if you aren’t willing and able to follow her out on the ice you better pack your bags and hightail it home. (*will exit the scene but not leave the stage*) She’s a beautiful woman . . . I can’t walk on water but she – she sure as hell . . . she sure as Hell . . .

HELEN (*yelling after him*) I sure as hell can! (33)

Pollock conveys the excitement of artistic endeavour and the growing relationship between Bert and Nell, while she also plants signs of ambivalence. Notice Ernie’s interjection calling attention to Nell’s “bullshit” exaggeration in the first scene and, in the second scene, Bert’s inability to complete the thought and finish his last sentence to affirm his belief in Nell’s abilities—and her stories.

Bert’s enthusiasm and belief gradually turn into frustration and disillusionment, and, finally, into hurt and violent retaliation. Nell’s misjudgements in business decisions lead to financial failures, culminating in an extreme winter at Priest Lake where the lack of heat and food due to poverty results in the starvation and death of many of Nell’s beloved animals, and Bert’s physical and psychological breakdown. At the end of the “Winter Tales” (84) of Priest Lake, Bert becomes, in effect, a wounded, dangerous, wild animal who feels betrayed by Nell and no longer believes or trusts in her, in her words, in her stories.³⁰ His painful words highlight her stories and challenge the audience to re-evaluate them, as he has:

Who said you were an actress? Who said it? I never said it! You couldn’t direct. No. No, I could direct! You couldn’t direct. I direct. What do you write? You write garbage and trash. You write little scenarios. Little – little notes. Little pieces of paper, not real writing. Little pieces of paper and I – I – I take them and I try – I try to make that garbage into story on film. Moving! Moving Pictures! [. . .] That’s what I do. I do it! This place is killing me. You are killing me. (89)

³⁰ However, unlike her beloved and unfortunate animals, he has a greater degree of freedom and choice and manages to survive.

Notice how Nell's stories are progressively diminished by Bert from "little scenarios" to "little notes" to "[l]ittle pieces of paper, not real writing." Bert will assault Nell and, soon afterwards, threaten her/Helen with a loaded gun and then turn the gun upon himself, as he pleads for a response from Nell:

(to the audience) Glamour. They all said she had glamour. [. . .] Do you think she's glamorous? . . . Do you think she's lovely? . . . Do you think you could love her? . . . I love her. . . . Yes, I do. I love her. [. . .] Glamorous screen star! Does that look glamorous to you? Does it? Destroys everything. Everything. Lose everything everything lost. [. . .] *(He shoves, throws, her towards the audience.)* Take her! Go on take her! I don't want her, you take her! You take her!!
[.....]

BERT: Don't leave me.

Pause. NELL and BERT lock eyes as he continues to point the gun at her.

HELEN: Play.

BERT: Please. . . . Nell!

BERT puts the gun to his own head. NELL makes no move to stop him.

(93)

Nell's lack of response, emotional and physical, may be interpreted as arising from complete exhaustion or shock, but it and their locked eyes also echo her earlier story of Dumka the Wolf and the "glass eye" and the "black box," its danger and emotional intensity, and her instructions: "Never show fear. It grows and it spreads. Let them do what they want. Keep the film rolling" (75).³¹ The tragic end of the "Winter Tale" of Priest Lake³² shows the limits of Nell's stories and the decay of trust between story-teller and audience.

Here, then, is the ethical issue of trust and story-telling appearing again in Pollock's work. It seems to me this decay of trust comes partly from the lack of reciprocity in Nell's relationships with significant, I will say "familial," others: her parents, her son, her lovers, her animals. She demands from these familial others belief in, trust in, and compliance with her

³¹ In her memoir, the real Nell Shipman's description of this encounter with Bert is full of film references and metaphors. She writes that Bert's "monologue was a speech any scenario writer would deem overdone" (156) and that "[. . .] I made no response. I might have been watching a series of subtitle cards turned into a soundtrack. I do not think I was afraid. Shooting me, seemingly the desired climax, still meant blanks although I knew the .38 clip was loaded and for real" (156-57).

³² Even I can't help but fall into Helen-Nell-Shipman's habit of seeing and referring to her life as a series of stories, complete with titles.

persistent vision of herself and her art, but Pollock gives us very few examples of Nell listening and paying attention to *their* stories and responding to *their* needs and demands.³³ In fact, what we do see are Nell's silence and denial. Pollock's writing fosters multiple interpretations, multiple beams of light, and she leaves it to her audience to struggle with these ambivalent issues. We are invited to celebrate and recognise Helen-Nell-Shipman's ability to persist in her artistic vision against traditional and patriarchal forces (social and artistic) and to mourn the relational costs (human and animal) of her personal and artistic self-fashioning. Her devotion to her art and identity as artist, to the neglect of her family and relation to others, is a feminist victory and a replication of the stereotypical romantic artist and of the narcissistic behaviour traditionally attributed to and accepted in male artists. It seems impossible for Helen-Nell-Shipman to envision and create an alternative to the two options, a balance of competing needs.

For myself, it is difficult to ignore the costs others paid for Helen-Nell-Shipman's choices and her art. For example, with respect to Priest Lake, while Bert ultimately had the ability to leave Nell, her animals did not. They (and young Barry) had no alternative than to trust her.³⁴ As

³³ In Nell's behaviour towards her family, we see echoes of Ev in *Doc* and Old Eddie in *Generations*, as well as Scott and Zelda in *Angel's Trumpet*.

³⁴ Similar issues of trust, choice, and responsibility occur in *Walsh*. Louis questions Walsh's promises of help to the Sioux, pointing out the gravity of the trust they place on him. Sadly, Walsh does not adequately "consider the consequences of [his] actions" (156), something he counsels when Sitting Bull chooses to stay at the fort. Instead, Walsh is ignorant of his own and his superiors' degree of trustworthiness.

LOUIS: [. . .] What can you do for Sittin' Bull?

WALSH: Everything within my power.

LOUIS: How much is dat?

WALSH: Say what you mean, Louis.

LOUIS: Louis choose to trust [Walsh], but da Indian can do nothin' else but trust. . . .

Trust . . . or die. . . . Sometime, trust *and* die. . . . Can da Major make da spring come for da Sioux?

WALSH: You trust in me . . . and I trust in those above me. . . . Quite simple, eh? . . .

Now let's get on. . . .

He goes to leave.

LOUIS: Da Indian say he would trust da Great White Mother more if she did not have so many bald-headed thieves workin' for her!

WALSH: *stopping and turning, angrily* The Sioux have a case . . . a strong case . . . and I shall present it!

LOUIS: *softly* Who stands behind you dere?

(continued...)

such, it may be argued that Nell's stories are a danger to herself and to others. Could she have imagined the end of her story better or differently (tell a different story), an issue Zelda Fitzgerald expresses (*AT* 194) in the quotation I give near the start of this chapter. I will discuss further the notions of reciprocity, imagination, and ethical choice in Pollock's drama in the next chapter. Before doing so, I would like to briefly explore one more form of relational story-telling as a means of "doing" relationships: that of telling stories to oneself and relating to oneself.

"Doing" Relationships with the Self: Self-Reflexive Story-Telling

While I have discussed story-telling as a means of enacting relationships with others, individuals also tell themselves stories (stories about themselves and others, about who they are, what they have done, the meaning and purpose of their actions and experiences), as scholars from many disciplines have observed and explored. Indeed, *Moving Pictures* is ultimately a memory play with Shipman, the only "real" character living in the "present" time of the drama, engaging in a prolonged internal dialogue with her selves and other figures from her past. A positive outcome of this form of relational story-telling might be self-reflexivity and self-awareness. The teller is different from the tale. Story-telling allows one the possibility of pausing and stepping outside of the living of the life to reflect on motives, meanings, choices. Pollock herself wrote, in her list of characters, that Helen, Nell, and Shipman "confront each other in the reconstruction of a life dedicated to the creation of play on stage and on screen. In that play, and in the transforming of her life experience into fiction, the woman discovers meaning that the actual living of her life did not reveal to her" (16). This does occur in the drama, though it suggests a privileging of the present and hindsight over the meanings and motives of the past. In addition, there is little agreement among the three selves on the meanings of their actions except for the closing scene which expresses the position that they had "no choice" (95-96) but to tell their stories, to play. This seems both heroic and suspect (ambivalence yet again).³⁵ Human agency and choice are

³⁴ (...continued)

WALSH: Honourable men!

Louis spits.

(157, emphasis in original)

³⁵ Helen and Nell have used the plea of necessity before. Earlier in the drama, Helen uses the terms "had to" and "have to" (72)—as if there was no other choice—to justify Nell's decision to alienate (continued...)

core moral values in Pollock's dramatic universe. Claiming one has "[n]o choice" can be a way of abdicating personal responsibility for one's actions.³⁶ Also, even if there is no choice but to tell stories, one might argue that one has the choice over which stories are told, how and to whom they are told, and for what purposes.

What is most ambivalent and troubling to me about the ending of *Moving Pictures* is precisely the nature of the relational story-telling which ends the drama. Pollock gives us a triumphant existential ending, with Helen, Nell, and Shipman united and in agreement at last, engaged in story-telling and "play" together. The ironic voice and relational intertext of Edison, describing that a reel of film in a projector must not be "too close to the light source" (95) or it will overheat and burn (thereby destroying the moving picture and its illusion of continuous movement) intervenes; it is acknowledged by Shipman, but she continues her "play" and Edison's light goes out (95-96). On the social and political level, some scholars have interpreted this ending as positive, a testament to the power of creative arts, artists, and women artists working in a patriarchal environment.³⁷ On the existential level, Pollock portrays a woman who refuses to give up, refuses to stop, even at the end of her life. Story-telling and "play" reach existential significance. Shipman wishes to stop writing, struggling, creating, but Nell states she will "never stop" because there is "no choice":

NELL: No choice!

EDISON: There is a tendency to overheat as the picture passes too close to the light source.

SHIPMAN: But we know the devil sits at the doorstep.

HELEN: Yes! But he'll never get in.

SHIPMAN: Why not?

HELEN: Because stories are barring the door! So – plaaaay. (95)

³⁵ (...continued)

the film industry and to convince Bert of her plan to sell everything and move to Priest Lake (72-73).

³⁶ For example, in *Fair Liberty's Call*, Annie Roberts challenges Anderson, insisting on the availability and responsibility of individual choice:

ANNIE: [. . .] And you could talk to me and laugh and call me Annie and kill me?

ANDERSON: If I had to.

ANNIE: Chose to. It's not them [the Loyalist men] choosin', is it? It's you. (71)

³⁷ For example, see Grace, "Creating" and "Sharon Pollock's Portraits."

Here, the imperative to “play” is synonymous with the will to live. Stories bar the door against the devil. Interestingly, it is the devil and not death who is at the door, so maybe stories keep one safe from despair, sin, greed, the selling of one’s soul.³⁸ An alternative interpretation is that the Faustian bargain has already been made and the devil sits awaiting payment. In any case, the women play together. In the terms articulated by Sherrill Grace, Helen, Nell, and Shipman are engaged in a form of relational story-telling. Grace argues that Pollock’s fictional Nell Shipman, in her ability to address herself as an other (as “you,” “she”), in Pollock’s very choice to embody the single self through three actresses, possesses an *intra*-relational consciousness, a depth and complexity in her awareness of the self, which is lacking in the self portrayed in the real Nell Shipman’s autobiography, *The Silent Screen and My Talking Heart* (“Creating” 105). That is one way of seeing relationality and the conclusion of the drama. But there are other light beams possible.

For me, the significance and strength of relational ways of thinking, whether in psychology or in story-telling, is its focus on the social and the contextual, as argued by modern and contemporary pioneers of relational psychology such as W.D. Winnicott, Carol Gilligan, Jessica Benjamin, and Stephen A. Mitchell. The focus on *intra*-relation, Helen-Nell-Shipman’s rich *intra*-relational life, is inward looking and independent of context. The value of relational story-telling, as I envision the practice, is that it is a means of being in-relation with *other subjects*, other individuals; it is a *social* activity.³⁹ I feel an ambivalent unease about the ending

³⁸ Pollock uses this same image of an artist defending her work and her survival against a destroying force at the other side of the door in *Angel’s Trumpet*. Here in *Moving Pictures*, the force is metaphorically named “the devil”; in *Angel’s Trumpet*, the force is Scott, outside Zelda’s door, and under discussion is the ambivalent forces of work (personal expression and ambition) and love:

SCOTT: I love you. You know that. (*to RENTON*) She knows it.

ZELDA: (*to SCOTT*) But it’s not about love, is it? (*to RENTON*) He tries to get into my room, and I’m asking you not to let him destroy my work.

SCOTT: Darling, darling, listen to me. I am at your door. I am trying to get in. The reason being, when you lock yourself in none of us in the house can rest easy.

ZELDA: I’m working in there. (192).

³⁹ Grace, in her discussion of Pollock and Catherine in *Doc*, in her later work *Making Theatre*, describes a relational self and relational story-telling closer to my perspective: “identity is always multiple and relational; you are who you are in relation to those around you, and you cannot tell your story without telling theirs or theirs without telling your own” (248).

of *Moving Pictures* because, while Helen-Nell-Shipman is united and imaginatively playing as one together, she is also alone and inward looking, like the “[t]hree little maids” of Gilbert and Sullivan, having fun but “car[ing] for none” (39). It is an image of artistic perseverance, but it is also an image of a lack of social connection. Interestingly, Paul John Eakin, one of Grace’s sources, critiques the notion of individual autonomy as false. For Eakin, traditional autobiography tends to promote “an illusion of self-determination: *I write my story; I say who I am; I create my self*” (“Relational Selves” 63, emphasis in original). He notes that even one’s models for identity are socially and culturally determined (“Relational Selves” 65).

Helen-Nell-Shipman, for all her admirable artistic effort, has withdrawn from social relationships. This is not unexpected, if identity is always an identity-in-relation, socially and culturally determined as Eakin and others suggest. For Helen-Nell-Shipman, relationships seem solely instrumental and self-serving. And by the end of the drama, she has retained few relationships. There is no one left who supports and reflects back to her her cherished and necessary identity as artist and creator except facets of her own self. Helen-Nell-Shipman is left telling stories to herself. The problem, when one believes everything is a story, is that everything is perceived to be subject to one’s narrative power. However, as Helen and Shipman remind Nell, there are some things which are not subject to revision. There are other subjects, beyond the self, who are not solely the objects of one’s narration/story-telling. To me, the ethos of relational thinking pays attention to the relationship individuals have with each other, not solely with their own selves. The presence of others (whether as listeners or competitive story-tellers) allows for the possibility of interference and disagreement (misalignment) and unforeseen change; it expands the possibilities of story-telling beyond what the self can imagine or create.⁴⁰

Recall Stone’s statement that:

[. . .] any one family story derives its meaning not only from daily family life but from the family’s entire jigsaw puzzle of stories. The meaning of any single family story will therefore appear as inevitable, from narrative context alone, to the family members who know the story and tell it. (106)

⁴⁰ It is possible to argue that one can address imaginary interlocutors (which, in a sense, is what Shipman is doing with Helen and Nell), but they are still the products of the self, challenging as they may be.

What this implies is that, for outsiders, who are not familiar with the collection of stories (the familiar and familial stories), the meaning is *not* inevitable—hence the risk (and opportunity) in telling stories to outsiders, strangers, others. (What Stone’s observation also suggests is that changing one story can have the potential of changing all the other inter-related stories too.) What holds for stories also holds for individuals within a family or a social groups. It is also instructive to see the uncanny resonance between Stone’s comment and Pollock’s story about the former mayor of Fredericton which prefaces the first chapter of this study. Here, Stone’s “one family story” occupies the same position as Pollock’s “the man himself” as one piece in a larger family jigsaw puzzle, whose shape, meaning, identity is apparently determined by the existing context, the “entire jigsaw puzzle” of stories and relations.

Change can also result from self-reflexivity. However, there is no evidence in *Moving Pictures* that Helen-Nell-Shipman, in her final unity, will tell new stories or change. In comparison, for example, George Roberts, in *Fair Liberty’s Call*, in the process of recounting his experience taking a war trophy from a fallen young rebel’s body, does see a new meaning and feel differently. Pollock’s stage directions indicate, “GEORGE, *in the telling, feels a sense of shame he hadn’t felt at the time*” (52). Near the end of that drama, George Roberts changes both himself and the stories he tells about himself. He acknowledges and names his actions, and presents himself to the Rebel Anderson: “I turned my back . . . on my oldest son . . . I turned my back on Richard . . . and Edward, I . . . Chose me” (73). Significantly, Joan responds: “I hear you Papa” (73). In *Moving Pictures*, there is evidence that Helen, Nell, and Shipman feel differently about their past actions, but they do not act upon this self-consciousness. In the midst of a memory of their past stage performances, they remember Bert:

HELEN: And behind Pantages Vaudeville House in Spokane? Who was it put the apple on top of his head? Who gave you the gun? It was loaded. And you just took twelve big paces, you turned and you fired!

NELL: I did. I just did it! I fired!

The three of them laugh.

SHIPMAN: You did, you fired. Ka-pow!

HELEN: One lucky shot! No takers for seconds! Who was it you called the Top Top Banana?

Pause as she realizes who that was, and what became of the top top banana; she has inadvertently brought up something that causes depression.

SHIPMAN: That was Bert.

NELL: Trusting.

SHIPMAN: Too trusting.

NELL: Followed precisely the advice he got for his foot the first time he froze it.

[.....]

NELL: Loved actors.

SHIPMAN: Loved me.

NELL: He believed. (80-81)

Helen, Nell, and Shipman do respond with sadness (and perhaps regret?) towards their personal relationship with Bert. However, what they name are Bert's actions ("too trusting," "loved me," "he believed"), not their own. Notice also that George Roberts refers to his earlier self as "I," acknowledging a continuity of identity and his responsibility for his past actions, while Helen, Nell, and Shipman use the pronouns "you" and "she." I concede that such self-knowledge and change may be unspoken, unscripted, but present, subtle and latent, to be expressed through the many rich, but non-textual, resources available to the theatre (lighting, pacing, gestures, tone of voice, etc.). However, Pollock gives us no evidence that Helen-Nell-Shipman tells *new stories*, even to herself. New stories, different actions, personal (and hence social) change would require a greater effort of ethical imagination and social responsibility, which is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Five

The Net of Stars

If, as I suggested in the previous chapter, story-telling, in life and in Pollock's dramas, is a means of "doing" relationships between people, then those factors and qualities upon which desirable relationships in story-telling, between teller and listener, are built may also pertain to social relationships in general. *Moving Pictures* suggests that some of the factors necessary for a positive and ethical relationship, as well as true communication, include: trust, reciprocity, care, honesty, and attention. In *Moving Pictures*, Pollock explores these issues in the context of individual and familial relationships, involving Helen-Nell-Shipman and her familial others. But Pollock's interests and dramas extend beyond the family to the community and its larger variants: the nation and even the globe. In this chapter, I return to the consideration of the kinship idiom and ambivalent misalignment as a broader social condition and as a dramatic and linguistic structure in Pollock's work. In many of Pollock's dramas, while individuals and groups yearn for relationships within an idealised caring family and community-as-family, her actual representations of these relationships, often based on the nuclear family, are overwhelmingly negative and dysfunctional. Many of her characters yearn for something which, in their own experiences, doesn't work. Yet, instead of discarding the notion of family, they seek a transformation of the old, just as, at the end of *Fair Liberty's Call*, Eddie (formerly Emily) explains to her mother a new relationship between them, as well as a "new world":

JOAN: What happened to Em'ly?

EDDIE: She's still here, Mama.

JOAN: She's gone.

EDDIE: She's changed.

JOAN: [*looking into EDDIE's face*] Eddie. Let me look at your face from a distance.

EDDIE: It's a new world, Mama—you gotta look up close.

JOAN: Up close. (78)

In this chapter, I explore the ambivalent ethical values or concerns which seem to me central to

stars in the darkness of space, a constellation. As stated earlier, I am drawn to the image of a constellation because of the space between its constituent stars and the fact that, while they appear fixed in place, stars are not static. Over time (albeit a long time), the shape of a constellation will change. The definition of a constellation is also flexible and contextual. Different observers in different cultures, different times, and different locations have created different constellations from the same stars. Thus, constellations are simultaneously stable and dynamic, congenial to a perspective which pays attention to ambivalence.

Individuals, families, and communities are like the numerous stars in a night sky. Different forces, relationships, or “angles of observation” can bring them together into a unified design or fling them apart into randomness. I am interested in Pollock’s exploration of viable communities, meaningful constellations. Individuals, families, and communities in Pollock’s drama struggle to balance the ambivalent needs for distance and proximity, work (or ambition) and love, justice and care, and action and imagination. These ambivalent needs are expressed not only in the plots of the dramas but in Pollock’s use of language, especially her choice of metaphors and her staging choices.

After reflecting upon these dualities, I realised that the theme of distance and proximity functions more as a general conceptual metaphor, encompassing the other binaries, than as a separate issue specifically articulated by Pollock’s plays. It is, however, a useful concept in that each element of the remaining binary demands (ambition/work and love, justice and care, action and imagination) brings individuals either farther apart or closer together. In addition, the metaphor of distance and proximity is my response to and echo of images found in the two quotations above. In the scene between Joan and Eddie from *Fair Liberty’s Call*, Pollock uses the metaphor of relative distance and proximity (“from a distance” and “up close”) to express issues of vision (“look[ing]”), identity, knowing/recognition, and changing relationships in a “new world.” Here, again, the ambivalent tension of opposing views is in play. While Joan attempts to see “from a distance,” in perspective, so that she can grasp the whole and the individual in context, Eddie insists on proximity, closeness, the immediate and detailed view. In *Getting It Straight*, as I have suggested earlier, the shape of a constellation depends on several factors, including the spatial relation between its constituent stars: how far (or near) they are from each other, where they “stand” in relation to each other. (Of course, “far” and “near” are also inherently relational terms.) In addition, Eme invokes a perspective which invites the audience

(“you / and I”) not only to spin the gossamer net together but also to stand at a distance (“if a / person stood on the far left star of the utmost / edge of cassiopeia’s chair”), look back from a different perspective, and evaluate, confirm, affirm the results of their work together. Her vision encompasses both proximity and the collective (women working creatively together) as well as distance and the individual (a person standing far away and assessing the outcome of that work).¹

Regarding the binary of work and love, I envision work in terms of an expression of personal ambition and means of self-expression, and love in terms of the love for others (people, living beings, community) rather than for some material good or abstract ideal. It is as such that I have explored this ambivalent duality in preceding chapters of this study. For example, Helen-Nell-Shipman’s life choices can be and are expressed in these terms, but she is not alone of Pollock’s characters. The valuation of work/ambition/self over familial relations/others, or the inability to balance the two apparently competing demands, is found in many of Pollock’s plays.² In the dramatic world of Sharon Pollock, loved ones and the community more often represent hindrances rather than supports in an individual’s quest for self-expression. In fact, the two demands seem incompatible. Over and over again, the question of love and concern for an other in decision making about one’s own goals or identity is bracketed, unresolved, unanswered, impossible to answer. In many cases, there is also an evasive misalignment of question and answer, For example, in *Blood Relations*, when Lizzie asks her father about her mother “[d]id you love her?”, his immediate reply is “I married her” (57) and Lizzie soon afterwards describes her mother’s death as a difficult and conscious choice, despite the fact that “she loved us so much” (58). *Doc* is peppered with questions of love which are unanswered and claims of love which are either unacknowledged or refused.³ In *Moving Pictures*, Nell has difficulty refuting

¹ In fact, *Getting It Straight* invokes vast extremes of size, distance, and time: from atoms and mustard seeds to galaxies, from the woman next to you to an observer light years away, from the past to the present and the future. It is also a relative cosmic universe where not only the distances between stars, but the dimensions of train stations, are measured by units of time “[. . .] my / grandfather / works for a railway sells tickets in a rust red / station house 4 seconds by 3” (95).

² Examples include: *Doc*, *Walsh*, *Komagata Maru Incident*, *Moving Pictures*, *End Dream*, *Angel’s Trumpet*.

³ For example, Katie asks Oscar why Ev married Bob and why Oscar didn’t; Oscar replies, referring to Ev and Bob, “He loved her” and “She loved him” (50). Neither answer satisfies Katie.

(continued...)

Shipman's accusation that she loved work more than Daddy, Ernie, and Barry (43). In *Angel's Trumpet*, when Scott tells Renton that he loves Zelda (despite his determined attempt to prevent her from writing), she replies: "But it's not about love, is it?" (192). Significantly, exceptions are found in *Getting It Straight* and *Fair Liberty's Call*, which I will discuss shortly.

In this chapter, I will focus on the remaining two dualities: the need to accommodate the ambivalent demands of justice and care and of action and imagination as conditions for ethical humane communities. While these concerns are present in many of Pollock's plays, I will focus my discussion on where I feel they are most clearly articulated, *Fair Liberty's Call* and *Getting It Straight*. Both plays describe and address communal, national, and international issues and contexts. While this is not unique in Pollock's work,⁴ *Fair Liberty's Call* and *Getting It Straight* are arguably the most explicitly so and, more importantly, the most hopeful and utopian in their conclusions, imaginary and provisional as they are. Both plays also highlight not only the need to make ethical decisions but to take action. For example, at the end of *Fair Liberty's Call*, Major Williams points out to Eddie (and the audience) that "You're makin' a choice right now" (77) about the future of the country. Meanwhile, in *Getting It Straight*, Eme asks the audience to determine what kind of society and world it will create: "What're you gonna do?" and "what would it [the gossamer net] spell?" (126).

While it is beyond the scope of this study to explore the production history of each play in detail, it is a significant influence on their scope and style. More so than many other Pollock plays, both can be seen as originally intended for an international, as well as a domestic, audience. *Getting It Straight* was produced by Women in the Arts for the 1988 International Women's Festival in Winnipeg, Manitoba (Grace, *Making Theatre* 268). It premiered with Pollock herself in the role of Eme. Much of the mono-drama had its origins in "Egg," a much

³ (...continued)

Later, Oscar does not reply when both Katie and Catherine ask whether he loved Bob (71, 72). Alternative, Ev tells Katie, "She [Bob] loves you," to which Katie replies "I don't love her" and he insists, "Yes you do" (102); when Bob tells Ev "You don't love me, you never loved me!", his only reply is "Go to bed" (103); and finally, when Bob suggests Gramma Kate's letter contains charges of neglect against Ev, he tells Katie, "Your grandma loves us" (118) and she replies, "Why don't you open it?" (118).

⁴ Other Pollock plays which are set in a communal, national, or international context include *Walsh*, *Komagata Maru Incident*, *Blood Relations*, *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, *One Tiger to a Hill*, *The Making of Warriors*, and *Saucy Jack*.

larger, incomplete and unstaged, multimedia project commissioned by Theatre Calgary for the 1988 Olympic Arts Festival in Calgary.⁵ The opportunity of a much more explicitly feminist and political production outside of the mainstream context (though much more limited in financial resources) no doubt gave Pollock the opportunity to experiment radically, producing a play unique in terms of both her theatrical voice and form. Meanwhile, *Fair Liberty's Call* was commissioned by the Stratford Festival in Stratford, Ontario, and premiered in 1993. The resources of one of the largest professional theatre companies in the country accommodated the larger cast and Stratford's Shakespearean focus partially explains the classically comedic ending of the drama, where external danger, Anderson's vengeance, is averted; internal tyranny, Major Williams, is expelled from the community; and the remaining characters pair off in "romantic couples" to build the future: Joan and George, Annie and Daniel, Eddie and Wullie.

However, not surprisingly for Pollock, even her two most hopeful plays are guardedly so. The comedic ending of *Fair Liberty's Call* is both provisional and penultimate: Annie has refused Daniel's marriage proposal and it is unclear how Eddie, a woman living her life as her dead twin brother, and Wullie, a black man and former slave, will make a successful life together and how much true freedom ("liberty") they will have in the New Brunswick of 1785. In addition, even as the "romantic" couples pair off in pastoral fashion, the audience's focus is directed at two other simultaneous scenes: Joan's second account of her encounter with the red woman and the final reversion of the stage to the primordial wilderness of the opening scene. Meanwhile, in *Getting It Straight*, there is continuing ambivalence and ambiguity. While Eme imagines a solidarity amongst women, we are equally aware of existing tensions and conflicts, the examples of which include Eme's relationship with her mother and Eme's explosive violence

⁵ "Egg" itself was a revision of another unrealised project: "God's Not Finished With Us Yet," a musical version of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, commissioned by the Vancouver Playhouse for Expo '86 (Brennan F1). For a detailed production history of *Getting It Straight*, see chapter seven of Sherrill Grace's *Making Theatre: A Life of Sharon Pollock*. *Getting It Straight* also contains interesting elements from much earlier scripts dating back to the 1970s. For example, a typescript outline by Pollock for a television play titled "That was before, this is now" (ca. 1970s) describes George Roberts, a former railroad man now institutionalised, and his children, Edward (the eldest and a lawyer), Mary, and Bob. George, like Eme's grandfather, is mentioned as being a "retired railway man" and, at one point, "discovered bound for Winnipeg on a train. returned home by the police" (n.p.). The scenario ends with Lance, Edward's son, departing in a car, waving goodbye to George who stands at "screened window" (n.p.). One can see that elements of the character constellations (names and relationships) in "That was before" also appear in later plays such as *Generations* and *Fair Liberty's Call*.

towards Freida and Myrna. At the end of the play, Eme's question is left unanswered—to be answered, outside the frame of the drama. With these provisions in mind, let us first consider *Fair Liberty's Call* and the ambivalent ethical demands of justice and care.

The Kinship Idiom and the Languages of Justice and Care

ANNIE: [. . .] We oughta be lookin' to a better world for our children. That's the only way to serve our brothers. (*Fair Liberty's Call* 71)

The ambivalent claims of justice and care are best illustrated by Act II of *Fair Liberty's Call*. As demonstrated earlier in chapter three, *Fair Liberty's Call* is a rich and complex play which encompasses a network of issues including the history of our country, social inequities and the desire for justice, familial and social relationships, and loss and mourning. Inter-connected as these concerns are within the play, it is the differences in moral orientation and decision making, as it pertains to the relationship between the individual and the community, which are the focus of this section. What I wish to focus on here is how its dualistic staging and the stark differences in the form and content of the communication practised by the two groups on stage dramatically represented the concerns of moral decision making.

At the end of Act I, Wullie, an illiterate freed slave, arrives to ask his friend Eddie Roberts to read and to confirm the details of a contract he had signed recently with Frank Taylor. Black Loyalist veterans, though promised equal land allotments and food rations by the British and colonial governments, have received neither. Driven by poverty and a threat to his freedom,⁶ Wullie had agreed to one year's indentured service for Taylor. To Wullie's dismay, though not to his or anyone's surprise, Eddie's examination of the contract reveals that Taylor had lied to Wullie. The contract Wullie signed was for thirty-nine years, not one. And, as the Major eagerly points out, even though Frank was now dead, Wullie is now "property. He goes with the goods and the rest of the real estate" (57). Wullie's predicament leads the Major to suspect him of

⁶ Rebel-owned slaves who ran away and fought for the Loyalists were granted a certificate of freedom by the Loyalists. Loyalist slaves who fought for the Loyalists were not freed after the war. Wullie had no proof of being Rebel-owned and Eddie had forged a certificate of freedom for him, a fact that Frank Taylor discovered and used to blackmail Wullie back into slavery.

murdering Taylor. Before the status of Wullie is cleared, Anderson, who had presented himself as a fellow Loyalist, suddenly fires a shot into the air, then points his rifle at the men and women, and the lights go to black.

As Act II begins, Anderson reveals himself to be an American Rebel, a “Patriot Son of Liberty” (60). He informs his hosts that he wants “[j]ustice” (60) for the murder of his younger brother who was killed by Tarleton’s Legion at the battle of Waxhaws after the Rebels had surrendered. Not only does Anderson seek revenge, he also requires that the Loyalist veterans acknowledge their responsibility for killing his brother by selecting who, amongst themselves, will be his victim (62-63). I have discussed this act earlier in the context of loss and mourning. At present, my focus is on ethical decision making and how the community responds to Anderson’s challenge.

At first, the men refuse to choose, disclaiming responsibility for an enemy’s death in the midst and confusion of battle. In fact, it is unclear if anyone can even identify which of the Rebel soldiers was Anderson’s brother. However, Anderson shoves Annie to the ground and threatens to kill her if they do not make a choice. Pollock’s stage directions then state:

[DANIEL, GEORGE, *the* MAJOR, WULLIE *and* EDDIE *move away to consult while* JOAN *approaches* ANDERSON *slowly, tentatively.* ANNIE *is still down.* *The light will gradually dim on* JOAN, ANDERSON *and* ANNIE, *which isolates the men and* EDDIE] (64)

Throughout the rest of the play, the lighting will cross-fade, directing the audience’s attention alternatively between the two groups, structurally and dramaturgically emphasizing their different manners of responding to their dilemma. In one area of the stage, the men and Eddie debate amongst themselves in an attempt to meet Anderson’s demand while, in another area, Joan and Annie converse with Anderson. Ultimately, the men and Eddie fail to come to a conclusion and, while they are still deliberating, the women simply tell Anderson he can go (as if they were in control of the situation, not Anderson). Surprisingly, he does, without his desired victim.

JOAN: [*to* ANDERSON] I can see you now.

ANNIE: Go.

JOAN: [*to* ANDERSON] You can go now.

[JOAN *holds out her hands.* *A pause.* ANDERSON *places the pistol in her hands.* *He exits.*] (75)

Of course, it is not as simple as that. Much transpires between Anderson's threat of revenge and his peaceful exit. Anderson's presence and his demand force each member of the community and the community as a whole to examine their relationships with each other. At one point Annie asks Anderson, "And you could talk to me and laugh and call me Annie and kill me?" to which he replies, "If I had to" (71). A while later, Joan tells them: "Oh don't talk of killin', talk of talk and namin' and talk" (71). Clearly, the women are calling Anderson's attention to alternative ways of interaction and relationship. While it may be a common sentiment that, during any conflict, the hope of a peaceful resolution remains as long as the parties continue to speak to each other, and while this belief may be valid, further examination is required to pay due merit to Joan's intriguing imperative. What kinds of "talk" exist within the play and to which of these may Joan be referring? What different approaches to ethical decision making and what models of community relationships do these forms of "talk" indicate? What approach will lead the men and women in the forest clearing out of their dilemma and offer a peaceful solution to Anderson's threat of violence?

Pollock's representation of how the two groups respond differently to this threat towards the community and this moral dilemma is remarkably similar to the duality between the "justice orientation" and the "care orientation" formulated by psychologist Carol Gilligan, as discussed in the first chapter, and subsequent scholars following Gilligan's feminist research on moral development and relational psychology. I find Gilligan's ideas particularly useful for thinking about Pollock's drama because of her focus on language and speech, her interest in listening to a speaker's "voice" as a "key for understanding the psychological, social, and cultural order" (*Different* xvi). Joan and Annie's response to Anderson and their ability to bring about a peaceful resolution to the community's ethical dilemma seem to exemplify Gilligan's conception of the "ethics of care" and its efficacy. It is not my objective to fit Pollock's work into a pre-existent theoretical template, rather, it seems to me that *Fair Liberty's Call*, particularly in Act II, represents an uncanny parallel to Gilligan's ideas, which in turn offer me a useful vocabulary to discuss the play, as well as Pollock's other works, with greater clarity and precision.

To begin, let us return to the two groups in the forest and look more carefully at their dialogue. As the evening becomes dawn over the duration of the act, the lighting alternates six times between Joan, Annie, and Anderson, on one side and the Loyalist men and Eddie, on the other, highlighting their differences. In this series of exchanges, Pollock dramatises two

approaches to the moral dilemma created by Anderson. On one side, the men and Eddie argue and debate and vote. They insist that the decision of who will be sacrificed to Anderson be reached reasonably, as a group, with fairness and deliberation. On the other side, Joan and Annie make no attempt to select a victim for Anderson. Instead, they tell stories, personal familial stories of loss, betrayal, and sacrifice.

First, on the men's side, George makes an appeal for voluntary sacrifice, should the veteran who killed Anderson's brother be in the group, but Daniel rejects this on the basis of the rights to self-preservation and non-interference: "If that person don't choose to step forward then that person don't step forward. Ain't nobody going to point their finger at nobody" (65). The Major also rejects George's proposal, this time, on the familiar grounds of war-time innocence and group solidarity: "We all be guilty and we all be innocent. We were followin' orders and responsibility and murder don't come into it" (65). However, this claim for equality is invalidated when evidence of inequalities based on social differences are pointed out by those who have experienced them: differences between those of higher and lower military rank (Eddie notes: "Nothin' goes up the ladder, it always comes down" [65]), differences between soldier and civilian (George, as a civilian, was not in the Battle of Waxshaw [65-66]), differences between men and women:

EDDIE: And Annie?

MAJOR: Not women!

DANIEL: Women don't come into it! (66)

The irony, of course, is that Eddie is a woman. Finally, there is the inequality between Whites and Blacks. While the Major tells the group that the chosen individual will die knowing that the Rebel will be caught and hanged for his crime, Daniel gives voice to Wullie's doubt: "Ain't never been a white man hanged for killin' a black" (66).

Subsequent methods of decision making prove equally ineffective. Daniel's suggestion of drawing straws (i.e., chance) is rejected by the Major as uncivilized (65). The Major's pseudo-judicial attempt to find Wullie guilty of murdering Frank Taylor, hence acceptable as a scapegoat, is challenged by Eddie as ultimately unjust, despite the Major's use of the form and the language of the court. (For example: they speak of "the accused," a "[j]udge," a "[p]rosecutor," and the group function jury-like to vote on Wullie's guilt or innocence. The Major also dismisses information as "unsubstantiated" [69].) Finally, in exasperation, the Major

insists “[y]ou don’t choose a man for death without some kind of due process,” to which Eddie states: “Perhaps there’s no such thing” (69).

In the end, George quietly proposes one last method. In contrast to the preceding heated discussions and mock trial, George’s slow hesitant speech draws focus and emphasises the gravity of his proposal.

GEORGE: Would it be right to say . . . that some . . . not just us here now, but at large, some are more valuable to the community and all . . . do you understand what I’m sayin’?

WULLIE: This one understands—it’s the kind of thing a coloured man don’t have no trouble at all understandin’

GEORGE: Such things are generally understood You can’t have people without you have some kind of relationship between people, some kind of rankin’, some kind of value put on their contribution and placement.

MAJOR: Go on.

GEORGE: Does it make some kind of sense that the least valuable to the community be the one that we choose, if choose we must?

MAJOR: All to be done equal and democratic. (70)

George’s criterion, “value,” highlights again Pollock’s interest in questions of worth. His method appeals to reason, shared social values, communal understandings, universal beliefs, but it too fails. Wullie’s understanding, based on his experience of racism, already hints at inherent problems. Equally problematic is the quick slippage in George’s terminology from “relationship” to “rankin’,” to “value,” and finally to “placement.” George, the former Boston merchant, speaks as if human beings were commodities with easily determined “value” to the community, but how does one define, determine, quantify, the “value” of a human being? Who gets to decide? How can this “be done equal and democratic” when the goal is to identify the least valuable (least equal) and offer him up for death, and when George links human value to rank and placement? It is a misalignment of means and ends. The question proves ethically impossible to answer and the men are still making their individual cases when Anderson silently gives Joan his rifle and leaves.

While the men talk to each other, Joan and Annie address their narratives to Anderson, engaging him in their performative and strategic acts of story-telling. Joan begins by expressing to him her sorrow at the loss of her children: Richard, Edward, Emily. She sings for him the

lullaby Richard sang to his siblings.⁷ She asks Anderson: “Can that which is lost be found?” (64) and whispers to him, “[d]o you know that song?” (65), just as she told him earlier he can whisper to her (64). Joan’s invitation to whisper and her act of whispering are not without significance. Whispering is an intimate act of sharing. It suggests an intimate connection, a conspiracy, a tender moment. You have to be “close” (emotionally or physically; and here we have the duality of distance and proximity again) to whisper to each other. One also whispers to oneself those personal truths and realizations yet too fragile to be spoken aloud. Important things are whispered.

Annie’s first words to Anderson acknowledges their relationship and challenges him: “Could you kill me lookin’ me right in the face?” He replies, “If I had to” (67). She then tells him her secret stories of personal loss, betrayal, and sacrifice. Out of revenge for the death of her Rebel brother Richard, she betrayed the British spy Major Andre, mis-directing him towards the Rebel forces. Earlier, she had sex with Loyalist guards in order to visit the imprisoned Richard:

ANNIE: [. . .] I offered somethin’. Them in charge wanted it. I gave it to them. It meant nothin’ to me. You could have it too if you want . . . Afterwards, they let me see him, and after that, I gave it to them again, or they took it. When I saw him, my brother, he told me the worst fightin’ he’d seen up ’til then was ’tween two prisoners over a rat. He looked so thin. He laughed.

ANDERSON: Why tell me?

ANNIE: After he was exchanged he fought under Arnold at Saratoga. We heard that’s where he died.

ANDERSON: Do you think you can bargain with that?

ANNIE: He looked so thin.

[Lights begin to change to focus on the MAJOR and the men]

ANDERSON: *[steps away from the women]* You can’t bargain with that.

JOAN: Bargain with that! (67-68)

While at first Anderson is able to speak easily with the women, he becomes anxious when Annie describes her personal sacrifice to see her brother, asking her, “Why tell me this?” and “Do you think you can bargain with that?” Anderson’s questions refer to Annie’s sexual barter but it is equally possible and more intriguing to consider that Pollock’s Annie is bargaining not with her

⁷ This is the “little mourning dove” lullaby discussed earlier in chapter three.

body but with her stories. Anderson has cause to be wary of the women's story-telling, for reasons I will explain later.

Finally, the women talk to Anderson about choice, naming (identity), and their relationship with each other. Annie tells Anderson she suspected him but she chose not to expose him because she was curious about his purpose. She challenges him again:

ANNIE: [. . .] And you could talk to me and laugh and call me Annie and kill me?"

ANDERSON: If I had to.

ANNIE: Chose to. It's not them choosin', is it? It's you. (71)

And Joan asks Anderson: "What's your name? Real name. Name yourself. [. . .] Are you someone I know?" (71). Joan's words, like Annie's, remind Anderson that he is free (at liberty) to choose and take responsibility for who he is, the nature of their relationship (kin or stranger, friend or foe), and what he does. She invites him to "name yourself," demonstrating that she will not impose her assumptions or judgments on him.

In these series of alternating scenes between the men and women, Pollock clearly presents two approaches to ethical decision making, reflected in two types of languages. The Loyalist men and Eddie appeal to reason, logic, universal values. They speak of rights, equality, and democracy; of judgment, the law, and due process. However, their methods and actions demonstrate that their actual social, political, and moral beliefs are far from just, equitable, and democratic. Their arguments based on universal values are often undermined by faulty premises and they fail to find a solution. In fact, they are so mired in their deliberation, they are caught unawares by Anderson's peaceful exit. In contrast, the women tell stories: personal and secret stories of loss, grief, and hope; of betrayal and responsibility. They address their narratives to Anderson, engaging him in their performative and strategic act of story-telling. Their conversation with him is an attempt at sharing and reciprocal connection; they assume closeness; they create new relationships, bonds, and obligations. In the end, Anderson silently responds by giving Joan his rifle and leaving without the revenge he desired. Surely Pollock is telling us something about the comparative efficacy of a rational public discourse of rights and democracy and a more emotional private discourse of personal and familial story-telling to attend to this moral dilemma.

At this point, I would like to return to the ideas of Carol Gilligan about language and relationship, psychological processes and theories, moral development and decision making.

Gilligan identifies the presence of two moral perspectives, a “justice [or rights] orientation” and a “care orientation,” related to different expectations of psychological development and different values regarding social interaction. The justice orientation approaches moral problems in terms of rights and non-interference while the care orientation considers them in terms of responsibility and a duty of care. Gilligan writes: “Whereas the rights conception of morality [. . .] is geared to arriving at an objectively fair or just resolution to moral dilemmas upon which all rational persons could agree, the responsibility conception focuses instead on the limitations of any particular resolution and describes the conflicts that remain” (*Different* 21-22). Supporting the justice perspective is a psychological model which identifies maturity with separation and growth in moral development as progressing from a stage where “relationships are subordinated to rules [. . .] and rules to universal principles of justice” (*Different* 18). The care perspective is supported by a conception of psychological development which values attachment and a moral attitude which subordinates rules to “the continuation of relationships” (*Different* 10). The justice orientation sees the individual as primary while the care orientation sees the relationship as primary (*Different* 19). Gilligan states that from the care perspective “the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract” (*Different* 19). Attentive to differences between individuals, the care orientation understands justice “as respect for people in their own terms” (“Moral” 24) rather than in abstract universal ones. As such, the care perspective conceives of a “particular other” while the justice perspective envisions a “generalized other” (*Different* 11).

Gilligan reports that while people are capable of recognizing and functioning from both the justice and care orientation, most tend to focus on one or the other. In addition, there is an association between moral orientation and gender. She found that men and women are equally likely to focus, but men almost exclusively focussed on justice while equal numbers of women focussed on justice and on care (“Moral” 25). Gilligan points out that “if women were eliminated from the research sample, care focus in moral reasoning would virtually disappear” (“Moral” 25). She cautions she was not asking whether moral orientation was genetically determined or socially conditioned because to do so would leave out voice and the “possibility for resistance, for creativity, and for a change whose wellsprings are psychological” (*Different* xix). Nor was she advocating for the sole application of one perspective. Both orientations have

their strengths and weaknesses. While the justice approach promises autonomous thinking and dispassionate judgment, it also has the potential for the individual to confuse a personal perspective with an objective, universal truth. While the care orientation promotes compassion and an attention to difference, it risks the tendency to forget one's own terms in a self-sacrificing concern for the other. Gilligan does, however, critique the relative neglect of the ethics of care and the voice of women within traditional theories of psychology and our social and moral value systems. She observes: "[t]he blind willingness to sacrifice people to truth [. . .] has always been the danger of an ethics abstracted from life" (*Different* 104). The ideal goal would be a complementary approach which combines justice with care, judgment with mercy, a practice which pays constant attention to the limitations of rights and rules so such sacrifices are examined more carefully and challenged. I would add that this complementary approach constitutes a recognition and negotiation of ambivalence, the co-existence of opposing views.

If we return to Act II of *Fair Liberty's Call*, we can see a remarkable resonance between Pollock's drama and Gilligan's theories. Pollock's two groups on stage can be interpreted as operating each from one of Gilligan's moral orientations. The men and Eddie, engaged in the rational public discourse of equality and legality, the procedures of votes and due process, are clearly located within the rights and justice orientation. The women, Joan and Annie, with their personal contextual narratives, their attention to differences in the midst of a search for commonality, can be seen to embody the care orientation. Their willingness to be vulnerable and to share with Anderson their deeply personal narratives demonstrate an assumption of connection, a willingness to risk that they will be heard. In letting Anderson depart without retaliation, they honour their relationship rather than rules of equality and justice (or revenge) which would lead to more violence and death. The men clearly exhibit the psychology of separation, even as they make claims to group solidarity (ambivalence yet again). Their debate often distances each from the other in an attempt either to defend one's right to remain silent (to protect against self-incrimination), to avoid responsibility (shifting the discussion from who killed Anderson's brother to who killed Frank Taylor), to shore up one's own "value" (to use George's mercantile term) and hence right to life. They are also distanced from Anderson. While the women talk to Anderson, the men talk to each other and (comically) don't even notice when the Rebel leaves. Only Eddie, the resisting voice, questions their methods and their language. Significantly, as George notes, Eddie alone does not make a case for her value to the

community to preserve her life. In fact, she twice volunteers to be Anderson's victim but is ignored by the men (65, 73), a point I will return to later.

Another observation is that story-telling is a mode of communication complementary to the ethics of care, one of the contextual and narrative approaches envisioned by Gilligan. As Langellier and Peterson point out, "stories are performed—by a particular speaker with a particular audience in a particular situation" (61). Stories can be used to support or challenge the normative power structure. As such, it is relevant to consider questions regarding "the distribution of narrative authority and storytelling rights and about excluded audiences and enforced listeners" (Langellier and Peterson 62). Joan and Annie choose to tell Anderson stories which they withhold even from their own Loyalist community, stories of their familial loss and grief, love and betrayal.⁸ They take this risk with Anderson in the hope that a human and humane connection may grow between them such that there will not have to be another death, another loss. Anderson is wary of the women's stories and the connection they attempt precisely because he needs to maintain his distance in order to be able to kill one of them. Likewise, the Loyalist men need to distance themselves from each other in order to select from amongst themselves a scapegoat for Anderson.

Distance can also help one see more clearly or differently. In telling one's own story, the narrator has the opportunity to step back and to be an observer rather than a participant of experience. The passage of time between the event and the telling allows one to think, to gain new insights.⁹ As Eddie tells the Major: "To stop and think then [during battle] was to die, but now? Now I ask, what did we do it [defend the Loyalist cause, participate in the war] for?" (49). Story-telling entails a risk because it has the potential to change the speaker as well as the listener, during the process of the telling, often in ways unforeseen by the speaker herself. For example, Pollock's stage directions and elliptical pauses emphasise that this is exactly what happens to George as he takes part in the Legion's Remembrance Ritual by recounting how he

⁸ Their stories include: Edward's suicide, Emily's transformation, Richard's imprisonment, Annie's exchange with Richard's guards and her betrayal of the British spy John Andre.

⁹ This potential illumination by the distance of time and story-telling is emphasised again by Pollock in her introductory note in *Moving Pictures* where she writes of Helen-Nell-Shipman: "in the transforming of her life into fiction, the woman discovers meaning that the actual living of her life did not reveal to her" (MP 16).

took an article of clothing, his war trophy, from a fallen Rebel soldier:

GEORGE: [. . .] I come on this figure lyin' face down in the mud . . . a young man, with a ruffled shirt and a blue waistcoat and a blond head of hair. He'd been leading the Rebel charge and he lay in the mud . . . but his hair—it still looked tidy and combed.

[ANDERSON *takes a drink of his rum.* GEORGE, *in the telling, feels a sense of shame he hadn't felt at the time.*]

And I . . . I—took the man's waistcoat . . . this is his waistcoat . . . the waistcoat of one of the Rebel fallen . . . at Bunker Hill. (52)

This example also demonstrates Gilligan's statement that the care orientation attempts to see the other in their own terms. George's account reveals a more detailed re-viewing of the dead young Rebel, with his "ruffled shirt" and "blond hair" incongruously "tidy and combed." It is, as Annie and Anderson would say, a new "angle of observation" (43, 45) and an example of Eddie's instruction to Joan: "It's a new world, Mama—you gotta look up close" (78). The act of looking "up close" also suggests to me the symbolic change in perspective and relationship which has the potential to turn the other from, in Gilligan's terms, the "generalized other" posited by the justice orientation to the "specific other" posited by the care orientation.

I would also suggest that story-telling, familial story-telling, contributes in part to Joan's own transformation. At the beginning of the play, she is an alienated settler who feels that New Brunswick "isn't home" and that her feet "carry [her] back to the house but they leave no trace of [her] passing" (27). She confuses Anderson with her dead sons. At the end of the drama, she tells Anderson that "I can see you now" (75) and afterwards says "I feel my feet pressin' flat 'gainst the surface of the soil now [. . .] the caps of my knees make a small indentation in the dirt" (79). In chapter three, I characterised Joan's change in terms of mourning, being able to mourn her dead. Here, we can also interpret Joan's change in terms of caring relationships. Gilligan writes that from working with theatre practitioners Kristin Linklater, Normi Noel, and Tina Packer, she has learnt to pay attention to "relational resonances" and how the voice "is expanded or constricted by relational ties" (*Different* xvi). When women's and girls' voices are not heard, when they cannot "speak in places where their voices are resonant with or resounded by others" or when "the reverberations are frightening" (*Different* xvi), then they begin to stop speaking and to fall silent. Unlike George (or even Annie), Anderson does not interrupt or try to silence or hush Joan. He *listens* to her and, as such, he acquiesces to remaining in relationship with her. Furthermore, Gilligan points out, from a perspective different from those of Kaufman,

Boss, and Doka discussed in chapter three, but with a similar outcome, that when one is unable to express one's felt reality, what one feels and knows, one may become disconnected and dissociated both from one's own feelings and experiences, and with the sense of what is real (*Meeting 4*). Annie Rogers once described, in the context of telling emotionally difficult stories, a safe, receptive, and caring relationship between speaker and listener as "the kind of shared reality that makes telling a story possible" (130). The reciprocal may also be true: as Joan and Annie give voice to their experiences and as they are received by Anderson, a shared reality is created and acknowledged, one which allows for a peaceful resolution to Anderson's threat.

With a vocabulary enriched by Gilligan's concepts, we can go back and ask a different set of questions. For example, why do the Loyalist men ignore and reject Eddie's two attempts to volunteer to be Anderson's victim? Why is George's idea of the value of an individual based on one's contribution to the community, which seems to evidence a change from the justice orientation's vision of the autonomous self to the care orientation's notion of the self-in-relation, ineffective and even morally repugnant?

I see at least two reasons why the Loyalist men ignore and refuse Eddie's sacrifice. One, they do not wish to acknowledge that they are indeed guilty of injustices during the war and Eddie, unlike Wullie, is sufficiently representative of the group (sufficiently proximate in class, race, politics) such that to accept her offer would in effect be an acknowledgment of the collective responsibility which they deny.¹⁰ Here then we have an instance of proximity and distance in terms of social identity coming into action. Second, the acts of volunteering and self-sacrifice run counter to the rights/justice orientation to which the men subscribe. In a sense, to give up one's life for others may not be an action the justice orientation is easily able to conceptualize. There is a sense of self-protection and maintenance of boundaries in the rights orientation's concern with the individual, independence, and non-interference that is alienated from the practice of giving generously. As Diana T. Meyer and Eva Feder Kittay write, in the justice orientation, "[p]eople are surely entitled to noninterference, they may not be entitled to

¹⁰ This is similar to the acquittal of Lizzie Borden for the charge of murdering her parents. Pollock's play suggests that, in order to consider Lizzie Borden's responsibility for such an act, the all male middle-class jury of Fall Rivers, her social peers, would have to accept the possibility that the women in their own families and community may have cause for and are equally capable of such acts of violence and transgression.

aid” (5). Thus, the men, invested in the justice perspective as well as the denial of responsibility, refuse or ignore Eddie’s offer.

As for the idea of evaluating an individual’s value to the community to determine who has least to offer and hence is most expendable, it is repugnant because it attempts to quantify a human life. (Variations of this type of blatant moral arithmetic appears again in *Doc* and in *Angel’s Trumpet*. I will discuss this further on in the chapter.) Its focus on one’s contribution to the community may at first seem to represent the care orientation but the ultimate goal for each man is still the preservation of the self. Besides, who will define “value” and “community”? Who has the right to evaluate? and upon which criteria? In addition, as each person makes a case for his value to “the community” in general, to the “generalized others,” he loses sight of the needs of his immediate community right there in the clearing, the “particular others.” If one accepts the demands of Anderson’s terms, then only Eddie is actually willing to give what is of most immediate value to the community of particular others before her.

But is it necessary to accept Anderson’s terms? It is possible to propose that the Loyalist men fail because the rights orientation cannot resolve the particular problem Anderson poses. The lens of the rights perspective, coloured by an investment in the rules of the game, fails to see that the question itself is flawed because the task to choose a scapegoat is ethically immoral. The men accept Anderson’s demand for “justice” and “responsibility” and try to logically find an answer when, within those terms, as Eddie points out, due process may be impossible. There is no way to act without another death. Gilligan observes that the care orientation pays attention to the limits of any particular resolution and describes any remaining conflict. The justice of equality and reciprocity reaches its ethical limit in Anderson’s equation of one death for another. As Joan asks Anderson, “Can that which is lost be found?” (64). Anderson’s brother was a unique individual and, in that sense, there is no one whose life or death can be justly equated with his. Justice, the kind of justice Anderson and the Loyalist men envision, is ethically impossible. The women do not accept Anderson’s question and propose an ethically more relevant one: not how to choose who must die next, but how to create a better community. Instead of service to the dead, they propose service to the living. In fact, they propose service to the living *as* service to the dead. Annie tells Anderson: “[. . .] There’s nothin’ I can do to put paid to my brothers or you to put paid to yours. We oughta be lookin’ to a better world for our children. That’s the only way to serve our brothers” (75). Notice that Annie’s expression of the

ethics of care, connecting the present (herself and Anderson) backwards to the past (their deceased brothers) and forward to the future (“our children”), is articulated through the language and the metaphor of the kinship idiom. This is fitting because, ideally, the familial sphere is one of care and nurturance which spans time in the form of generations.

Many of Pollock’s other plays also grapple with the ambivalent perspectives of justice and care. *The Komagata Maru Incident* is an early example. Pollock has stated that she found Hopkinson “a far finer man than Walsh” (“Sharon Pollock.” 121) because he took responsibility for his Sikh heritage. She states: “When he says, yes, I’ll testify, he accepts fatalistically the manner of his death in the nature of a Sikh, his mother’s religion” (“Sharon Pollock.” 121). The justice/care perspectives offer an additional interpretation of the difference between Walsh and Hopkinson, and why Hopkinson is the “finer man”: Walsh, acting out of “self-preservation” (*Walsh* 162) and shielding his actions behind the demands of his job and the rules of non-interference, betrays his caring relationship with Sitting Bull and the Sioux and is subsequently haunted by his actions. In contrast, Hopkinson, knowing that he was endangering his own life, honours the relationship between himself and his Sikh informants and chooses to testify on their behalf at court (despite the nature of their work in the context of the wider Sikh community). He loses his life but not his personal integrity.

In *Doc*, the tension and contradiction between Ev’s care for his patients in his public crusading medical practice and his neglect of his family in private life (another misalignment) may also be seen through this critical lens. The weaknesses of a blind and absolute adherence to the justice approach is most starkly and brutally expressed by Ev in an argument with Oscar following Bob’s death. Oscar had criticised Ev’s neglect of Bob, which Oscar felt led to Bob’s suicide:

EV: [. . .] you say I killed her! It was all my fault?

(OSCAR stops. EV moves to him.)

Supposin’ it were, her death my fault, put a figure on it, eh? Her death my fault on one side - and the other any old figure, thousand lives the figure - was that worth it?

(OSCAR exits)

Was it? I'm askin' you a question! Was that worth it!¹¹ (123)

Surely Ev's moral arithmetic is an extreme example of the formal and abstract attitude of the justice perspective where relationships are subordinated to rules which are deemed to represent some universal principle of justice regardless of the specific context of the situation. Here, the "universal" Ev expresses is something like: the needs of the many take precedence over the needs of the few or the one.¹² He reduces Bob, his wife, from a "specific other" to a "generalized other," a singular abstract individual to be weighed against a larger number of needy others. He also contradicts conventional expectations of familial caring and nurturing. We expect individuals to care more for kin and fictive kin than strangers, and many moral teachings counsel us, ideally, to care for strangers as much as, as if they were, family. Yet, Ev cares for his wife Bob (and arguably his children) *less than* his patients.

In addition, as noted earlier, Gilligan cautions that while the justice approach promises autonomous thinking and dispassionate judgement, the individual might confuse a personal perspective with an objective universal truth (*Different* 104). This occurs with Ev. While it is not clearly articulated why Ev neglects Bob and Katie to the extent that he does (it seems to go beyond the patriarchal attitudes of his times), there are clues which suggest there are more personal and subjective motives involved. Ev actually does not treat Bob objectively as he might another patient. There is a logical flaw, a false dichotomy, in his argument. One could, like Annie and Joan, argue that Ev, like Anderson, has formulated the wrong question. In this case, why are the one/Bob and the many mutually exclusive? And why does he care for Bob (his wife, kin) less than for one of his patients? I could conjecture several reasons.

Bob (like Katie) is family and claims a type and degree of attention and closeness which Ev does not wish to or, perhaps, is incapable of giving. (This brings up the related issue of proximity and distance again.) Ev's success and identity are invested in his public medical

¹¹ Here is another form of the question of worth raised by Catherine earlier (79, 83) in other plays such as *Moving Pictures* and *Angel's Trumpet*.

¹² I put the word "universal" in quotes because implicit in Gilligan's critique is a questioning of the limits of the universal itself. In addition, we have clear cases where Ev's argument of the many before the few is not an absolutely accepted rule at all. Many democratic constitutions, for example, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, entrenches certain rights for individuals and minorities precisely to counter a blind adherence to majority rule.

activities. It is easier to be the admired heroic crusading doctor than the caring attentive husband and father who may be perceived, at close quarters, to be all too human and flawed. Remember, it is Bob who asserts of Ev:

He doesn't care. He doesn't care about anything except his "prac-tice" and his "off-ice" and his "off-ice nurse" and all those stupid, stupid people who think he's God.
[.]
You're not God. (6)

She doesn't want him or value him as "God" or "Doc." She wants him as her husband, as family.¹³ Ev neglects that relationship. In addition, Bob might be uncomfortably close for Ev in another way: her personal and career histories are, in many ways, much like his. They both came from poor families. They are both intelligent and overcame obstacles to become successful. They are both good at their jobs and proud of this fact. Ev acknowledges that the only reason he doesn't want Bob to continue working as a nurse, with him or with other doctors, is that she is his wife and he does not wish to risk any *potential* negative influence this might have on his reputation. It has nothing to do with her actual medical skills and any real evidence of risk. Hence, to be close and attentive to Bob, would require Ev to witness her pain in not being able to exercise her freedom and her gifts. He would also have to acknowledge his own real part in her unhappiness and her addiction – something which he refuses to do.¹⁴ It is this hypocrisy and misuse of the justice argument which make Ev's question to Oscar so offensive. Appropriately, Oscar's response is to walk away without replying to his friend, refusing to engage with Ev within such flawed terms. Oscar's silence voices his rejection of his friend's behaviour and values.

While the discussion so far has been to emphasize the value of the perspective and practises of the ethics of care and its feminist associations, neither the justice nor the care

¹³ There is a resonance here with the relation between Barry and Nell in *Moving Pictures*, where Barry wants Nell to be his mother, not the artist. Likewise, Oscar's evaluation of Ev: "I could see it in my father, I can see it in you. You got your eye fixed on some goddamn horizon, and while you're striding towards that, you trample on every goddamn thing around you!" (*Doc* 122), is echoed by Bert when he spoke of Nell as someone who "[d]estroys everything" (*MP* 93) in her pursuit of her film career.

¹⁴ This is not to say Bob has no responsibility for the conditions of her life. Like Ev, Bob too neglects her children and there is always the example of Oscar's mother as an alternative to staying in her unhappy marriage.

orientation is inherently gender specific and it is the co-existence of both means of moral decision making, both perspectives on human development and inter-relationships, which is necessary for an ethical community. It may be a difficult goal to accomplish, as ambivalence is difficult to contain and maintain. If, in *Fair Liberty's Call*, the figure of Eddie represents an attempt to combine both masculine and feminine perspectives, both the justice and the care orientations, then what Pollock portrays is not the idealistic success of transgressive gender and political identity but the precarious and imperfect effort to affect change. While Emily, in assuming the identity of her brother Edward, is able to act with greater authority and freedom in the masculine public sphere, she has had to engage in warfare, killing and being killed by fellow citizens, and is excluded (at least publically) from the feminine (and feminist) community of her mother and sister. In responding to Anderson, Eddie, having chosen to deliberate with the men within the rights perspective (even though her role is in critiquing it), is ultimately as ineffective as the other men. It is Joan and Annie, with Anderson, who finally affect a peaceful resolution. However, it is a “new world,” one which is being born and continues to be created. Eddie complements the work of Joan and Annie by challenging the ethical limits of and identifying the practical weaknesses in the men’s values and by preventing them from pursuing Anderson and continuing the useless quest for revenge. The rule of justice in civil society, which all the men, including Anderson, claim to value, replaces the personal demand for revenge and is tempered by the care of mercy. It is this coexistence of both the justice and care approach which will build “a better world for our children” (75).

Bridging the Ambivalent Misalignment Between Action and Imagination

[. . .] your task consists in bridging the gap that exists between your two faculties: your faculty of *making* things and your faculty of *imagining* things; to level off the incline that separates the two: in other words: you have to violently widen the narrow capacity of your imagination (and the even narrower one of your feelings) until imagination and feeling become capable to grasp and to realize the enormity of your doings; until you are capable to seize and conceive, to accept or reject it—in short: your task is: *to widen your moral fantasy*.

(Günther Anders, “Commandments in the Atomic Age” 13, emphasis in

original)

* * * * *

[. . .] if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life you are living at this moment. [. . .] There must be ways, and we will be finding out more and more about them, in which the energy of creation and the energy of relation can be united.

(Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken” 43)

* * * * *

Another play which clearly dramatizes the conflicting approaches of justice and care and the primacy of the kinship idiom is Pollock’s monodrama *Getting It Straight*. There are many forms of language in the play: the judgmental and prescriptive language of medical diagnosis (exemplified in Eme’s account of her conversations with her doctors and the story of her grandmother’s experience with nurses in naming her son), the sensationalism of commercial media (selling remedies to mask our social inequities and fears), the pseudo-intelligent prattle of the military-industrial complex (in its demonstration of mutually assured nuclear destruction), and the absurd bravado of global commerce (represented in the speech of Eme’s husband). One common feature of all these discourses is the abstract and distancing practise of the justice orientation: the generalization and appeal to “universal” rules and values,¹⁵ the valuing of the speaker’s independence and authority, the lack of true reciprocity, and the avoidance of equal and mutual caring connection and relationship.

In contrast, it may be argued that Eme represents a radical and extreme form of care, one

¹⁵ In fact, Eme’s husband, in his long capitalistic monologue, asks “how do you spell universal inc?” and answers: “communications! that’s how you spell it, television / radio film cables threading the the [sic] oceans / satellites filling the skies” (106). In “Egg,” the earlier form of the drama, the firm which works in partnership with the military and which Martha and other women attack is named “Universal Inc.” (30) representative of its homogenizing function and colonizing ambitions.

which attempts to encompass all of humanity. Throughout the play, Eme's repeated concern is the welfare of children: her children and the world's children. Her language is that of personal narratives. And like the women in *Fair Liberty's Call*, Eme speaks of personal loss, fear, confusion, and pain. Even when she describes the felt experiences of others, such as those of children caught in violent conflicts, she does so in their voices, from the first-person perspective.¹⁶ Instead of the distance and independence of the justice perspective, Eme's behaviour exemplifies the interdependence, the inter-connectedness, and closeness of the care perspective—taken to the extreme.¹⁷

However, in addition to justice and care, Pollock's exploration of ethical behaviour and community responsibilities is articulated through the duality of action and imagination, and it is from this perspective that *Getting It Straight* is exemplary. One way of looking at the play is to see it as the enactment of a struggle to balance distance and proximity, and action and imagination, such that one may act effectively and responsibly. Eme is a figure who is disturbed by the violence and inhumanity in the world and unable to function in a socially acceptable manner because she has given up what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls the "privilege of unknowing"¹⁸ (24). She is no longer able to maintain any ethical, emotional, and psychological distance from the global human suffering she sees around her and in which she feels implicated. In Eddie Roberts' words, Eme "look[s] up close" at her world and is changed by what she sees. Boundaries (physical, temporal, psychological, emotional) dissolve in Eme's experience of the

¹⁶ Some of Eme's speeches in the voice of children who suffered from international conflicts and warfare were originally intended for performance by life-sized puppet representations of children in "Egg." In *Getting It Straight*, the fact that Eme speaks in several (often unidentified) voices also adds to the chaotic atmosphere of the drama.

¹⁷ Like Joan, Eme also exemplifies Gilligan's observation that at the moment of socialization (often at home, in the familial context), children begin to lose their voice. They must make a choice between saying what they know, experience, see—their truths—and being alienated, punished, and silenced by a community or society which does not wish to hear or acknowledge them. Their choice becomes keeping silent and conforming, which allows them to remain connected with their community at the price of becoming alienated from themselves, or speaking their truths and being disconnected from their community. In this case, Eme's incarceration in a mental facility forcibly disconnects her from her community and in speaking to the audience and "all members a the female / sex" (*GIS* 126) she attempts to connect with or create a new community which will listen and affirm her vision and her values.

¹⁸ Sedgwick describes this type of willful unknowing and ignorance as "the killing pretense that a culture does not know what it knows" (51).

world and, like characters in *Fair Liberty's Call*, she inhabits a liminal space of betwixt and between where ambivalent dualities coexist.

This dissolution of boundaries and liminal state are reflected in the stage setting, established immediately in the opening moments of the play. Significantly for a drama which explores ethical behaviour and human responsibility in a world overshadowed by warfare, capitalist greed, and patriarchal and ethnic inequity, Pollock's stage directions convey a sense of uncertainty and ambivalence:

Light patterns reflect what may be bars, ribs, open seating, the exterior structure of a grandstand, as seen from the inside out. The patterns shift and change, perhaps as a result of the sun rolling round the Milky Way, the earth swinging round the sun, the moon moving round the earth, or perhaps as an external manifestation of the electrical impulses inside EME's head. She is hiding under the grandstand in an area used for storing incidentals and where a certain amount of garbage has also accumulated. (87)

Note the conditional terms “may be” and “perhaps,” and the “shift[ing] and chang[ing]” patterns. What is outside (“the exterior structure”) and what is inside (“seen from the inside out”) are combined. The movement of the galaxies (the Milky Way), stars (the sun), planets and their satellites (the earth and moon) are analogous to the movement of electrons (“the electrical impulses”) within a woman's mind. The centre (“the grandstand”) and the peripheral (“incidentals” and “garbage”) inhabit the same space. Humanity, embodied on stage by Eme, herself “incidental” to and marginalised by society, is linked to nature and the cosmos. And, as we will see, she is like the universe: chaotic, varied, random, as well as patterned; and her vision and concerns span the local (her family relations), the global (international relations), and the universal (the cosmos).¹⁹

Eme also has the ambivalent characteristics of a liminal figure. Recall that as Victor Turner notes of liminal individuals, they are “beyond the normative social structure. This weakens them, since they have no rights over others. But it also liberates them from structural

¹⁹ Pollock creates a similar sense of scale and relationship between humanity and nature in *Fair Liberty's Call* (recall the opening and closing setting of a primordial wilderness) and the much earlier play *Generations* (1980). As examined earlier in chapter two, Pollock's stage directions link the lives of the Nurlins to the earth (the changes of the land) and the solar system (the movement of the sun). I would argue that all three plays also share a certain idealist tone and explicitly cast their vision on larger issues of social and global relations in the context of familial relationships. *Generations*, like *Fair Liberty's Call*, explores myths of origins: regional in the former, national in the latter.

obligations. It places them too in close connection with non-social or asocial powers of life and death” (27). As a patient in a mental institution, Eme is “weak” and powerless, removed from her former community and social position (middle-class mother and wife). Simultaneously, she is powerful because she is not obliged to conform to the social structures which formerly contained and silenced her. She speaks out against authorities. She gives voice to the chaos she sees around her rather than remaining silent. She is physically violent: she pushes Freida and injures her, she hits Myrna, she stabs (or hopes she stabbed) her husband with a pair of scissors. She claims her right to fear and to care for the well-being of others. Of course, her power and freedom are limited, but this does not diminish her symbolic liminal status.

Even more so than *Fair Liberty's Call*, *Getting It Straight* unfolds in a context of global relations and responsibilities. As such, Pollock also establishes the context of a grand natural scale, one which challenges humanity's sense of self-importance, control, power, and entitlement. She creates a state in which the human is placed in perspective: not large, important, and powerful but small, insignificant, and fragile. We and our Earth comprise mere pin points of light in the vast universe of innumerable suns (111-12). We are invited to observe from different and unfamiliar perspectives, to accommodate vast contrasts (in size, in distance, in time, in quantity), to take the longer and broader view, to relinquish the positions of centrality and certainty. For example, Eme speaks of “a field full of yellow mustard” (and my mind fills in the word “seeds”) and a universe of distant stars (94), “a million hiroshima bombs” in the sky and “a billion viruses” in our bodies (112). It is a world of Einstein's relativity where time and space are one, and distances, astronomical and local, are given in seconds: “I look deep into time for the nearest stars [. . .] / time / being space / being time / my room / is square 1 second by 1 second” (94). To be more precise, Pollock again asks us to accommodate ambivalent dualities: humanity is both large and small, central and peripheral, powerful and fragile. In order to shift our perception of ourselves and our world, we need to exercise our imagination.

Earlier critical discussions of *Getting It Straight*, while related to the political and social, have focussed on the individual, from two main perspectives: an individual's struggle against powerful social pressures and Pollock's changing representations of the mother figure. For example, in *The Buried Astrolabe*, Craig Walker analyses Sharon Pollock's work from the perspective of an individual's conflict with authority and her attempt to preserve her personal integrity under such circumstances (135-36). Walker argues that, for Pollock, memory and the

power to remember correctly are key “in protecting individual integrity against deterministic forces” (199). With respect to *Getting It Straight*, he sees Eme as a “genuinely mentally distressed woman who is attempting to work out a sane understanding of an irrational world” (187). While the need for social change is an underlying current in the drama, Walker’s focus remains on Eme and the personal. He points out that “[m]ost of Eme’s allusions are in the nature of personal memories of her immediate family” (188). Finally, citing Eme’s allusions to Cassiopeia and Rapunzel, the former a woman punished for “boasting of her daughter’s beauty” and the latter “locked away because of her beauty,” he wonders whether Eme was incarcerated “because her thinking is too beautiful and good for the world, rather than too flawed” (190). Walker’s analysis ends with a recognition of the ambiguity of Pollock’s ending. With reference to Pollock’s opening stage direction, he suggests that “the biggest open question” of the drama is whether Eme is a Jonah figure or not: “Is Eme’s condition necessarily one of imprisonment behind the bars of insanity? Or is she, like Jonah within the ribs of the whale, trapped only temporarily in her despair, her entrapment a state in a journey whose ultimate objective is universal enlightenment?” (190).

Alternatively, Cynthia Zimmerman, in “Sharon Pollock: Transfiguring the Maternal,” examines *Getting It Straight* in the context of Pollock’s changing representation of the mother figure. Zimmerman notes that in *Doc*: “Sharon Pollock reaches closure on one front (the struggle with the authoritarian father) and reveals unresolved conflicts on another (the maternal connection)” (154). She argues that Pollock’s portrayals of the mother, beginning with Bob in *Doc* (1984), progressing to Eme in *Getting It Straight* (1988), and finally to Joan in *Fair Liberty’s Call* (1993), move towards “a more desirable one—to the daughter” (156). Where Bob, along with Ev, neglects her daughter Katie, Eme expresses concern for the safety and future of her children. (In fact, Eme is concerned about the well-being of all children, a point I will discuss further in this chapter.) However, as Zimmerman points out, Eme is separated from her children, alone, marginalised, and powerless. And “regardless of the power of her truth, no one listens” (157), at least not within the frame of the drama. For Zimmerman, Pollock’s positive (from the daughter’s perspective) transformation of the mother leads to Joan

who speaks openly and is heard. She is the one who has gotten it straight; her values are clear. She does not have Bob’s sense of injured merit. Cherished and protected by her daughters, she is an emphatic and nurturing maternal presence.

Bob, the unavailable mother, is replaced by Joan, the one who puts home and family first. Joan's identity is mother, not wife. (157)

Finally, Zimmerman notes, in *Fair Liberty's Call*, the other roles of "the family plot" (158) are also transformed: "the father humbled, the mother revered, and the daughters empowered" (159).

My present exploration of *Getting It Straight* complements existing analyses from the perspective of ethical decision making and the kinship idiom, the representation of community as family. I am interested in Pollock's dramatic representations of desirable social relationships and viable communities. These issues are related to another important and related theme in *Getting It Straight* (and, I would argue, much of Pollock's work): the misalignment between action and imagination. The duality and misalignment between action and imagination is most clearly articulated immediately following a long chaotic virtuoso passage where Eme describes the ills of global injustices and greed. She begins with a description of her childhood experience of sexism (101) and moves to a childhood song (101-102) which suddenly transitions to a vast montage including media reports about international conflicts (in Beirut, Nicaragua, Iraq) and pitches for international trade in nuclear arms and commodities (102-103, 106), to thoughts about the safety and future of her own children (104-105) and children world-wide (108-109). Following Eme's kaleidoscopic description of the injustices and violence in her world and her critique of their justifications ("so people die / they say it's in our nature / these things happen" [112]), she envisions the total destruction of planet Earth and a hollow male-centred epitaph, "They Died like Men!", and concludes: "this does not satisfy" (112). There is a pause; then Eme begins anew. Her next words are key and I quote the passage here in its entirety because it is the source and inspiration for both my recognition of the ambivalent misalignment of action and imagination and the kinship metaphor within this play:

they say I have a great imagination they
say
what are you thinking?
I say I asked Him [her husband] that!
I say I thought inside his head was a cornucopia
of rich and vivid images precise perceptive thought
I say what are you thinking?
I say have the courage to fear
I say the more boundless the deed the smaller the
hindrance
I say reality is surpassing imagination
I do not say I opened his briefcase

he says nothing
 I see he's right
 inside his head they dropped the bomb it wasted all
 the people but it kept the real estate
 they say who dropped the bomb?
 I say his parents
 myrna says don't tell them that!
 I say it's just a metaphor what are you thinking!?! (112-13)

To begin, let us focus on the first half of the passage:

I say have the courage to fear
 I say the more boundless the deed the smaller the
 hindrance
 I say reality is surpassing imagination (112-13)

Eme's statements are striking, paradoxical, and have the quality of aphorisms. They are central to the drama and they also exhibit the ambivalence, the co-existence of opposing feelings or traits (courage and fear, large and small, deed and hindrance, reality and imagination), so prevalent in Pollock's work.

As I noted previously, existing commentary on *Getting It Straight*, while related to the political and social, have focussed, unsurprisingly, on Eme and Pollock's representation of the individual or individual figure (like the mother). I would like to shift the light beam and look more closely at the other locus of the relationship: the community and one's relation to it. In addition to their aphoristic nature, Eme's words above are a commentary on contemporary society. At the start of this study, I said my focus was less on the content of Pollock's drama and more on form but the two are inseparable and, in the case of *Getting It Straight*, there seems to be an interesting critical neglect of the manifest content of the drama—the feminist socio-political critique of contemporary society, especially the military-industrial-scientific complex—as if it were somehow dated, embarrassing (unseemly in its passion and disarray, just like insanity), and little related to the other aspects of the dramatic work. In contrast, I feel it is important and generative of the formal characteristics of the drama and resonant with themes and structures in other Pollock plays.²⁰ Eme's observations describe our social maladies and they are both logically counter-intuitive and emotionally accurate (here we have ambivalence again): we are

²⁰ Obviously, the content and political perspective of *Getting It Straight* is also resonant with the historical context of the play's own premiere at the 1988 International Women's Festival in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

afraid to be afraid; the greater the magnitude of human injustices and violence, the less we act against them; reality is beyond imagination. Together, they also suggest a link between feeling, as ethically effective action, and imagination. By implication, Eme's statements suggest that if we are to respond adequately to pressing global dangers, we need to acknowledge our fear and be, feel, afraid; to respond to the "boundless" injustices with resistance of congruent magnitude; and to be more imaginative. Eme's statements also resonate with the ideas of twentieth-century German philosopher, journalist, and pacifist Günther Anders. In fact, I believe Pollock's Eme is quoting from Anders' essay "Commandments for the Atomic Age," published in *Burning Conscience*, a collection of letters between Claude Eatherly and Anders. It is from the ideas of Pollock and Anders that I derive my focus on the ambivalent duality of action and imagination. While I have no conclusive proof that Pollock is quoting Anders, there is strong evidence for my claim.

Günther Anders (born Günther Stern in Breslau, 1902-1992) was one of the many left-winged intellectuals of the Weimar period who fled Nazi Germany in 1933. His parents were pioneer child psychologists Clara and William Stern and Walter Benjamin was a distant cousin. Anders studied art history, psychology, and philosophy with many eminent scholars, especially Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl (his dissertation advisor), and was a fellow student of Herbert Marcuse and Hannah Arendt (who was Anders' first wife, from 1929-1937). Between 1936 and 1950, he lived and worked in the United States, returning to Europe (Vienna) in 1950, where he continued as a journalist and public intellectual. He is best known for his critique of nuclear warfare and the role of technology in modern society and for his work in the anti-nuclear and peace movements (Dawsey n.p.; Marcuse n.p.).

Beginning in June 1959, Anders engaged in a series of correspondences with Claude Eatherly, the pilot of the weather reconnaissance plane which supported the bombing of Hiroshima in 1945. Eatherly had publically expressed regret for his part in nuclear warfare and was, at the time, a psychiatric patient in the Veterans Administration Hospital in Waco, Texas.²¹ In his 2 July 1959 letter to Eatherly, Anders enclosed a fascinating essay entitled

²¹ After his discharge from the Air Force in 1947, Eatherly's life was characterised by mental instability and erratic behaviour. For example, he engaged in a series of bizarre minor crimes and was in jail and psychiatric hospitals numerous times ("Pilot at Hiroshima" 12; "Scout in A-Bombing" 61).

“Commandments in the Atomic Age”²² in which he anatomises the dangers and moral injustices of the atomic age (11-20). He presents his argument for the rejection of atomic warfare and the need for eternal vigilance against its use. It is a philosophical and practical manifesto of wide ranging concerns but I will only highlight those which are relevant to my analysis of *Getting It Straight*.

In the “Commandments,” Anders argues that modern society is schizophrenic because there is a “daily growing gap between our two faculties: between our *action* and our *imagination*” (12, emphasis in original).²³ He contends that humanity is unable to truly envision and conceive the reality and the effects of its actions. He states:

For in the course of the technical age the classical relation between imagination and action has reversed itself. While our ancestors had considered it a truism that imagination exceeds and surpasses reality, to-day the capacity of our imagination (and that of our feeling and responsibility) cannot compete with that of our *praxis*. (12, emphasis in original)

It is the magnitude of its own destructive ability which humanity cannot imagine. Anders argues that it may be possible to imagine and experience genuine feelings for the murder of one person or perhaps ten people, but the mass murder of thousands “lies infinitely far outside the sphere of those actions which we can visualize and towards which we can take an emotional position; and whose execution could be hampered through imagination and feeling” (12). He then counsels:

Therefore your next insight should be: ‘The more boundless the deeds, the smaller the hindrance.’ And: ‘We humans are smaller than ourselves.’ This last sentence formulates the raging schizophrenia of our days, that is: the fact that our diverse faculties work independently of each other, like isolated and uncoordinated

²² The essay is an English translation, by Anders’ second wife Elisabeth Freundlich, of “Gebot des Atomzeitalters,” a full-page article published in the 13 July 1957 edition of the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Anders “Gerbot,” n.p.). In an annotation to a 23 June 1959 letter from Eatherly to Anders, Anders erroneously gives the German essay a publication date of 14 July 1957 (Eatherly 8).

²³ Anders’ use of the term “schizophrenia” to describe a gap between one’s ability to imagine and to act is totally in keeping with the original and formal definition of the term, coined by German psychiatrist E. Bleuler, meaning: “A mental disorder occurring in various forms, all characterized by a breakdown in the relation between thoughts, feelings, and actions, usu. with a withdrawal from social activity and the occurrence of delusions and hallucinations” (“schizophrenia, n.” Def. a. *OED Online*).

beings, who have lost all contact with each other. (12)

He tells his reader that his statements are not fixed observations or cause for despair but intended to generate self awareness and change:

to make yourself aware of your limitedness, to terrify yourself by it, and finally in order to break through this allegedly unbreakable frontier; in order to revoke your schizophrenia. (12)

And because the effect and magnitude of nuclear warfare is so immense as to defy imagination, the moral imperative, the cure for our social schizophrenia, is:

[. . .] to make yourself as big as you actually are, to catch up with yourself. Thus, your task consists in bridging the gap that exists between your two faculties: your faculty of *making* things and your faculty of *imagining* things [. . .] in other words: you have to violently widen the narrow capacity of your imagination (and the even narrower one of your feelings) until imagination and feeling become capable to grasp and to realize the enormity of your doings; until you are capable to seize and conceive, to accept or reject it—in short: your task is: *to widen your moral fantasy*. (13, emphasis in the original)

This includes being able to fear. For Anders, modern society lives in “*the ‘Age of the inability to fear’*” (14, emphasis in the original). He instructs the reader: “don’t be a coward. Have the courage to be afraid. Force yourself to produce that amount of fear that corresponds to the magnitude of the apocalyptic danger” (14). Hence, the path towards ethical responsibility and action involves a progression of steps: imagination (a broad “moral fantasy”), corresponding emotion (feelings of empathy, fear, responsibility, moral outrage), decision making, and then action.

While I have no conclusive proof of Anders’ influence on Pollock’s work or that Eme is citing Anders, the remarkable resemblance between Eme’s and Anders’ statements points me towards such a conclusion:

Eme: “I say have the courage to fear” (112)

Anders: “[. . .] don’t be a coward. Have the courage to be afraid.” (14)

Eme: “I say the more boundless the deed the smaller the / hindrance” (113)

Anders: “Therefore your next insight should be: ‘The more boundless the deeds, the

smaller the hindrance.” (12)

Eme: “I say reality is surpassing imagination” (113)

Anders: “While our ancestors had considered it a truism that imagination exceeds and surpasses reality, to-day the capacity of our imagination (and that of our feeling and responsibility) cannot compete with that of our *praxis*.” (12, emphasis in original)

In addition, there are more resonances and commonalities between the “Commandments” and *Getting It Straight* which further strengthen my claim: the political themes of anti-nuclear and pacifist activism; the specific and direct association with Claude Eatherly and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the issue of personal responsibility and social insanity; the sense of imminent apocalyptic danger and urgency; the references to extremes of time, space, and space-time; the consciousness of the ambivalent role of science and technology in contemporary life; the critique of authority (political, scientific, social), including the fallacy of nuclear deterrence and the delusion of safety; the refusal of dissembling language which masks reality and deflects attention;²⁴ and the concern for responsible ethical and moral action. It is not unlikely that Pollock came across “Commandments for the Atomic Age” in *Burning Conscience* in the course of her research for *Getting It Straight*, just as I came across it in my research on her play. I am confident that, whether consciously or unconsciously, Pollock was influenced by Anders’ essay. I would even venture to hypothesize that she encountered Anders’ work after “Egg” because the aphoristic lines I quoted from *Getting It Straight* do not appear in the existing draft of “Egg,” nor do explicit references to Claude Eatherly, although it discusses nuclear

²⁴ Anders counsils against tolerating dissembling language, what he calls “honest sounding ‘keep smiling’ labels” and notes: “The baptizing of a certain H bomb explosion as ‘Operation Grandpa’ was not only shockingly bad taste but intended fraud” (16). Good illustrations of this from *Getting It Straight* include Eme’s repeated statement of “enola gay fat man little boy,” highlighting the dissembling language used to refer to instruments of nuclear warfare and her account of the absurd explanation for the premise of mutually assured nuclear destruction as a vehicle of deterrent: “instead of confusin’ all you good people with a lot / a military and scientific jargon perhaps a simple demonstration of the premise behind the policy of / nuclear deterrence would set you minds at ease / traffic accidents! [. . .] so when you hear balance of power holds innocent / hostage I want you to think / road safety and children!” (114). These are, of course, also examples of the kinship idiom at work in Pollock’s plays. I will discuss this further in the chapter.

warfare, “fat man,” “little boy,” and “Enola Gay” (“Egg” 3).

What is useful about Anders’ ideas is that they help shift the focus from the individual to the social and, like the work of Carol Gilligan, they give me an expanded conceptual language in which to explore and describe Pollock’s work. Instead of asking whether Eme is sane or insane, what the cause of her mental instability is, or what kind of figure she represents, the “angle of observation” and the light beam shifts to the nature of society. Eme says “I / look / to the past for guidance I say / little boy little boy fat man?” (119). Whatever the degree of Eme’s sanity, her main observations about society, the products of her “great imagination” (112), are actually real, historically accurate, and persist to this day. What is more relevant to me is the exploration and representation of society’s malady and our social responsibility.

Anders claims that society is schizophrenic. There is a gap between its capacity for action and for imagination. Humanity’s ability to make and do things has surpassed its ability to imagine the results of its actions and to respond ethically. Here again is an example of ambivalent misalignment. In the world Eme confronts, imagination is linked to paranoia and madness; it is a tool used by the authoritative “they” to discredit Eme’s observations.²⁵ But the word “imagination” has ambivalent meanings and associations. For Anders and for Eme, imagination is the practise of envisioning and comprehending more adequately the results of our actions. Imagination is a means of perception.²⁶ Eme tells us: “they say I’m mad / I say enola gay little boy fat man! / [. . .] I think / of getting it straight” (89-90). And what is required isn’t just any imagination. It isn’t the self-focussed and self-serving imagination of Mr. Big in *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, Nell in *Moving Pictures*, and Scott Fitzgerald in *Angel’s Trumpet*. It is an expansive ethical imagination which encompasses not only immediate and self-interested results but those permeating years into the future, affecting not only the self but the wider (even global)

²⁵ Eme is described in a series of progressive statements which link madness to imagination, from “they say / another sign / shadows / of a violent mind” (89), to “they say I’m mad” (89), to “they say this [Eme’s behaviour] / is paranoia” (90), and finally “they say I have a great imagination” (112).

²⁶ One definition for “imagination” in the *OED* is: “The power or capacity to form internal images or ideas of objects and situations not actually present to the senses, including remembered objects and situations, and those constructed by mentally combining or projecting images of previously experienced qualities, objects, and situations. *Also (esp. in modern philosophy): the power or capacity by which the mind integrates sensory data in the process of perception [emphasis added]*” (“imagination, n.” Def. 1.a. *OED Online*).

community.

Empathy, the ability to imagine and place oneself in the condition of others, to feel what another might feel, is an important ethical outcome of such an imagination. George Lakoff notes:

To conceptualize moral action as empathic action is more than just abiding by the Golden Rule, to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The Golden Rule does not take into account that others may have different values than you do. Taking morality as empathy requires basing your actions on their values, not yours. This requires a reformulation of the Golden Rule: Do unto others as *they* would have you do unto them. (“Metaphor” 199, emphasis in original)

As such, the imagination required is more like that of Zelda in *Angel’s Trumpet*, realising the need to read to the end of the story; Kate in *Saucy Jack*, paying attention and giving voice to neglected and murdered women; and, of course, Eme, concerned for the safety and future of all children and humanity on earth, at times, even speaking as the children.

Often, Eme struggles simply to see what others choose to, or are encouraged to, ignore because such concerns are best left to the experts. This subordination of experience to expertise is a common challenge for citizen activism. Anders councils that the gravity, complexity, and scope of nuclear destruction exceed human mastery and “we all, as human beings, are equally incompetent” (14). Therefore, citizens cannot leave it solely to specialists (whether they be in science, government, medicine, or the military) to be concerned and to solve the problems. He continues:

The climax of unbearability, however, is reached when those allegedly more competent persons [. . .] try to make us believe that we have not even the *right to fear*, not even the right to have a conscience. [. . .] responsibility is *their* business, just the business of those with qualifications in that department [. . .]. This immoral situation cannot be allowed. [. . .] Each of us has the same right and the same duty to warningly raise his voice. You too. (15, emphasis in original)

In *Getting It Straight*, Eme is told not to think or to worry about things deemed outside her competence. Recall the capitalist monologue of Eme’s husband, the commodities expert, boasting about the breadth of his knowledge and corporate power, advising his listener to buy abaca (106); the absurd simplistic explanation of nuclear deterrence by a spokesman who doesn’t

wish to “confus[e] all you good people with a lot / a military and scientific jargon” (114); and the numerous other “experts” (the nurses, the doctors, the journalists, the corporate and military professionals) who claim authority and responsibility, yet are fundamentally incompetent at protecting our health and our planet’s health or creating more peaceful, just, and kind societies. In addition, these “expert” modes of communication are unidirectional, lacking in reciprocity. Confident of their authority and world view, these experts speak but do not listen or expect a conversation. And even if some of the experts are competent and ethical, they may be ignored by political decision makers or they are too few. The dangers are too great. Therefore, everyone must take responsibility and take action. This is Eme’s position. She bears witness to the harm and injustices around her. And in doing so, she is justifiably frightened (and angry) and has the courage to *be* afraid and concerned. Here again emerges the issue of distance and proximity: instead of bowing to social pressures to keep a distance and refuse connection with others and with her own perceptions and feelings, Eme demonstrates proximity and closeness (empathy).

No doubt one function of the visceral style and tone of the drama (Eme’s chaotic voluminous speech; the Brechtian alienation effect and agitprop-like mix of direct address, song, dance, children’s rhymes; the intensity and urgency of Eme’s communication; the text in free verse form where line breaks and semantic units do not coincide) is meant to provoke a corresponding exercise of imagination and resultant emotions in the audience. There is a degree of “violence” in Eme’s awakening of our senses and our sensibility (confusion, fear, guilt, concern, responsibility), just as her own have been assaulted and altered. I am reminded of Anders’ claim that one has to “*violently* widen the narrow capacity” (13, emphasis added) of one’s imagination and emotions. The reader and audience are disoriented and must make sense of Eme’s speech just as Eme must make sense of the social discourses of her environment. Like Eme, they are challenged to achieve a greater level of self-consciousness and responsibility.

In addition, Pollock’s choice of the free verse form (rare in her works) and stream of consciousness mode stylistically parallel the theme of the dissolution of boundaries. Eme’s thoughts and words are fragmented and disconnected; at the same time, their accumulation, repetition, and variation generate new connections. In the free flow of expression and the free association of ideas within the chaotic experience of Eme’s consciousness, frames are dissolved and reformed. Everything is disconnected, cast adrift from their familiar contexts and, simultaneously, everything is connected (or potentially connected) to everything. Old familiar

and comforting meanings are destroyed and new disquieting meanings are created. For example, Eme's husband's work and their middle-class life, even their charity (he makes a tax deduction with her donation to foster parents plan [110]), are dislodged from their comforting insularity and linked to financial greed and the global trade in nuclear arms. The boundaries between us and them are broken. And new imaginary communities are constructed. For example, Eme's ethical imagination links together the many mothers in the drama (Eme herself, her Gramma, her mother, Enola Gay, the Japanese victims of the atom bomb, Casseopeia, the women holding up photographs of their families), united by their common experiences of injustice, powerlessness, and concern for their children. She addresses Enola Gay (the mother of Paul Tibbets, the pilot of the plane which dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, and the woman after whom he named his plane) and demands communication as if they were familiars. And Eme's childhood experience and the fate of her own children become reflections of historic, mythic, and present narratives of violence against women and children around the world. This is, again, evidence of Pollock's use of the kinship idiom, which I will discuss shortly.

Eme "warningly rais[es her] voice" (Anders, "Commandments" 15) in her direct address to her audience. She challenges authorities who discredit her observations, insisting that she is "getting it straight." It is not she who has "a great imagination" (*GIS* 112); it is society which lacks sufficient "moral fantasy" (Anders, "Commandments" 13, emphasis in original). But even that is not enough. Pollock is interested not only in ethical imagination, but in responsible action, praxis (to borrow Anders' term). Eme not only takes responsibility, she acts. She tells us: "I am / prepared / for this guilt [of harming or killing her husband] I am not / prepared for the guilt of / doing / nothing" (125). But some actions are more (or less) effective than others. It is Eme's choice of action, influenced by her external and internal limits and resources, which increase the complexity and ambivalence of the drama.

In an oft quoted 1982 interview, Pollock tells Robert Wallace: "I know there's a play that follows *Blood Relations* about what happens to the woman who is unable to kill either her father or her mother or, indeed, even herself. Obviously it's about women and madness" ("Sharon Pollock." 118). Pollock seemed to have been working through all three possibilities during the time of the interview and afterwards. If *Blood Relations* is about a woman who kills her parents, then two of the major plays immediately following it, *Whiskey Six Cadenza* (which premiered in

1983) and *Doc* (in 1984), can be seen as ones in which women kill themselves.²⁷ And several scholars associate *Getting It Straight* with Pollock's comment regarding a play about "women and madness."²⁸ This may be so, but discussions of *Getting It Straight* often focus on the issue of Eme's sanity—or, rather, insanity—and neglect Eme's power and reason, and, most importantly, the ending of the drama, in which Pollock actually gives us an additional choice to the three formulated above.

In addition to Pollock's 1982 statement to Wallace about murder and madness, an alternative lens through which to see *Getting It Straight* is her 1990 interview with Rita Much, two years after Pollock's premiere performance of Eme in Winnipeg. When Much asks Pollock what roles would appeal to her as an actress, she answers:

I'd like to play Medea. I think. The character is so very large; it resonates in a powerful way. Here we have a woman who does the very worst "unnatural" thing male-run society thinks she can do. It would be fascinating to try to find a way to present that act as rational, given her choices. I'd like the chance of showing the audience the tremendous pain that drives Medea to kill her children. The appeal of the role is that Medea is a woman *in action*. She's not passive or weak.

Whenever we see powerful women we turn them into witches. Think of the big, ugly step-mother in fairy tales. I'd like the challenge of showing a powerful

woman who isn't a witch. ("Sharon Pollock Interview" 213, emphasis in original)

Eme resonates with Medea. Like Medea, Eme is a woman who acts (or hopes she did). Eme, too, is "powerful" and she sees her act as "rational, given her choices." While Medea kills her innocent children as a means of "killing" or destroying her husband, Eme acts directly upon her husband in order to save the children, hers and those of others. In a "male-run society," killing one's husband is transgressive though it is usually not seen to be as "unnatural" as killing one's child, no doubt because one's spouse is family by choice (the stranger who becomes kin), whereas one's child (or parent) is a "blood relation." As such, society sees Eme as insane, rather

²⁷ Leah, in *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, gives Mr. Big a hand gun and then tells him she is leaving him. She basically invites him to kill her; and he does. In *Doc*, Bob commits suicide.

²⁸ For example, see Walker in *The Buried Astrolabe* (184), Zimmerman in "Transfiguring" (156), and Grace in *Making Theatre* (267).

than “a witch.” However, following Pollock’s description of Medea, Eme can be seen as both powerful and rational.

In Eme, Pollock shows us “rational” reactions to an irrational, schizophrenic, patriarchal, greedy, and violent society. In fact, Eme seems to go through all three options named by Pollock in her interview with Wallace and then arrives at a fourth. Eme attacks her husband in an effort to stop the social insanity and safeguard the future of her children. This is a symbolic act as well as a practical one of desperation. In attacking her husband, whom she sees as participating in the military-industrial complex which harms life and perpetuating the values of patriarchal society, she is symbolically killing her father and mother,²⁹ the irresponsible parents (more on this element of the kinship idiom later). In her frustration and powerlessness, she is also violent towards Freida and Myrna, women she knows from the institution.³⁰ Eme does not kill herself, but she is judged as mad and she is an escaped patient from a mental institution. None of the three alternatives (violence towards her parents, self-harm, and madness) is effective in liberating Eme or changing society. They are also individual responses; Eme acts alone. Few, if any, within the play shares her view of and concern for humanity. In Eme’s words: “this does not satisfy!” (121). But Pollock gives us one more possibility: Eme’s fantasy of a community of like-minded women acting together, a social solution to a social problem.

Eme describes her vision of cooperative feminist action twice in the drama. The first time it is addressed to Myrna alone, following a description of children dying in conflicts around the world (119-121), which “does not satisfy!”(121), and of her own children who, in their sleep, “twist and turn their sheets uprooted / wrapt round them like a shroud” (121):

you and

I
will will will
spin
a a

²⁹ This is the symbolic father, patriarchal society, the values of which Eme’s real mother enforces in her favouritism towards her son and devaluation of her daughter.

³⁰ Eme pushes Freida from a height and injures her (96-97) and violently hits Myrna, a fellow patient and friend, when Myrna makes lewd gestures and laughs at Eme’s feminist fantasy of universal cooperation and love (121-22). It is unclear if Freida is a patient or a staff member of the mental institution.

gossamer
 net
 of
 of what
 of women's hands and
 and rapunzel's hair and
 that net
 will encircle the globe and and
 if a person stood
 on on the far left star of of
 the utmost edge of of
 cassiopeia's chair!
 that net will
 twinkle in the in the
 inky cosmos like like fairy lights on a
 on a christmas
 tree and
 what what what will it
 spell?
 myrna smiles
 love myrna (121-122)

Eme's speech is full of hesitation and repetition, as if she were struggling to create her vision as she speaks. Myrna laughs and mocks Eme's answer of "love" and, hurt and in anger, Eme violently hits Myrna (122), thus revealing the difficulty in achieving this feminist cooperation and love.³¹ But Eme repeats her vision again at the end of the drama. This time her speech has lost its hesitation and fragmentation and it is not a fantasy addressed to Myrna alone but a "call for action" to "all members a the female / sex" (126):

What're you gonna do?

 I say
 go to the ladies
 go beneath
 go under
 you'll find others there
 I do have this stain on my skirt
 but myrna will answer twice on the bus while
 you

³¹ Notice how Eme's question of spelling also serves as a counterpoint of her husband's earlier question in the midst of his long speech: "how do you spell universal inc? / ooo that's an interview question u n i / communications! that's how you spell it" (106)

and I
 spin a gossamer net of women's hands and rapunzel's
 hair and that net will encircle the globe and if a
 person stood on the far left star of the utmost
 edge of cassiopeia's chair that net would twinkle
 in the inky cosmos like fair lights on a christmas
 tree—and what would it spell?

what would it spell?

what would it spell? (126)

Eme also does not attempt to answer her own question. She leaves the decision and the task to the community of women she addresses. What has transpired to cause this change?

In the passage between the two statements of her vision, Eme determines that her moral dilemma consists of choosing between two crimes: doing nothing or killing her husband (representative of life destroying patriarchal forces). She affirms her faith in the validity and importance of her observations and her values: “I want to believe I want to act but it's hard ping / it's an act of faith piiing” (124). She describes her resolve to act and affect change. She feels her responsibility and need to protect the children (her own and those of others), and she tells us she attacks her husband (124-25). Eme is clear about her decision:

myrna says they say I dreamt it [killing her husband]
 I say no
 no
 I say strike out strike down I say this is the lesser
 crime I am guilty of that I accept that I hope I
 have killed him, to have known and done
 nothing? that is the crime of that I am not guilty
 not guilty of that! (125-26)

Perhaps Eme's only real “madness,” the only dysfunction in Eme's thinking, is in perceiving that her choices were limited to these two crimes and in not being able to “imagine” that ultimately her violence (real or imaginary) would not be effective. Eme is incarcerated, she is separated from her children, and the global trade in injustice, violence, and greed continues. Individual responsibility and action is necessary but not sufficient. The type of action required to respond to society's “schizophrenia” cannot be taken alone. Hence Eme's renewed coherent “call for action” to “all members a the female / sex” (126).

Pollock's dramas have always addressed social issues and challenged audiences to reflect, to imagine differently, and to act. In *Getting It Straight* the communal challenge and call for

action is explicit. Eme alone cannot fold a thousand paper cranes (119-20) but a community of like-minded individuals working together can. At least, this is the feminist vision Eme gives us. At the end of *Getting It Straight*, Eme is no longer isolated but imagines herself in a community of women with a common cause, a constellation of individuals, “a net of women’s hands.” And, in this second iteration of her speech, the answer to what this constellation spells (what drives the community of women and what they create) is not “love” (122). As discussed in earlier chapters, the question of love for family and others is left unanswered in many of Pollock’s plays. Rather, Eme directs her question at her audience, inviting them to exercise their ethical imagination. Maybe, as Zelda tells Scott in *Angel’s Trumpet*, “it’s not about love, is it?” (192). Perhaps, in this case, other answers will suffice: empathy, compassion, care, justice, peace, equality.

Ethical Decision Making and the Kinship Idiom

As mentioned earlier, *Getting It Straight* contains a variety of languages or discourses: that of medicine, commerce, the military, popular media, advertising, children’s rhymes, marching songs, the voices of children caught in conflicts and wars. By having Eme repeat or report them, Pollock removes them from their original context and puts them in a new frame, highlighting their special interest and coercive utility, as well as their absurdity. In fact, the abrupt switches in discourses “ventriloquized” by Eme, their variety, and Eme’s presentational style, recall Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*, “making strange” languages and meanings we so often encounter but seldom take seriously or engage with critically.

One of the most prevalent discourses in *Getting It Straight* is the kinship idiom and its most striking occurrence is in the second half of Eme’s passage containing the aphorisms I discussed earlier:

I do not say I opened his [her husband’s] briefcase
 he says nothing
 I see he’s right
 inside his head they dropped the bomb it wasted all
 the people but it kept the real estate
 they say who dropped the bomb?
 I say his parents
 myrna says don’t tell them that!
 I say it’s just a metaphor! what are you thinking!?! (113)

In Eme’s understanding of the world, “the parents” are indeed killing the child. Those

responsible for the care of the children and the future they represent have failed. Here, “parent” and “child” also represent state and citizen. It is an ambivalent metaphor. From a more hopeful perspective, the parental metaphor can suggest any entity charged with the care and protection of others, especially the young, weak, and disadvantaged. However, the modern and contemporary parent-child relationship, impossibly idealized as the locus of love, care, and nurturance, can also be one of prejudice, competing and unmet needs, mis-communication, and the abuse of power. Myrna’s caution is evidence of the risk in using such a charged metaphor. Yet, the kinship idiom and the family metaphor are often the chief forms for Eme’s moral imagination and it is operative in both her private and public experiences.

Eme shares many memories and stories about her own family, but these are embedded with social commentary. Often there is tension; something is not right. Parents are absent or ineffectual or negligent and children are abandoned physically, emotionally, metaphorically. She speaks of being questioned about her father and deftly comments on social expectations regarding familial relationships: the psychological importance of the father-daughter relationship, the socially acceptable (and unacceptable) ways of addressing parents (91).³² The story of her father’s mis-naming (“R.D.” rather than “Artie”) becomes one of her “[f]ormidable” (93) grandmother’s failed struggle with authority (nurses) in naming her newborn son (92-93). Eme’s story of her paternal grandfather who dreams of travel but is incarcerated in a mental institution or nursing home with cross-hatched wires barring the windows (95-96), suggests families’ and citizens’ inability to care for one another, parents as well as children.³³ Pollock also links Eme’s grandfather to the madness of warfare and the fragility of humanity through a series of associative images related to bombs, pools of blood, and mental disturbances: a black hole inside grandfather’s head which blooms like a rose and Eme’s childhood game with her grandfather of “boom! fall in a ditch!” take on sinister overtones (96); a dream of grandfather’s house which transforms into one of “blotches of blood” (109) from victims of military executions, like dark

³² Eme reports a conversation with medical staff: “these are the kind of questions they ask you / here, are you close to your father? / yes / what do you call him? / daddy no not daddy father that’s what I call him / father” (91).

³³ As noted earlier, the image of a grandfather incarcerated in a mental institution, looking down a barred window, appeared in Pollock’s outline for the television script “That was before, This is Now” (n.p.).

purple flowers, on a wall; and the image of a (neutron) bomb going off in her husband's head (113). Eme's childhood account of her mother's favouritism of her brother Bubu represents not only the sexist values of her patriarchal society but women's perpetuation of this prejudice and the harm it causes (101). Finally, Eme tells us about her alienation from her husband (their lack of true communication), her horror at his capitalist hubris and greed and his participation in the military-industrial complex, and her concern for the future of her children (104-05). Her own childhood experience of sexism and the classical story of female scientist Hypatia (murdered by a man who is later canonized) cause Eme to fear for the future of her children and all children (104) in an unjust, violent, patriarchal world. In each case, the familial is intertwined with the social, the personal with the political.

In addition to telling us about her own family, Eme also describes her experience of the world around her and this, too, is expressed predominantly in terms of familial images and relationships. To begin with, society itself practises the kinship idiom, often to simplify and re-frame relationships and to placate and control its citizens. One of the first appearances of the family metaphor in *Getting It Straight* is Eme's reply to the charge that she is mad: "enola gay little boy fat man / little boy little boy fat man!" (89), a grotesque nuclear (arsenal) family of the military-industrial and scientific complex. "Little Boy" and "Fat Man" were the military code names for the atomic bombs which were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively. And Enola Gay is, ambivalently, both the deliverer of death (the bomber plane) and the deliverer of life (pilot Paul Tibbets' mother). Later, Eme and Myrna watch a television presentation explaining the Cold War concept of mutually assured destruction (ironically called "MAD") as a deterrence for nuclear warfare. Here too, the kinship idiom is employed by the speaker:

now suppose you could deter you [sic] neighbour from
 runnin' into you on the road by seizing his children
 and tyin' them to the front bumper a your car
 suppose everyone were to do likewise
 it's clearly evident accidents would decrease
 indeed the chances of a single child dyin' on a car
 bumper would be slight
 [.]
 and that's what nuclear deterrence is about, folks
 so when you hear balance of power holds innocent
 hostage I want you to think
 road safety and children! (114)

Not only is this example absurd and grotesque, but its logic is disturbing. First, it assumes

concern for one's own family and not that of others. Your neighbour is not deterred from attacking you by the harm it may cause your children; you have to seize your neighbour's children hostage to protect yourself. In addition, even concern for one's own family is idealistic. There is, sadly, too much evidence of people who willingly harm their own family members.

Increasingly, "look[ing] / to the past for guidance" (119), what Eme sees and describes are the plights of other families, especially those who suffer from international and civil conflicts. From her perspective, those involved are not soldiers, not workers, but kin. For example, the soldier Paul Tibbets is described as the "pilot son" of Enola Gay (97). And Eme's powerful descriptions of the atomic bombing of Japan are exclusively in terms of children (endangered) and parents (powerless or absent):

[. . .] I
 hear
 the voices of students calling for their mothers and
 [. . .] I
 see
 a mother weeping
 and
 holding above her head
 a naked baby
 that is burned bright red all over its body and
 another
 mother
 is crying
 as
 she gives her burnt breast to her baby and in the
 cistern students [. . .]
 [. . .] cry out
 calling
 for their
 parents but
 no parents come and every single person who passes
 is wounded
 all of them and
 the
 hair
 of the people
 is singed and frizzled and covered with dust
 they don't appear human
 they don't appear to be creatures of this world
 I have children
 where are they?

I have a stain on my skirt
 maybe
 his sister has them
 or my mother where are your children who has them?
 returned in a green plastic garbage bag or walking
 north from the pas till the cold sets in? (97-99)

Notice also how Eme's concern for children and families moves fluidly between the past and the present, the social and the personal; and it ranges from the Japanese victims of the atomic bomb in the Second World War to her own children and family, to "your children," to children (most likely Native) in The Pas, Manitoba.

Images of families continue to dominate Eme's consciousness and her conscience. Eme recounts being at home and seeing "outside / the window a tall woman in a yellow sari holds in / one hand a black and white photograph of a child" (119). She feels the futility (and perhaps ethical absurdity) of the donation she makes to "foster parents plan," in return for which she gets a photograph of her foster child and her husband gets an income tax deduction (110). The cleaning woman in the institution where Eme is placed shows her "a small / photograph / of / a / family / on a saigon street" (91). And it is "sons and daughters [who] die, their eyes closing on / rifle butt and boot" (120). Sometimes, Eme speaks in the voices of children caught in violent conflict, describing their own experiences in the first person:

the soldiers lined the young men up and beat them
 and shot them I hid but my brother was very brave
 and my mother was brave too for she held the flag
 up even though it was forbidden she didn't do it for
 the flag she did it for my brother!³⁴ (109)

Eventually, the notion of family is redefined. Eme's dream of her grandfather's house reaches the radical conclusion that we all share the same house and home. Where at first Eme tells the boy in her dream: "it is not your house! do you understand boy! / it is not your house!" (108), in the end, she concludes otherwise:

[. . .] my house is green
 shutters and shade says freida in white sweet
 berries and bark is that true?
 think about it
 get it straight

³⁴ In the draft of "Egg," this speech belongs to Yakuma, one of the puppets of children (26).

no no wherever there be roof tarp cardboard on
 hot air vent tree stone sand leafgrey dirtdark
 or shimmering that is our house believe and act
 on that belief!
 I am afraid for the children
 where are they? (109)

Eme moves from the perspective of individual rights and exclusive ownership (“your house” and “my house”) to a shared communal stance (“our house”). Her understanding of home also changes from a single, relatively privileged dwelling (the house with “green /shutters and shades” and “sweet berries and bark”) to a multiplicity of shelters, including more reduced and elementary forms (“roof tarp and board on / a hot air vent stone sand leafgrey dirtdark”). The word “family” originally meant not biological kin but those who lived in one house.³⁵ If all forms of dwellings are “our house,” then we, humanity as a whole, is one family and the children of others and one’s own children merit equal care and concern. And Eme’s fear becomes not what kind of future her children will have but whether they, similar to other children around the world, will live or die, whether they will have a future at all:

what are you going to be when you grow up will
 you grow up going to grow really up?
 yes these are the questions that begin to concern me (104)

Eme continues and questions the kind of future children will have and who they will become. Will they be inquisitive, seek knowledge, challenge social stereotypes, like Hypatia or will they be Cyril-like: discriminatory, violent, jealous of their privileges and powers (104-105)? Again, Eme’s concerns expand from the fates of individual children and families to those of citizens and societies.

However, despite the prevalence of parents, children, and siblings in *Getting It Straight*, despite the presence of the family metaphor, Eme’s final call of action to the women of the world is free of the kinship idiom. One might expect a call of solidarity in an emphatically feminist drama of the late 1980s to employ the family metaphor of “sisterhood” or appeal to the maternal. Yet Eme makes no such reference. The relationship might be implicit but names are important and Pollock has chosen to forego the family metaphor in Eme’s closing moral fantasy. The kinship idiom is a tool. On one hand, tools are neutral and can be used for good or ill; on the

³⁵ See “family, n.” Def. 2.a. *OED Online*.

other hand, tools can also shape the task,³⁶ and we often think and act as if the tenor and vehicle, ground and figure, of metaphors are one. The parents have dropped the bomb on the children. One might not wish to repeat even the semblance of a past hierarchical relationship, often (though not exclusively) lacking in choice (one cannot choose one's parents, siblings, or other relatives), which might be invested with unmet needs, anger, jealousy, betrayal, injustice. Perhaps Eme's (and Pollock's) choice of language, her explicit refusal of the kinship idiom, reflects her calls for new forms of relationships and new forms of community, where the well-being of others, whether they be children or adults, is not the sole responsibility of their parents and kin alone. In fact, in her final address to all the women of the world, Eme stresses not only their collectivity but their differences in occupation, class, race, ethnicity, geography, and nationality. If a society truly believes in justice and equality, then care for basic human needs and rights should not be dependant on privileged relationships but should be available to all, kin and non-kin.

While the kinship idiom may be absent from Eme's closing imaginary community of women, ultimately, it persists in the whole of the drama and, as I have demonstrated, many of Pollock's other plays, including those which follow *Getting It Straight*. For example, the kinship idiom is very much present in *Man Out of Joint*, one of Pollock's latest published works (first produced in 2007, first published in 2008), a play about 9/11 and Guantanamo Bay, racism, corporate greed, and state atrocities (specifically those of Canada and the United States). As Grace observes, *Man Out of Joint* is "hard-hitting theatre about universal issues and perennial Pollock themes" and its protagonist Joe/Joel Gianelli, the Italian-Canadian lawyer committed to the defence of political detainees, is another of Pollock's "characters of conscience" (*Making* 367), a moral individual confronting greater immoral authoritarian forces.

While I do not wish to detract from the play's powerful social and political critique, I cannot help but see that, as in Pollock's other works, its geopolitical concerns are made more personal and imaginable (in Anders' terms) by the use of the kinship idiom. Gianelli is not only a crusading lawyer but also a son, husband, and father, obsessed by his work and his familial losses: struggling with his failing marriage to his wife Suzanne; mourning the recent death of

³⁶ Abraham Kaplan calls this the "law of the instrument" and explains: "Give a small boy a hammer, and he will find that everything he encounters needs pounding" (28).

their three-year old son Spencer; and contending with the burden of his heritage, given voice by his dead immigrant father Dominic. (The youth Dominic and his family were unjustly interned and their lives shattered during World War Two by the Canadian government.) And while Grace compares Gianelli to other Pollock characters like “Walsh, Hopkinson, Doc, and Eddie/Emily” (*Making* 367), I am struck by the resemblances between *Man Out of Joint* and *Getting It Straight*, and between Gianelli and Eme.

Just as time and space are fluid in *Getting It Straight*, Pollock’s stage direction in *Man Out of Joint* indicates: “Multiple dimensions of time and space are layered in the world of the play” (304). Both protagonists’ growing awareness of horrifyingly unethical social and political realities are threatened or minimized with suspicions and charges of insanity. Most importantly, the final impetus for their transgressive political action (real or hoped for) is articulated through their intense sense of responsibility and concern for their children and the children of the world. As discussed earlier, Eme asks her children:

what are you going to be when you grow up will
you grow up going to grow up really? (104)

And of her real (or imagined) murder of her husband, she states:

I say strike out strike down I say this is a lesser
crime I am guilty of that I accept that I hope I
have killed him, to have known and done
nothing? that is the crime of that I am not guilty
not guilty of that! (125-26)

Similarly, at the close of *Man Out of Joint*, Joel tells his law partner Erin,

JOEL [. . .] You decide.
ERIN Decide what?
JOEL What to do Erin. What to do.
I have to go.
ERIN Go where?
JOEL Wherever knowing this takes me – I’m not crazy you know.
ERIN I’ve got to be honest, you’re pushing the envelope, Joe.
JOEL Don’t you get it? Spence isn’t gone. Spencie is here right now. And I’m
going for Spencie, and I’m going with Spencie. Now you may not
understand that – but – Spencie does.
All the Spencers, all over the world, they understand. I’m taking action for
them.
I won’t stand by and watch.
I’m not going to do that. (*He exits*) (364)

And finally, both plays end with an unanswered ethical question addressed to the audience. Eme,

after describing, for the second time, how “you / and I” will spin a “gossamer net of women’s hands and rapunzel’s hair” which “encircles the globe,” asks the audience:

[. . .] what would it spell?
 what would it spell?
 what would it spell? (126)

Before symbolically shouldering a gun and leaving the stage at the end of *Man Out of Joint*, Joe describes a memory of Spencer.³⁷ It is a story about how his son “noticed things,” such as a homeless man or an unhappy hungry child, gives voice to what he sees, and asks for caring action (365). Joe’s last words, and the last words of the play, are:

He’d see a child and say, “She’s not very happy” or “I think she’s hungry, Daddy . . . what should we do?” . . . That’s what he’d ask. “What Should We Do?” . . . He was . . . He was almost three then. Almost three.³⁸ (365)

As we see, the kinship idiom and the ethics of care and responsibility remain powerfully persistent in Pollock’s work.

But the kinship idiom is double-edged and ambivalent. Family, kin, and fictive kin can both strengthen our ability to act and restrict our choice of actions.³⁹ The family metaphor is a powerful persuasive tool enabling us to expand our moral fantasy and extend our network of privileged relationships and care to strangers by seeing them as family. The ideal relationships within a nurturing and supportive family form one of the bases of our ethical conduct in society. Congruent with the care perspective posited by Gilligan, the kinship idiom values and envisions

³⁷ Joe, who appears similar to Joel and is on stage during the whole drama may be interpreted as symbolically both the man Joel becomes at the end of the drama and, because Joseph was the name Dominic gave him at birth, the man he always was. Notice here another instance of the kinship idiom common in Pollock’s plays: the concern with generations, naming, and familial versus individual identity.

³⁸ This passage too has generational resonances in the play since, earlier, Dominic tells a story of how he and his young son, the child Joe, walked down Spadina Avenue in Toronto and was confronted by an angry woman begging for money. Dominic attempts to shield Joe from the sight of the woman while thinking that this was his long lost sister Anna. Anna and Joe ultimately exchanged glances, but the story ends with the woman walking away and Dominic’s admission that “I did not call out ‘Anna.’ I did not go after her” (338).

³⁹ Interestingly, Grace associates Dominic’s haunting reminders of “past injustices” with Joe’s lack of choice and sacrifice: “the son will have no choice other than to oppose the racial profiling [. . .] in contemporary society. What happened during the war is happening once more, and someone must have the courage to stand up against it, regardless of personal sacrifice” (368).

“specific others” and contextual relationships rather than “generalized others” and abstract bonds.

However, there are other facets to the model. Society often transmits its values to new generations of citizens through the family and these values can be harmful as well as caring. Kinship relations are also inherently hierarchical, in terms of age, generation, and gender. And Pollock’s views towards the family, and relationships in general, are predominantly conflictual. She tells Zimmerman:

Part of me thinks that all writing is about relationship. You can’t have two people without having a hierarchy, right? It may not always be the same, and in the best of all possible worlds the relationship would be freely chosen, which is almost impossible. So within the family I see the same dominant and submissive positions that are acted against or reinforced as people try to preserve power or seize power. People try to choose and things block their choices. (“Towards a Better ” 37-38)

Yet the kinship idiom persists. Clear-eyed and ambivalent as usual, carefully wielding a tool she knows to be flawed as well as powerfully constructive, Pollock (and her protagonists) strives for viable caring relationships and communities, the “almost impossible” and “the best of all possible worlds.”

Chapter Six

Conclusion: “what would it spell?”

And when I look at my plays in order to analyze them, look at *Blood Relations* or others as if someone else wrote them [. . .] I think that the person who wrote them was consumed with surface and substance, with inside and outside, with internal and external, with over and under. So the outside of the house in *Blood Relations* or the outside of the family, or even the eyes looking in a mirror and all those reflections seem to have some place in it although I didn't choose them consciously. (Pollock, “Towards a Better” 37)

What I Found: Observations

This study was initially inspired by two key patterns I observed in Sharon Pollock's plays: ambivalent misalignment, the co-existence of opposing feelings, states, values, needs; and the kinship idiom, articulations of the literal family and the family as metaphor for other forms of relationships, especially larger social groups. Ambivalent misalignment and the kinship idiom appear not just as content but also in the formal structure of Pollock's dramas. While my study looks at both content and form (they are inseparable), I chose to highlight form because I am interested in Pollock's craft, her work as a playwright (a “maker” of plays, as Shipman would say). I am interested in what her works look like, how they are put together, and how meanings are invoked. Formal elements, such as geometries of character constellations, rhythms and repetitions, frames, generic structures, and inter-texts add experiential, affective, and aesthetic dimensions which reinforce the intellectual ideas and arguments of the plays. In addition, Pollock herself has spoken of the importance of structure in her work and I wish to respond to her focus with a reciprocal attention. Finally, I am sympathetic to Susan Sontag's call, in her 1964 essay “Against Interpretation,” for more formal analysis in commentary on the arts and “a really accurate, sharp, loving description of the appearance of a work of art” (13). She encourages attention to the sensory experience and the materiality of an art work, stating that:

“[w]e must learn to *see* more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more” (14, emphasis in original). As my study progressed, I found this injunction increasingly resonant with Pollock’s work. I am reminded of Eme’s decision to pay attention to the suffering and injustices she sees, hears, and feels around her, as well as Anders’ suggestion that we need to enlarge our capacity to feel and to imagine ethically. Sontag ends her essay with the statement that “[t]he function of criticism should be to show *how it* [a work of art] *is what it is*, even *that it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means*” (14, emphasis in original). Sontag was writing in response to the critical emphasis of her time, but I believe her observations have enduring value. In my study, I have not eschewed meaning, but I have striven for a co-existence of description, formal analysis, and interpretation.

The Kinship Idiom

As structural and thematic foundations interwoven with each other throughout the plays, ambivalent misalignment and the kinship idiom connect a diverse and inter-connected number of concepts and forms. As I pointed out in my introduction, my inspiration for the term “kinship idiom” is Nancy Chodorow’s comment that “a kinship idiom can come to describe and incorporate whatever productive relations develop” (*Reproduction of Mothering* 12). Certainly, family relations are the subjects of many of Pollock’s plays and they form the idiom or metaphor used to understand and speak about larger social groups (from communities, to nations, to the globe), material objects (the nuclear arsenal “family” of *Enola Gay*, *Fat Man*, and *Little Boy*), and immaterial concepts (such as *Mutually Assured Destruction* and visions of the future), imbuing them with kin-like familiarity, values, and associations. The kinship idiom, in terms of the family of blood and the family of choice, is used to socially and politically exclude and include individuals and groups. As such, the kinship idiom bridges Pollock’s “family plays” and “history plays.” In Pollock’s dramas, familial issues of concern for the literal and metaphoric family include inter-generational anxieties about identity and inheritance, the future of a family which harms its own members, negotiations with the dead and the past (loss and mourning), and the ambivalent demands of individual freedom and familial responsibilities.

At the same time, family is not monolithic and Pollock uses different types of family to model different forms of community relationships and to characterise the moral standing of different groups. For example, in *Walsh*, the close-knit loving family of Sitting Bull is contrasted

with the fragmented and emotionally distanced families of Walsh, Clarence, and the all-male “family” of the NWMP to represent the superior moral standing of the Native peoples compared to White society.¹ And while family is often portrayed as a systematic restrictive force in Pollock’s plays, there are also moments when it is a source of emotional support and ethical action. For example, this is the case for Margaret in *Generations*, the Roberts women in *Fair Liberty’s Call*, and Eme in *Getting It Straight*.

The kinship idiom also functions in a more literal manner. Much of the early critical analysis of Pollock’s work describe her as portraying a heroic individual struggling against a corrupt systemic force or authority. However, Pollock’s dramas repeatedly stress that such forces are composed of families and individuals, not incomprehensible, removed, inhuman machines or systems. For example, in *The Komagata Maru Incident*, families are the agents of prejudice who take home and farm land away from dissenting or minority citizens, who are themselves represented as families. In *Saucy Jack*, the victims of Jack the Ripper are not isolated nameless women but beloved family members: daughters, wives, and mothers. In *Getting It Straight*, the kinship idiom describes the nuclear weapons arsenal used to destroy Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the Second World War and those who make such decisions and actions possible (individuals and states), as well as the victims of the atomic bombs and of oppressive states. In fact, it is not different families in conflict but, exemplifying Bennet Simon’s notion of tragedy, members of the same family killing each other: the parents dropping the bomb on the children.

Equally important, Pollock herself is ambivalent about the power of the kinship idiom and its use as a strategic tool of persuasion and understanding. She repeatedly highlights and resists the ability of states to co-opt actions taken on behalf of familial individuals (blood or fictive kin) as acts on behalf of the state. She insists upon a personal familial motive for political action rather than a nationalist one: love for the family rather than the nation-as-family. (This is parallel to Bodnar’s distinction between official and vernacular mourning practises which I

¹ There are many formulations of two opposing forms of family, with different, though overlapping, theoretical and disciplinary inflections. For example, one common sociological approach characterises the “maternal family” and the “paternal family,” linguist George Lakoff identifies “the nurturing family” and the “strict father” family as the foundations of American liberal and republican moral and political values (see *Metaphor, Morality, and Politics*), and drama scholar Tom Scanlan sees the ambivalent desires for the “family of security” and the “family of freedom” as a dominate theme in American drama (see *Family, Drama, and the American Dream*).

discuss in Chapter three.) For example, as quoted in the previous chapter, Eme, gives voice to one of the children of civil conflict, describing his or her mother defiantly holding up a flag, adding that “she didn't do it for / the flag she did it for my brother!” (*GIS* 109). The state also attempts to co-opt familial loss and mourning as Annie Roberts reveals in *Fair Liberty's Call*. Annie stresses to Anderson that her betrayal of the “traitor” Benedict Arnold to the Rebels was a personal, not political, act: “I was thinkin’ of Arnold, not the Arnold who betrayed the Rebel cause, but the Arnold who betrayed my brother Richard. Can you understand that?” (74).

Indeed, loss and mourning is one of the central concerns articulated by the kinship idiom in Pollock’s work. This theme (and form) entails not only loss of kin (for example, the daughter’s loss of the maternal figure, which Zimmerman and Grace so convincingly demonstrate), but also loss and mourning on a broader scale, both individual and communal. Characters lose not only parents, siblings, children, fictive kin, but also homes, aspects of their identities, and their expectations for their future. They lose faith in their ideals or their understandings of their worlds and their relations to those worlds. Loss and mourning are associated with issues such as individual, familial, and national inheritances and identities and with productive and destructive responses to loss, including an emphasis on story-telling (family stories and national narratives) as a means and form of mourning and remembrance.

Ambivalent Misalignment

Ambivalent misalignment is a core condition of the mourner-inheritor who is often challenged by both the desire to cling onto and the necessity to “let go” of the beloved deceased or lost object. Pollock’s mourners struggle to reconcile their relations to those who are “there and not there” and to negotiate their responsibilities to the past, present, and future, including whether to mourn or tell stories about the past—or not. Ambivalence is also, in Cole’s words, “displaced onto the governing structure and imagery of the play[s]” (2), tying together many of the structural characteristics of the mourning ritual and the condition of the mourner (including the notion of the liminal and the transitional space, both physical and mental). Loss and mourning allow us to see in a new light formal elements in Pollock’s work such as doubling and repetition, antiphony, and associated genres such as the lament, funeral oratory, elegiac romance, and the ghost story. Pollock’s plays also articulate the psychological and ethical necessity for the community and nation to acknowledge loss and permit mourning, both individual and communal.

Ambivalence also occurs in many other forms and situations in addition to the condition of mourning. For example, it is present in ethical decision making, inter-generational relationships in general, and individual identity construction. At the start of this study, I raised the question of whether ambivalent misalignment is resolved or whether it persists, in one form or another, constituting a “normal” state in Pollock’s dramatic world. My answer is that Pollock’s plays overwhelmingly demonstrate continuing states of ambivalent misalignment, including that between presence and absence, proximity and distance, present and past, self and other, love and work, care and justice, imagination and action. This is especially evident in the endings of the dramas. For example, at the end of *Blood Relations*, Miss Lizzie tells the Actress and the audience: “I didn’t [kill my parents]. [. . .] You did” (70). Pollock casts into doubt not only the Actress’s (and the audience’s) ability to know “what happened?” but also complicates wider issues such as the assumption of universality and feminist solidarity, and the validity of personal experience as a source of general knowledge. In *Doc*, Catherine, with Ev’s approval, burns Gramma Kate’s letter, an act which has drawn responses from scholars as both a silencing of Gramma Kate’s voice and a refusal of knowledge, as well as an attempt at forgiveness and survival.² In *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, Johnny, who had earlier argued with Mama George about the distinction between lie and truth and the necessity and moral superiority of the latter (211), ends the play with the paradoxical and ambivalent statement: “It [the past or his account of the past] may all have been lies, but that still doesn’t mean it weren’t true” (247). At the end of *Moving Pictures*, we return to the opening “*three in one*” (17) image of Helen-Nell-Shipman alone on stage, lacking connection with others, yet playing together. For her, work has taken precedence over human connections and love, but the audience is left in a state of ambivalence over the demands of artistic expression and its cost in human relations. *End Dream*, a play which enacts three different versions of events leading to Janet Smith’s death, also ends as it begins, with Janet’s death and Wong Foon Sing telling her, “I did not want this. I do care for you. (*He touches her face.*) Did you have feelings for me?” (163)³—choosing to do so in Cantonese, a

² See Wasserman, “Daddy’s Girls” 32-33; Belliveau, “Daddy on Trial” 166-67; and Zimmerman, “Transfiguring” 154.

³ *End Dream* opens with Wong Foon Sing, at a distance from Janet Smith, saying “I did not want this. I do care for you. Do you have feelings for me?” (101).

language she does not understand.⁴ It is a declaration of mutuality with a built-in lack of reciprocity by a man who seems both to care for her and to acquiesce to, or actually commit, her murder. Finally, *Angel's Trumpet* ends with two simultaneous scenes: while Zelda declares her artistic and existential freedom and persistence, wielding the power to narrate the end of the story (including Scott's and her own deaths), Renton bows to Scott's demands for her continued incarceration and the cessation of her writing, sealing her imprisonment in the institution in which she will die, locked in her room with other patients, unable to escape when fire destroys the building. In each case, the ambivalent misalignment is intellectual, emotional, and formal. And its effect is to disturb our complacency and cause us to examine our assumptions and responses.⁵

Story-Telling and Relational Stories

Just as Pollock's use of the kinship idiom posits a self-in-relation (what psychologists such as Gilligan call a relational self), so I find in Pollock's dramas not only stories of relations (familial story-telling) but also stories-in-relation, relational stories. Like their individual story-tellers, stories are not autonomous but exist in relation to other stories, each influencing the meaning of the other, each inspiring the telling of another. This is so because of the social nature of stories and story-telling and because, as Pollock's own image of the crystal and light beams suggests, no one story is sufficient to illuminate the truth or reality of any subject. In fact, Pollock challenges the simple equation of story (or history) with truth by highlighting the constructedness of the story and its role as strategic performance. Story-telling in her plays serves many functions; for example, it is a form of entertainment, a tool of persuasion, an expression of loss and remembrance (story-telling as mourning ritual), a means of "doing" relationships, and an

⁴ When Janet and Wong Sing first meet, she clearly states she does not understand Cantonese (104). Unexpectedly, just before her death, Janet tells Wong Sing "I love you!" (163) in Cantonese, the only time she speaks Chinese in the play. I interpret this as symbolic or expressionist or as the acquisition of a few common phrases, and not necessarily as an indication that she has learned Cantonese and can understand Wong Sing's words.

⁵ For example: what has the Actress really discovered? how valid is our tendency to generalize from our individual experiential knowledge? How are truth and lie defined in *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, and by us? How does one demonstrate love? How do we respond when words (claims of love or endurance) and actions contradict each other (another form of ambivalent misalignment)?

existential foundation of life itself.

Pollock represents the relational and multiple nature of stories and story-telling through a variety of formal techniques. She tests the validity of her story-tellers and their stories, challenging them with competing and multiple versions of a story (ambivalent misalignments again), whether these are personal narratives (autobiographies), family or community stories, or national narratives (received histories). Telling stories to each other, telling family stories, as well as deciding not to tell certain stories (ambivalence about story-telling) are ways in which individuals and communities build relationships and identities. Pollock's plays, with their intertwining of families and familial story-telling, demonstrate both Elizabeth Stone's assertion that, in terms of family, "[w]hat blood does not provide, narrative can" (70) and Bennett Simon's observations linking anxieties about the propagation of progeny and the propagation of stories in tragic drama (2-4).

At the same time, Pollock highlights the creative, performative, and subjective nature of story-telling by creating unreliable narrators, often protagonists who are artists and story-tellers by profession and by vocation; using first-person direct addresses to the audience; and placing characters as watchers and listeners on the periphery of the stage. She also employs other meta-theatrical/meta-fictional techniques such as circular structures and temporal misalignments (for example: temporal frames, repeated scenes, overlapping scenes), direct references to plot structure and what makes a good story, questions about how the story ends, and characters who speak of their lives as stories, games, plays.

Ethical Directions and Viable Communities

Finally, I return to the last question I raise in my introduction: whether Pollock's plays envision forms of relationships which are ethically and emotionally desirable. I believe there are significant clues which indicate the ethical vector of Pollock's work. I am borrowing the term "vector" from the disciplines of physics and mathematics, where a vector is "a quantity having direction as well as magnitude, esp. as determining the position of one point in space relative to another" ("Vector," def. 1). I believe the kinship idiom and ambivalent misalignment are significant sources for the direction and strength of Pollock's ethical vision.

It is possible to accept Pollock's characterization of her plays as focussed on the tragic struggles of an individual against a distanced authoritarian force or against another individual,

but that would be a distillation of conflicts into their most common and elementary form—and content. Instead, I have chosen to explore their varied and specific manifestations, and to discern clues of how hopeful and specific resolutions may be reached. Pollock's characters struggle with competing and opposing social and ethical demands: the needs of the self and the needs of others (especially family), the challenges of justice and care in ethical decision making, the need to confront the increasing destructive capacities of our actions with a corresponding enlargement of our ethical imagination. In addition, the situations are more complex than conflicts between an individual and other(s). For example, plays such as *Walsh, Blood Relations* and *Getting It Straight* show us that not only does the individual struggle against external others, she (or he) also struggles against internal forces and desires. Major Walsh admits that he values his own survival more than his ethical values and his friendship with the Sioux. Miss Lizzie's desire to retain her inheritance and accustomed life style contributes to her murderous actions as much as her opposition to oppressive patriarchal forces.⁶ Eme, the individual, appears as capable of violence and possessiveness as the authoritarian forces against which she struggles.

From the varied observations in this study, I offer here my understanding of Pollock's vision for a viable community. Individuals and communities do not exist in isolation nor do they live solely for themselves and their self-directed goals but exist in-relation to each other. One metaphor in operation for desirable human and community relations is the family, but it is a family which nurtures and welcomes growth and difference rather than confines and stamps out change. The model is closer to that of the constellation, with its elastic connections, space for movement, and contextual form, than the jigsaw puzzle, with its fixed shape and tight inelastic connections. Such a community is also compatible with an ethics of care highlighted by Carol Gilligan, not to the exclusion of rights and justice, but in dynamic relation to them.

Ultimately, I believe the kinship idiom, refracted through the theoretical observations of Carol Gilligan and Günther Anders, helped me to see better the foundation, as well as complexity and breadth, of Pollock's ethical concerns and reasonings. As such, a more viable form of

⁶ Miss Lizzie's exchange with Dr Patrick in which she asks him to weigh one life against another (*BR* 60-62), easily making the ethical decision to abandon or even kill others in favour of her own survival, is a brutally challenging scene which I find powerfully ambivalent. Her self-interested decision may be admirable in its honesty but the ease with which she makes and declares her choice (i.e. her lack of internal struggle) contributes to the chilling aspects of her character.

relationship is to strive for a co-existence of care and justice, responsibilities and rights, challenges with which so many of Pollock's plays wrestle.⁷ Pollock's plays also suggest we must respond to our ever growing capacity for destructive action with a corresponding enlargement of our capacity to feel more and to imagine fully the outcomes of such destructive abilities so that we may temper them with ethical decisions and actions. This pertains in personal individual relationships (as between Ev and Bob, Nell and her family, Scott and Zelda) and relationships between social groups. One way to develop our ethical imagination is to practise conscious story-telling, as well as to pay attention to the stories of others. Conscious story-telling would involve an ethical awareness that one's story is not necessarily the truth but an expression of need or desire. It is self-reflexive and it may tell us more about the triangular relationship between story-teller, subject, and listener than the subject itself. It is a difficult practise. Paradoxically, or perhaps in a state of ambivalent misalignment, story-telling both helps us to see our limitations and enables us to push beyond those limits and create new realities. Ultimately, in Pollock's dramas, more stories, even unpleasant stories, are better than fewer stories. And the ghosts of the past are not dispelled by silence, secrets, refusals to hear, and "killin'" but, in Joan's words, by "talk and namin' and talk" (*FLC* 71).

So What? Ways of Seeing

This study demonstrates that a sustained formal analysis can illuminate cohesive details, themes, and methods in Pollock's work neglected to date. The cohesiveness and complexity of ambivalent misalignment and the kinship idiom in Pollock's dramas attest to her skill as an artist and constitute the foundation of her theatrical exploration of human relations and ethical practice. The choice of observational tools, methodology, and theoretical foundations influences what one sees (what is defined as data) and how one makes sense of one's observations. George Lakoff argues that "our conceptual system is largely metaphorical" (*Metaphors* 3) and that conceptual metaphors influence and structure how we think, act, and feel. For example, he observes that we (North Americans) speak of arguments as wars. He stresses: "It is important to see that we don't just *talk* about argument in terms of war. We can actually win or lose arguments. We see the

⁷ Such plays include *Walsh*, *One Tiger to a Hill*, *Komataga Maru Incident*, *Getting It Straight*, *Fair Liberty's Call*, *Angel's Trumpet*.

person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and we defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. [. . .] Many of the things we *do* in arguing are partially structured by the concept of war” (4, emphasis in original). Vehicle and tenor become one. Lakoff continues that it is possible to describe and conceive of arguments in other terms. For example, people in another culture may see arguments as dances. In which case, the participants would be “partners” or “performers” instead of “opponents,” and their goals might be harmony and aesthetic beauty instead of victory. He adds: “In such a culture, people would view arguments differently, experience them differently, carry them out differently, and talk about them differently. But *we* would probably not view them as arguing at all: they would simply be doing something different” (5, emphasis in original).

My study offers a different way of looking at Pollock’s work by highlighting some of the conceptual metaphors in operation. In doing so, I observe neglected features of the dramas and new ways of understanding Pollock’s work. For example, several scholars have looked at Pollock’s work from the structural and thematic perspective of the trial;⁸ my study shifts the angle of observation from “trial” to “mourning (ritual).” Pollock’s concern with social and personal injustices, as well as the significance of memory and history in her work, remain in both forms, both models, but the emphases, elements, goals, and desires are located differently. The trial metaphor entails specific attitudes, ways of relating and seeing, objectives, and actions. Once it is adopted, the observer searches for a crime and its evidence; the agents in play become the accused, the victim, the judge, a jury, criminal, witness, advocates and lawyers; and one is interested in reason, the law, rights, justice, the determination of innocence and guilt (judgment), wrongs and injuries, retribution and restitution, issues of morality and ethics.

The model of mourning re-frames the story and focuses on a different set of characteristics, players, goals, and obstacles. For example, the actors or agents include: the (beloved) deceased or lost objects, ghosts, mourners, inheritors, witnesses (a shared element with “trial” but having very different connotations) and the issues with which one struggles include

⁸ For example, Ann Saddlemyer writes about Pollock’s interest in crime, injustice, and an “internal trial” in Pollock’s *Blood Relations* (“Crime in Literature” 216); Jerry Wasserman argues for the theme of father-daughter incest in Canadian feminist plays by women, including Pollock’s *Blood Relations* and *Whiskey Six Cadenza* (“Daddy’s Girls”), and George Belliveau’s speaks of the discussion of a “memory trial” structure and a “moral court” (“Daddy on Trial” 162, 163).

emotional attachment, loss, absence, grief, suffering, remembrance, ambivalence, liminality, and the difficult task of negotiating one's (the individual's, the community's, the nation's) relationship with the dead or lost. I am not saying that the trial metaphor doesn't involve loss and emotions or that mourning ignores issues of ethics and responsibility. I am saying that, while there are over-laps, the two metaphors tend to obscure and highlight different facets of the situation, allowing different observations to be made. Recalling the image of the constellation: the individual stars remain the same but, due to a different angle of observation, the design and meanings we make of them differ.

Newly visible elements and patterns can help explain observed reactions to the dramas. For example, with regards to *Doc*, Pollock has noted the critical attention to Bob and neglect of Catherine. She tells Zimmerman in 1991: "because Bob is more present, more active even though she is acted upon, I don't think the audience sufficiently realizes what has happened to Catherine. Catherine is the figure that has learned from the tragedy" ("Towards a Better" 38). I think the neglect of Catherine can be further explained by the existing critical discussion's emphasis on the trial model, focussing on Ev and the degree of his responsibilities for the neglect and death of his wife Bob and his mother Kate (his "crimes"). Within this context, Ev is the accused and Bob is the primary victim and, arguably, the chief prosecutor. While Katie/Catherine can also be seen as a victim, Bob draws the focus because of her dramatic presence and, in another instance of ambivalent misalignment, her dramatic absence: her death by suicide. Katie/Catherine is mainly one of the surviving witnesses and a weak prosecutor who feels partly guilty for her mother's neglect and death.⁹ However, if we shift to the loss and mourning model, then Ev recedes from view¹⁰ and Katie/Catherine as mourner-inheritor comes to the fore, while Bob remains significant as both mourner (for her own lost possibilities, her lost self) and beloved-deceased. I should note that the most recent critical explorations by Grace and Zimmerman do attend to Catherine, precisely because they pay attention to the theme of a

⁹ The collection of roles in *Doc* is actually more complex than that. There are several accusers (Bob, Gramma Kate, Oscar, Katie/Catherine to an extent) and several witnesses (Katie, Oscar, Bob), though Catherine is the only surviving one in the play.

¹⁰ Ev does not fit well into the central roles in the mourning model. He is not the beloved-deceased and he does not seem to mourn either the loss of Kate or Bob. In fact, he mourns the deaths of his patients and losses of their families more than those of his own family.

daughter's response to the loss of her mother rather than of a child putting her father on trial for his crimes.¹¹

A change in model or form also alters the "structure of feeling" (Williams 40) within and towards a work. The trial form tends to emphasize or prioritise confrontation, critical analysis, the urgent search for fault and responsibility. The mourning form leans toward care, empathy, reflection.¹² For example, there is an interesting scene in *Doc* where Catherine and Ev recall a photograph of Bob cradling a little pig like a baby, feeding it with a bottle (124-25). Catherine observes that Bob "looked as if she was waiting. Just waiting" for something "[b]ut whatever it was, she couldn't grab it" (125). Ev asks Catherine if she knows what she wants; Catherine says "yes," and Ev replies, "[t]hen you grab it" (125). This scene has tones of remembrance and reconciliation, but there is also evaluation. An obscure critical judgement has been made. The unspoken judgement by father and daughter is that Bob lacked something (initiative, strength, motivation, some kind of moral toughness) which contributed to her demise, her inability to grab at life; and that Catherine, like her father, does not.¹³

However, Bob's waiting, especially in the given context, can be seen not as a flaw or a weakness but as a sign of loss and mourning (the loss of her identity, of meaningful work, of Ev's love, of her ability to have children). Mourning can look and feel like "waiting." C.S. Lewis notes, in *A Grief Observed*: "grief still feels like fear. Perhaps, more strictly, like suspense. Or like waiting; just hanging about waiting for something to happen. It gives life a permanently provisional feeling. It doesn't seem worth starting anything" (29). Likewise, James Redfield, in his description of funerary rituals in *The Iliad*, states: "The dead man is going on a journey, and the impulse of the mourners is to go with him; the most perfect mourning would be

¹¹ See Zimmerman's "Transfiguring the Mother" and Grace's *Making Theatre*.

¹² Of course, there is a range of variations in the trial and mourning models. In the current study I have identified differing types of mourning practices (for example, official and vernacular) with variable feeling tones. However, it is the mourning form related to care and empathy which I think Pollock's plays represent as more ethically positive and constructive.

¹³ I am reminded of a similar instance where a daughter distances herself from her mother: Miss Lizzie's description of her dead mother, followed by a pause, after which she comments: "Some people have very small wrists, have you noticed. Mine aren't . . ." (*BR* 58). Miss Lizzie's observation is also another example of physical traits used to characterise psychological or emotional relationships, like David's remark to Edward about the size of their hands in *Generations* (164).

suicide, and this is treated as a real possibility (XVIII.34). Short of this the mourner may suspend his life” (181). These seem like apt descriptions of Bob and as appropriate an interpretation of her behaviour as an inability to “grab” at life. Of course, prolonged mourning, like melancholia or depression, is still often seen by contemporary Western culture as shameful, willful, and excessive; it is evidence of moral weakness. However, as Pollock and Annie Roberts state: what you see depends on your “angle of observation.”

Returning to the prevalence of ambivalent misalignment, the kinship idiom, and the importance of story-telling in Pollock’s plays, we have seen that they are not only major structural and thematic elements on their own but together they help illuminate the ethical foundations of Pollock’s work. While ambivalent misalignment can be a source of psychological distress and lead to inaction, it can also be creative and useful. The productive element in the ambivalence Pollock creates and in our response to it lies in the “co-existence” at the heart of its definition. It is important to stress that co-existence does not necessarily mean balance or resolution or stability, nor does it mean the type of capacity or skill exemplified by Mr. Big in *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, where he proclaims:

Mr. Big: [. . .] Why do I bstride my world like a colossus?

Johnny: Diet?

Mr. Big: Come on, do you know?

Johnny shrugs.

Mr. Big: I’ve mastered the art a seein’ the multiple realities a the universe, and more than that, I have embraced them, though they be almost always conflicting, but equally true. [. . .] (203)

There are ambivalent misalignments and multiple ironies here. Mr. Big’s proud description of himself echoes the words Shakespeare’s Cassius uses to describe Julius Caesar, a man Cassius fears to be a tyrant: “Why man, he bstrides the narrow world / Like a Colossus” (*Julius Caesar* I.ii.234-35). Cassius himself, as one of Caesar’s murderers, is an unreliable observer in the drama. While Mr. Big’s statement lacks any sense of irony, Johnny’s responses (his sarcastic answer and his shrug) prove otherwise.

Mr. Big’s claim of his acceptance of ambivalence (the co-existence of multiple realities and truths) is illusory. While he seems to welcome all, his openness and relativism are used to rationalize his own unlawful and unethical behaviour: bootlegging (justified as a strike against conservatism and colonialism) and the sexual abuse of young Leah (re-defined as an expression

of pure and inviolate love). More importantly, Mr. Big stresses mastery, control, power. In a way, it isn't really ambivalence and co-existence at all or not the type which I think is ethically expansive and challenging. The type of ambivalence I find productive and which I believe Pollock's dramas represent and create is one which results from an active struggle with difficult issues. This continuing ambivalent misalignment indicates a critical refusal of the emotional, intellectual, and ethical stability of mastery, balance, or closure. As I noted earlier in this chapter, such ambivalence signals a questioning of one's expectations, assumptions, values, and understandings—not a shoring up or magnification of one's ego, as in the case of Mr. Big. It explains for me the tension in Pollock's work which disturbs my complacency and understanding and makes me look again and again. Such an ambivalent misalignment has the potential to create space for imagination and empathy which challenges us to feel, understand, and respect the validity of opposing values, points of view, needs, and struggles. The reduction or elimination of this positive and productive form of ambivalence would imply the silencing of other voices and the simplification of a complex reality.

Like ambivalent misalignment, the kinship idiom can be used to suppress difference and maintain authoritarian power, but it also has positive potentials. As we have seen, there are diverse models for family and familial relations can represent supportive, rather than constricting, bonds. The kinship idiom—refracted through the lenses of Gilligan's ethics of care, the movement from the constricting jigsaw puzzle model of family to the more flexible model of the constellation, and Anders' call for an expanded "moral fantasy"—functions as one of the bases of Pollock's ethical concerns. For example, the kinship idiom speaks persuasively for empathy and the ethics of care when Eme extends her anger at the treatment she received from her parents to the treatment of women in society and her concern for the future of her children to the plight of other mothers and their children.

The kinship idiom is a powerful persuasive tool and can be liberating and supportive if we remain open to its full ambivalent potentials. Benedict Anderson, as I pointed out earlier, speaks of family as a metaphor for the things you did not chose. However, the analogy is incomplete and one-sided. I suggest that family is not only a metaphor for fate or lack of choice but for the past. It is, perhaps, a weakness of imagination that we often look in only one direction along the line of time. We cannot chose the past, the family we are born into, but we can choose the future, the family we create. This is Annie Roberts message to Anderson at the end of *Fair*

Liberty's Call. We can also define "family" differently, as Eme (a woman who can no longer distance herself from the suffering of others) suggests when she redefines home from "my house" to "our house" (*GIS* 109) (the residence of a family) and, by extension, who is family. In this case, kinship becomes a metaphor for closeness and care, what Eddie would call looking "up close" rather than "from a distance" (*FLC* 78).

Finally, I wish to comment on my particular reading of the relevance of Pollock's representation of story-telling in her plays. It is possible to celebrate the role of the story-teller and the power of stories in Pollock's work. Her creative and expressive characters, literal artists like Nell Shipman and Zelda Fitzgerald, as well as other artistic figures like Bob (a story-teller), Catherine (a writer), and Miss Lizzie (stage managing the performance of her own story), have been interpreted as defiant, sometimes heroic, often feminist, creators of art and of the self.¹⁴ Even the darker story-tellers like Scott Fitzgerald and Mr. Big, who use their stories (their versions of reality) to control and abuse others, are undeniably creative, powerful, and charismatic. However, my reading of Pollock's representation of story-telling is more ambivalent and cautionary than much of the existing scholarship.

In fact, I argue that it is possible to associate story-telling with limits as much as with possibilities (another instance of ambivalent misalignment). When Gayatri Spivak was asked by interviewer Geoffery Hawthorn "whether the deconstructionist movement¹⁵ is a declaration of war, or the celebration of a victory over the grand récits?" (18), she replied:

I think of it myself as a radical acceptance of vulnerability. [. . .] And I think the post-structuralists, [. . .] imagine again and again that when a narrative is constructed, something is left out. When an end is defined, other ends are rejected, and one might not know what those ends are. So I think what they are about is asking over and over again, What is it that is left out? Can we know what is left out? We must know the limits of the narratives, rather than establish the narratives as solutions for the future, for the arrival of social justice, so that to an extent they're working with an understanding of what they cannot do, rather than declaring war. (18-19)

Spivak continues with an observation about the relationship between narratives (stories), needs,

¹⁴ For example, see Kerr and Grace "Sharon Pollock's Portraits of the Artist."

¹⁵ Hawthorn was referring to the work of post-structuralist theorists like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean-François Lyotard.

and truth: that the post-structuralist practice proceeds from “an acknowledgment that the impulse to narrate, that the impulse to think of origins and ends, that these are theories that we all share. But it acknowledges that it is a need rather than the way to truth” (20).

Spivak’s remarks suggest that one of the purposes of story-telling is to locate the limits of the story and the story-teller. Recall Pollock’s image of the light beams and the crystal in the dark: one beam of light (one story-teller and one story) is not enough to illuminate the whole crystal. And so, we need to tell the story again and again, or we have to have different narrators contributing to the story, each time diminishing the limits of the narrative, learning more each time about what is left out, leaving less out. For example, in *End Dream*, Pollock dramatizes Janet Smith’s last moments three times, attempting a more comprehensive story.¹⁶ It is at the borders and the limits of the story, the transitional and liminal zone, where creativity, innovation, and change are possible. Thus, what is valuable in any story is not only what it says but what it does not and cannot say: presence and absence, ambivalence yet again. This notion of paying attention to limits resonates with Gilligan’s insistence that the ethics of care and responsibility “focuses instead on the limitations of any particular resolution and describes the conflicts that remain” (*Different* 22). Likewise, while Pollock has often associated the discovery of meaning with the telling of the life story rather than the living of the life,¹⁷ the opposing view is simultaneously possible: what the story reveals is not “meaning” but limits: what it does not mean.

As with the story, so the story-teller. Story-telling, or what I would call “conscious story-telling,” thus has the potential to become an act of self-awareness and humility for the story-teller, a practise of identifying one’s own limits. Of course, this is a difficult act and, in Pollock’s plays, the awareness that one is telling a story and not the truth, or not the whole truth, is often imposed upon characters by others. This is the case for Mr. Big and his fantasy of virtuous love for Leah, and Nell and her self-aggrandizing narratives. Pollock also forces the audience to see the limits of their own assumptions and narrative impulses when she has Miss

¹⁶ However, the re-telling does not necessarily bring us any closer to the truth, to how Janet Smith died, and this is in keeping with Spivak’s and the post-structuralist notion of narratives as expressions of need (or desire) rather than transparent descriptions of reality.

¹⁷ For example, she writes of Helen-Nell-Shipman that “in the transforming of her life experience into fiction, the woman discovers meaning that the actual living of her life did not reveal to her” (*MP* 16).

Lizzie confront the Actress and, by extension, the audience with their own murderous desires. There are, however, rare moments of self-consciousness and self-realisation where one sees the limits of one's own story. George comes to a moment of self-realisation and remorse as he tells his story of removing a war trophy from a young dead Rebel soldier. Likewise, Zelda recognises her and Scott's narcissistic need to be the "major character in our own sensational tale" (AT 194).

Finally, as the above examples indicate, while many of Pollock's characters seem to confuse the story with the life, Pollock herself reminds us otherwise. And, again, she does this through the structure of her plays as well as the content. Hence, for example, while Scott and Zelda both blur the boundaries between their lives and their stories, Laheursa, the observing, recording other, highlights the difference between lived experience and the written record, the story. Pollock's stage directions stress the text/story not as truth or reality but as commentary, transformation, and interpretation:

The sound as LAHEURSA¹⁸ transcribes and records the meeting provides an aural counterpoint to, and comment on, the spoken words, as well as on their transformation from spoken to written with attendant interpretive variance. The sound always lags a couple of seconds behind the spoken words. [. . .] It is important that the sound of the keys and the absence of that sound be carefully orchestrated.¹⁹ (168)

And later on, at the end of the play, Pollock's stage direction states explicitly that Laheursa will stop recording Zelda's words but continue to record those of Scott (223) before stopping completely. Through both the creation of Laheursa and the staging of her actions, Pollock reminds us that the story, though it can be life-giving, is not the life.

¹⁸ *Heure* is a feminine noun in French meaning "hour" ("Heure," def. a) or "moment" ("Heure," def. d). *Heur* is an obsolete masculine form of *heure*, meaning chance or fortune ("Heur," def. 1), deriving from the Latin *augurium*, meaning "divination" and "predication" ("Augurium," def. 2). Combined, "Laheursa" might allude to a feminine figure of time or moment or a feminine spirit of prophecy. (My thanks to Prof. Richard Plant for the Latin reference.) I believe the name "Laheursa" also functions as a commentary on death and artistic rebirth. The name's spelling is similar to "La Huesera," the Bone Woman of Mexican folklore. Clarissa Pinkola Estés explains that in Mexican folklore, La Huesera is Bone Woman, the old woman who patiently collects and assembles the bones of the dead, especially those of creatures in danger of being lost to the world. When she has gathered a full skeleton, she brings flesh back to the bones through her singing and gives the creature life again (27-28). A figure of death, transformation, and rebirth, Laheursa/La Huesera (and Pollock) witnesses and gathers to ensure that the words of Zelda, as well as those of Scott, are not lost.

¹⁹ Note again the importance of ambivalent duality in Pollock's work, here in the formal co-existence of presence and absence.

What Next? Further Explorations

My study is necessarily limited in scope but it suggests further areas of exploration. Certainly, I believe Pollock's work merits further attention from the perspective of formal analysis. And I am acutely aware of my relative neglect of significant plays in Pollock's oeuvre such as *Angel's Trumpet*, *Saucy Jack*, and *End Dream*. I am confident that the lenses of the kinship idiom and ambivalent misalignment can make visible interesting elements beyond what I have been able to accomplish here. For example, *Angel's Trumpet* is an intense exploration of familial relations and story-telling, full of ambivalent misalignments and tensions about issues such as love and hate, story and life, creation and destruction, art as product and as process, and the ethics of artistic creation (which are also the ethics of human relations). Its complex structure also merits further attention. It is also a play about loss, death, and mourning—as well as the passions which fuel life. The theme of loss is also apparent in *Saucy Jack*. It appears in Pollock's invocation of the murdered women as human beings worthy of care and mourning. In addition, one of the central motivators of Jem's actions is the threat of loss: the loss of the self and sanity, of love, and of influence in the homosocial (and apparently homosexual) order of his privileged community. Finally, the form and structure of *End Dream* is complex and fascinating with its circularity, repetition, language choices, and relationship geometries. Again, the kinship idiom appears as a confining force (for example, Doris tells Janet Smith, that she is part of the Clark-Evans family and bound by its secrets and loyalties [104]) and ambivalent misalignment is found in many of the relationships in the drama (for example, between Janet Smith and Robert Clark-Evans, between Janet and Wong Foon Sing, and between Wong Foon Sing and Wong Sien).

I am also conscious of the limits to my approach itself. There are observations which I have noted in the course of my study but have not explored further and new directions which may extend from my present work. For example, despite my discussions of multiple stories and story-tellers, there is a strong pattern of dualism in my representation of Pollock's work. While there are exceptions, such as the many voices in *Fair Liberty's Call* and *Moving Pictures*, my models of ambivalent misalignment and ethical tensions tend towards opposing dualities rather than greater multiplicities. The concept of ambivalence itself, with its focus on contraries and opposites, is dualistic. It might be argued that Pollock's approach and her plays do exhibit this binary conceptual structure (her reference to being “consumed with surface and substance, with inside and outside, with internal and external, with over and under”—dualistic spatial

metaphors—supports such an interpretation), but it would be interesting to explore what might become visible were one to adapt a multiple framework. If one path towards a more just and caring community is to expand our capacity to feel and imagine ethically, then surely being about to see beyond dualities to multiple alternatives is welcome.

In addition to such methodological possibilities, there are specific topics in Pollock's plays which I believe merit further attention: loss and mourning, tragedy and myth, song and rhyme, and ethical and philosophical concerns such as the nature of "truth" and "worth." First, one might consider the themes of loss and mourning. How do we honour the dead and simultaneously attend to the living? How do we look at and accept our past without it becoming an obstacle to our creation of the future? On a personal scale, many of Pollock's characters struggle with these issues, expressing ambivalent attitudes. However, on the communal and national level, I believe Pollock's articulation of loss and mourning and their relation to history and nation building deserve further attention. The ideas of Ernst Renan, Judith Butler, and Walter Benjamin point to potential directions of inquiry.

Ernst Renan states that "the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things" (11). He also claims that "suffering in common unifies more than joy does. Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort" (19). Certainly, Pollock's plays explore national identity and concerns, choices and responsibilities, as well as loss and grief. Inspired by Renan's words, one might ask of her work: what do communities and nations choose to remember and mourn, and what do they choose to forget? And while Renan does not elaborate on what "duties" and "common effort" griefs impose, I suspect we will find possible answers, both constructive and destructive, in Pollock's drama.

On a similar vein but with significant differences, Judith Butler theorises that, in our contemporary world so familiar with violence and loss, that there might be a place where "belonging now takes place in and through a common sense of loss (which does not mean that all these losses are the same). Loss becomes condition and necessity for a certain sense of community, where community does not overcome the loss, where community *cannot* overcome the loss without losing the very sense of itself as community" (468, emphasis in original). This is an intriguing suggestion since commonality is achieved not through sharing the same loss or even over-coming losses together (both of which would reflect Renan's notions of a shared past or a

common future endeavour). Butler goes on to discuss Walter Benjamin's suggestion, in *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, that narrative served in some way to contain loss and, with the postmodern decline of established narratives (recall Spivak's "grand récits"), there has been, in Benjamin's words, a "transposition of the originally temporal data into a figurative spatial simultaneity" (qtd. in Butler 469). To emphasize, the representation of mourning, the containment of loss, collapses from temporal, sequential, narrative into "simultaneity [which] seems to imply both spatiality and figuration" (469). Further research on Pollock's drama might consider the relation between identity and attachment to loss, and the role of space and simultaneity in Pollock's work.

Next, one might explore Pollock's work from the perspective of modern or contemporary tragedy. I have utilized the ideas of Cole and Simon while bracketing tragic drama, the subject from which they have derived their critical and theoretical observations. It might be fruitful to remove the brackets and consider aspects of tragedy, as well as myth, in Pollock's work. There are implicit and explicit clues which suggest such an approach might reveal interesting results. For example, as I noted earlier, Pollock herself refers to the structure of Greek myth in her scenario statement for the radio drama "Generation," the precursor to *Generations*, and Eme, in *Getting It Straight*, might be associated with the figures of Cassandra and Medea.

Alternatively, we can turn from the classical understanding of tragedy and its association with elements such as the aristocracy, fate, hubris, the reversal of fortune, and catharsis to more modern and contemporary re-formulations such as the result of disorder, the experience of such results, and the efforts to recreate order. Tragedy, then, can be seen as deriving from complex conflicting ethical demands (for example, not between good and evil but between lesser evils); the very real pain, suffering, and horrors resulting from human desire, greed, and brutality; and the violence inherent in political and social revolution and nation building. In the words of Raymond Williams, revolutionary social change, in response to human suffering and evil, is itself tragic because we have the "conviction that it [the experience of evil] is not inevitable, but is the result of particular actions and choices" and that the resultant need for change is directed "not against gods or inanimate things [. . .] nor against mere institutions and social forms, but against other men" (102). Pollock's works bear resemblances to such understandings of social conflicts. One of the few works I have found to date exploring Pollock's plays explicitly in terms of tragedy is the doctoral dissertation by Kristo Jacek Kozak on theories of tragedy, philosophical

understandings of subjectivity and possible stage representations of the tragic subject. Kozak discusses *Doc* in these contexts as an example of contemporary tragedy. I believe there are possibilities for more work on Pollock's plays in terms of tragedy as social conflict.

Another area of further exploration is Pollock's use of popular song and children's rhymes—vernacular genres—as intertexts and structural elements in her plays.²⁰ I have called attention to this in some of her plays, but, if one looks carefully, one finds popular songs, children's rhymes and catch-phrases, and forms of poetry in the majority of Pollock works. These are used not only to establish setting (time, place, mood) but also for formal, emotional, and thematic resonance. For example, Pollock once stated that: “Another identifying mark [of her work] is perhaps language. I have a good ear for dialogue but it's an enhanced dialogue. A poetic quality permeates the language in my plays” (“Sharon Pollock Interview” 210). A focus on songs and rhymes may lead us to further appreciations of Pollock's use of and skill with language, an enhanced non-naturalistic language, and music in general. In addition, the repeated use of children's rhymes and songs also leads me to think of the roles and perspectives of the child in Pollock's work. Finally, there is a long tradition of popular song and rhyme in political activism, as well as political theatre (agit-prop theatre, Brechtian theatre, collective creations), and I believe these functions are apparent in many of Pollock's works and merit further study.

In a more philosophical and existential direction, there are several terms I have touched upon lightly or bracketed in this study which I feel are important to Pollock's dramas: “truth,” “worth,” and “meaning.” Pollock herself has highlighted these concerns and I feel much more can be done.²¹ To an extent, my study has focussed on story rather than truth, but Pollock clearly is interested in the notion of truth (that crystal hanging in the darkness), the desire to know the truth (of what happened, of motivations and actions, of whether love existed), how it can be determined, who is given the authority to make such determinations, the uses to which truth can

²⁰ Limited discussions do exist to date. Ann Nothof notes Pollock's use of sound, music, and songs as structural elements in her survey of staging in productions of *Doc*, *Moving Pictures*, and *End Dream* (“Staging the Intersections of Time”) and Sherrill Grace discusses the significance of the musical cadenza form in *Whiskey Six Cadenza* (*Making Theatre* 228-29).

²¹ For example, Pollock discusses the issue of truth with her metaphor of the crystal hanging in the dark and the many illumination light beams cited earlier, meaning in her “Playwrights Notes” (14) and character description of the three Nell Shipmans (16) in *Moving Pictures*, and worth in “Reflections” (17). Zimmerman does discuss the notion of worth in “Sharon Pollock: anatomising the question” (6).

be applied, and, even, its worth. Young Katie tells Ev: “I want the truth” (*Doc* 7) but she is surrounded by people, adults, who make its determination difficult. She will attempt to record everything in her notebook (echoes of Scott Fitzgerald’s need for a record), as if more detail will lead to greater truth and mastery. Years later, Pollock continues to wrestle with truth and lie in *Moving Pictures* and *Angel’s Trumpet*. I believe Pollock’s articulation of the complexity of truth merits further attention.

Another existential question which I find in Pollock’s work, implicitly and explicitly, is that of “worth” and its myriad forms: human worth, the worth of a given endeavour, relative worth. Repeatedly, Pollock’s characters defend their basic human worth: worthy of being heard, worthy of care, worthy of dignity, worthy of life. They also ask each other (or themselves): “Was it [their choices and their actions] worth it?” Pollock also argues for the basic human worth of various social groups: the incarcerated in *One Tiger to a Hill*, the Native peoples in *Walsh*, the children in *Getting It Straight*, the murdered women in *Saucy Jack*.

There are also more difficult questions of worth. When Miss Lizzie challenges Dr. Patrick with philosophical questions of ethical decision making, questions about who to let die or kill and who to save, she speaks of relative worth and tells him: “*My life is precious!!*” (*BR* 62)—to her, more so than that of her step mother. In *Doc*, when Ev speaks of tending to half the province of New Brunswick, Catherine asks “Was it worth it?” (79). She also asks young Katie, who speaks of recording everything down in her note book, “Will it be worth it?” (83). Finally, when Ev practises his moral arithmetic, defending his neglect of his wife, measuring the relative worth of one person, Bob, against that of thousands, his many patients, he asks Oscar: “Her death my fault on one side - and the other any old figure, thousands lives the figure - was that worth it? [. . .] Was it? I’m askin’ you a question! Was that worth it?” (123). None of these questions receives a direct answer. Meanwhile, in *Fair Liberty’s Call*, the Loyalist veterans each argue for their worth, their “value” (70, 72) to the community. In *Moving Pictures*, Nell defends her devotion to film making, proclaiming to Shipman “you wonder if it was worth it! I know it was worth it!” and Shipman challenges her: “Worth it. What is ‘it’, what is it?” (46). Finally, in *Angel’s Trumpet*, Zelda’s declaration of her will to write, violently striking and indicating every part of her material body as instruments of self-expression (220), is nothing if not an impassioned defence of her intrinsic human worth and right to self-expression. I believe more critical attention to Pollock’s varied and sometime ambivalent explorations of “worth” (how it is

defined, how it is evaluated, the equality or democracy of worth in theory and in practice) will produce interesting results.²²

Finally, there is the question of “meaning.” Even if a degree of truth is found and the facts agreed upon, there is the question of meaning (and purpose). What does a given collection of facts mean? It is a question of interpretation. In *Fair Liberty’s Call*, Eddie tells her father that there was no opportunity for reflection during battle: “To stop and think then was to die, but now? Now I ask, what did we do it for?” (49). And in *Moving Pictures*, Nell and Shipman argue over the conflicting evaluations of meaning (or worth) which result from different chronological perspectives: the time a decision is made (Nell’s perspective) and a time later in the future (Shipman’s perspective). Pollock, herself, has on several occasions expressed the idea that the meaning of an action or event is only discernable after the act.²³ As I have noted briefly, this seems to privilege hind-sight. It also calls to question what is meant by “meaning”? Meaning is contextual. Which meaning is relevant? The meaning prior to action, the one which, in fact, inspired the action, or the meaning which is imposed after the act? How and upon which terms might one judge or interpret the past? These are all moral and philosophical questions with which Pollock’s works struggle. I believe further critical exploration will demonstrate that the form and direction of Pollock’s questions are as important as, and perhaps even more important than, her answers.

* * * * *

In this study, I have tried to look “up close” and “from a distance” at selected works of Sharon Pollock. Through a detailed reading of the play texts, with an emphasis on form and structure, I have examined a set of elements including: the repetition of words, phrases, roles, scenes, and character configurations; selves-in-relation, relational stories, and relational story-telling; deaths

²² Some critical work has been done on this topic. Cynthia Zimmerman touches on the question of worth, in the context of the price of “self-expression” and “personal sacrifice” (“Anatomising” 6).

²³ For example, as noted before, she states in her description of the three Nell Shipmans in *Moving Pictures*, “They confront each other in the reconstruction of a life dedicated to the creation of play on stage and on screen. In that play, and in the transforming of her life experience into fiction, the woman discovers meaning that the actual living of her life did not reveal to her” (16).

and absences; the choice of metaphors; the use of songs and rhymes; and staging elements such as set descriptions, lighting, blocking, and gestures. Stepping back and looking again, I find in these elements larger patterns and constellations of meanings and themes. These constellations spell for me: ambivalence and ambivalent misalignment, the kinship idiom, loss and mourning, the liminal, story-telling, care and justice, action and imagination.

At the same time, like Gayatri Spivak's deconstructionists and Pollock's story-teller with her lone beam of light, I feel the final result of my study is as much an awareness of the limits of my analysis and what has been left unexplored as an illumination, from my "angle of observation," of facets of Pollock's work. Like stars in a constellation, my analyses may be connected by gossamer threads of reasoning and associations, but I hope they cohere into discernable designs and that my observations do justice to the complexity of Pollock's creative work and philosophical inquiries and make a useful contribution to the existing scholarship.

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