

shame, for we are no longer in the 1930s, and Cantonese opera should not be a mystery for the Canadian academic world; the scholarly materials and human resources are available to put these recordings into historical perspective, but they have not been used. For that reason, it is tempting to call the module a lost opportunity, but since it is an online project, and can yet be improved, one may hope that the opportunity is only temporarily misplaced.

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DONNA COATES, ed.

Sharon Pollock: First Woman of the Canadian Theatre

Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2015. 328 pp.

MOIRA DAY

In 2012, Sharon Pollock received an unusual gift for her seventy-fifth birthday: a conference completely devoted to her life and work. While fully engaged in the event, Pollock was also reportedly a bit bemused, quipping, "I should be dead" (qtd. in Coates 6).¹ It was a wry acknowledgement that canonization is a process that generally presupposes your demise.

This volume of essays, No. 8 in UCP's *The West* series — and arguably the second half of the same birthday gift — tackles that paradox head-on. On one hand, editor Donna Coates unabashedly argues that Pollock's canonical stature *is* reason enough to justify another volume of essays of her work. One may quibble with Coates' claim that "Pollock became the first woman in Canadian theatre history to have had a volume produced on her life and work" (3). Even in terms of Alberta playwrights alone, surely Geraldine Anthony's seminal book on Gwen Pharis Ringwood (1981) preceded Sherrill Grace's very fine 2008 biography on Pollock by several decades. However, there is little reason to dispute Coates' claim that as "playwright, director, theatre administrator, critic, teacher, and mentor, Sharon Pollock has played an integral role in the shaping of Canada's national theatre tradition" (1).

At the same time, Coates also works hard to dispel any impression that canonical be equated with "dead" in any sense of that word. To the contrary, she stresses that Pollock, on the verge of her eightieth birthday, still remains a very active member of her theatre community, as well as one of Canada's most frequently published, produced, anthologized, and analyzed playwrights. About half of the twelve essays illustrate the point that the range and density of Pollock's work continues to invite new critical and stage interpretations by offering fresh looks at what could be considered "classical" Pollock: the writer of seminal history,

memory, and regional plays. The book's mix of established and emerging scholars is particularly attractive. Among the established set, Sherrill Grace's bright, witty personal reflection on the relationship between archive and biography, both as regards Pollock and others of her peers, is especially engaging. This is balanced by Shelley Scott's intriguing analysis of Pollock's historical mysteries (*Blood Relations*, *Saucy Jack*, *Constance*, and *End Dream*) in relation to the detective story genre, and Cynthia Zimmerman's thoughtful reconsideration of *Doc* as memory play—but whose memory? While these are all fine essays, a highlight is Jerry Wasserman's combination of personal reflection and historical analysis in his consideration of *Walsh* as initially seen through American eyes during the height of the Vietnam War, and what it seemed to suggest—at least at the time—about contrasting American and Canadian mythologies of nationhood. Also of note are the fresh views brought by younger scholars to plays like *Generations* (Jason Wiens) and *Fair Liberty's Call*; two thorough though quite different analyses by Carmen Derkson and Kathy K. Y. Chung make a convincing case for regarding the latter as a deceptively simple play that merits more attention. On the production side, Wes D. Pearce's essay on the evolving scenography in Pollock's plays, over a range of texts and productions from *Walsh* through to *Doc*, is particularly insightful in its blend of technical, critical, and literary analysis.

Most of the remaining essays focus on the continuing vitality of Pollock's work entering her seventh decade. For those interested in the growing body of Canadian theatre and film dealing with military and peacekeeping efforts in the Middle East, the volume contains two very solid articles on Pollock's *Man Out of Joint* (2007), both on its own (Tanya Schaap) and in conjunction with Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End* (Donna Coates). An all too brief article by Kosovo director Jeton Neziraj, describing a 2010 production of *Blood Relations* in Kosovo and his planned collaboration with Pollock on another project, left me wishing there were even more materials on Pollock's recent international activities and reception abroad before new audiences.

The same could be said about the contribution of several other distinctive voices from the creative/professional sphere that balance out the predominantly scholarly tone of the volume. These include a reflection by theatre critic Martin Morrow on Pollock's years with the Garry Theatre (1992–1997), and something of Pollock's own sharp, witty, astringent voice as a critic in the form of seventeen of her CBC radio reviews of Calgary theatre between 2006 and 2008. It was probably too much to expect Coates to pull a coup and present us with a whole new Pollock play—but she comes close with *Sharon's Tongue*, a short stage piece by four Alberta theatre artists (Lindsay Burns, Pamela Halstead, Grant Linneberg, Laura Parken) that is assembled completely out of Pollock's own words to reflect, in a condensed form, what the actors considered the ongoing concerns, issues, and *leit-motifs* in her plays. As a play that is neither on Sharon Pollock nor strictly by her, it is unlikely to be catalogued as part of her official canon, but one could easily see it taking on a second life as a Fringe or co-op show.

It is this representation of voices from the creative sphere, the essays on the late play *Man Out of Joint*, and the publication of a selection of Pollock's theatre reviews, that most distinguish Coates' volume from the two major collections that have preceded it. As a purely literary collection, it would be difficult for it to compete against either the ground-breaking status of the 2000 Nothof collection, or the "greatest hits" appeal of the 2008 Grace-La

Flamme compilation of the best essays published on Pollock between 1986 and 2008. Nonetheless, Coates' volume is generous in bringing the attention of the reader to the considerable weight of scholarship that already exists on Pollock, while offering a new selection of good-quality essays by established and emerging scholars, many of whom have not appeared previously in a Pollock collection.

Coates' something-for-everyone approach may have its drawbacks; inevitably one ends up wanting more of one thing and less of another. Still, whether the volume functions as a pleasant walk down memory lane for older scholars who already know Pollock well, or as an engaging introduction to her for younger scholars who do not, Coates' collection constitutes a worthy addition to the body of Pollock scholarship—and an affectionate, well-deserved salute to the then and now “First Woman of Canadian Theatre.”

Notes

- 1 All quotations are from Coates.

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JAN SELMAN AND JANE HEATHER, eds.

Theatre, Teens, Sex Ed: Are We There Yet?

Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2015. 542 pp. + DVD.

HARTLEY JAFINE

Jan Selman and Jane Heather's *Theatre, Teens, Sex Ed: Are We There Yet?* is an impressively comprehensive resource, exploring how participatory theatre can be used to promote political and social change in sexual health education. The collection focuses on the award-winning theatre program, *Are We There Yet?* (AWTY), and a five-year research study evaluating its efficacy. Developed in 1998, AWTY is a collaborative partnership between Concrete Theatre and Options Sexual Health Association (previously Planned Parenthood Association of Edmonton). While theatre practitioners are seemingly the most appropriate audience for this book, program evaluators and sexual health educators will certainly find it useful and, as the editors advise, readers are invited to engage with different sections of the book depending on their needs.¹

The book is divided into three parts, exploring participatory theatre, collaborative partnerships, and documentation and evaluation respectively. Each section, which includes