

SHARON POLLOCK.

Blood Relations and Other Plays

(New edition with an introduction by Anne Nothof and the original introduction by Diane Bessai).

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“When you put a play out, you put it out for people to make it their own.” (172)

In a 1999 interview with Anne Nothof, playwright Sharon Pollock noted that although a published play text records and documents what worked for a particular group of people in a specific time and place, “What you want published is a text that will stimulate the creative imagination of theatre people who are going to produce it with their own vision of the possibilities of the work” (173).¹ Pollock also recognized that the published text supports scholarship and to that end needs to offer more editorial instruction to assist the student trying to envision the production. In Pollock’s view, “[t]he published version is your avenue to people who will read the play, and people who will produce it, and they need different things” (173). The 2002 edition of Sharon Pollock’s *Blood Relations and Other Plays* responds to both needs by offering her most up-to-date revisions of four important early plays and supporting material that will help readers to understand their power and enduring currency on Canadian and international stages.

Originally published by NeWest Press in 1981 with an introduction by Diane Bessai, *Blood Relations and Other Plays* included *Blood Relations*, *One Tiger to a Hill* and *Generations*. All three had first been produced in Alberta in 1980; *Blood Relations* won the first ever Governor General’s Award for Drama (1981). The revised edition has retained these elements and has expanded to include *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, which premiered at Theatre Calgary in 1983 under the name *Whiskey Six*. The play earned Pollock a third Governor General’s award nomination in 1988 and was first published in a collection edited by Diane Bessai and Don Kerr entitled *NeWest Plays by Women* in 1987.² Beyond this additional play, the new edition adds a brief biography of the playwright and a second introduction to her works by Pollock scholar Anne Nothof. The text is illustrated with black and white photographs drawn from various productions which suggest the range of important Canadian and other artists who have produced the four plays. For

example, we see *Blood Relations* production photos taken from the play's 1980 premiere at Edmonton's Theatre Three, a 1981 National Arts Centre production as well as a 1986 production by Tokyo's Bunka-Za Theatre. Finally, to support further investigation into Pollock's oeuvre and influence, the collection offers a comprehensive bibliography of Pollock's works, including her television and radio writings, and a useful bibliography of critical articles, interviews and selected reviews.

In the intervening years between the first and second edition, Pollock has received many awards for her considerable contributions to Canadian theatre as a playwright, artistic director, actor and mentor. Her work and art have been the subject of much academic study and public discourse. Her plays have been performed across Canada, the United States and abroad. She has also written many other successful plays, the most recent of which are available in *Sharon Pollock: three plays* with an introduction by Sherrill Grace.³ Given this range of theatrical activity, the revised NeWest edition of Pollock's earlier plays must account for her broader works and theatrical contributions.

Bessai's original introductory essay placed three important emerging plays in the context of a promising playwright's career and thought. More than twenty years later, this new edition faces a different challenge. How to account for the importance and significance of four early plays in a prolific and important playwright's career? First, Nothof argues convincingly that these early plays contain themes, structures and images that remain at the core of Pollock's oeuvre:

Personal lives still inform the political scene: choices are made, usually with catastrophic consequences to individuals who reaffirm the possibility and necessity of choice. Women may be "acted on," but they also act out their own dreams and destinies. [...] All of Pollock's plays experiment with structure and style: scenes intersect or blend, time inhabits a simultaneous present and past, characters are divided into multiple selves who interact with and observe each other. Through choreography, soundscapes, and set design, her plays suggest the illusion of reality and the reality of dreams. (v-vi)

Ambiguous truths and complex realities animate each play. They continue to challenge artists and students to discover choices facing each play's production. Second, the edition includes additional

material that stimulates readers to consider the continuing relevance of these challenges. Third, Nothof suggests the range of production histories associated with each play. *Blood Relations*, the most produced play in the collection, has been performed on stages across Canada, the United States, Australia and Japan. Although *One Tiger to a Hill* has been produced in Canada to mixed reviews, Nothof points to its significant popularity and success on American stages. *Generations* has been less produced since its initial professional productions across Canada, but Nothof notes the play's enduring popularity with drama students generally and a particular production of the play in India at a university whose community included many farming families. Finally, Nothof also challenges Bessai's earlier description of *Generations* as "conventionally naturalistic" by highlighting the play's more expressionistic elements. To support her claim and suggest how theatre artists have been stimulated to discover these elements, she includes designer Richard Robert's account of the set for the *Generations* premiere at the Canmore Opera House: "So we have islands of related naturalistic elements ("man made"), moving within a ground of symbolic topography ("the land") against a horizontal plane ("the sky")" (vii). The revised edition's additional and final play, *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, remains the least produced of the collection despite, as Nothof notes, receiving the "best overall reviews of any Pollock play" and being one of Pollock's favorites (x). One hopes that this new edition will stimulate theatre artists, students and scholars to consider these earlier plays' possibilities anew with the goal of "Making the play[s] their own."



NOTES

- ¹ Pollock, Sharon. "Interview with Anne Nothof," in *Sharon Pollock: Essays on Her Works*. Ed. Anne Nothof. Toronto: Guernica, 2000.
- ² "Whiskey Six Cadenza." *NeWest Plays by Women*. Eds. Diane Bessai and Don Kerr. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1987. 137-247.
- ³ Sharon Pollock's plays *Moving pictures*, *End dreams* and *Angel's trumpet* are newly available in *Sharon Pollock: three plays (with an introductory essay by Sherrill Grace)*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2003.