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PLAYING ALBERTA WITH SHARON POLLOCK

SHERRILL GRACE

“I don’t care if you understand it or not, I understand it! Sure I could go do some stupid job somewhere else, but when I’m standin’ out there ... well ... there’s just somethin’ ’bout a person standin’ there on the prairies, everything else stripped away. It makes things simple.”

These words are spoken by David Nurlin in Sharon Pollock’s play *Generations* and I want to return to them, to David’s decision to stay on the family farm, and to this play because, of all her plays that deal in some way with Alberta, this one with this character in this speech strikes me as deeply resonant with the playwright herself. Over the years she has made it very clear that she belongs to the West, to Alberta, specifically to Calgary, and this is not simply because she does not know other parts of Canada. She has lived elsewhere for considerable periods of time; she was born in New Brunswick, grew up in Fredericton, and attended the University of New Brunswick, so she knew that place intimately, from the inside, as it were. She knew it, and she *chose*

Alberta, *not* Manitoba, *not* Saskatchewan, and most definitely *not* the West-beyond-the-West in Vancouver, where she found life in the early seventies to be maddeningly slow. In interviews she has often been downright fierce about where she comes from, and that place is where she has felt most at home: Calgary.

She first moved to the city early in 1966 at a time when it was just beginning to grow, when the theatre scene there was in its infancy, and she returned permanently in 1976, bought the house she still lives in, and began to play an active role in all aspects of theatre life in her hometown and, more widely, in the province. She was there in the early days of Theatre Calgary; *Walsh*, her first big stage success premiered with Theatre Calgary in 1973. In the eighties she would have a very brief stint as Artistic Director with Theatre Calgary, and she has acted in, directed, and premiered other plays with the company. Lunchbox Theatre, Alberta Theatre Projects, Alberta Playwrights Network, Vertigo Theatre, Theatre Junction, Calgary-based CBC radio, and local film and television – all these organizations have called on her for scripts or directing or dramaturgy or adjudication, and all have benefited from her leadership, mentoring, and artistic talent. Moreover, her connection with Banff and the Playwrights Colony, which she headed from 1977 to 1980, helped that organization develop and enhance its contribution to the theatre scene across Canada, not just in Alberta. And then there is the Garry Theatre, which she ran from 1993 to 1997, a small, independent, semi-professional company that came close to fulfilling her dreams for what theatre could be and could do for the community in which it lived.¹ In short, Sharon Pollock has been central to the Alberta theatre community for forty years. As well as winning numerous national and international awards, she has won provincial recognitions for her work, received honorary degrees from both of the province's major universities, and has been described as a local treasure. Five of her six children live in Calgary and her network of close friends and colleagues there is extensive. If all this does not make her a Calgarian, I cannot imagine what would.

However, as Pollock's biographer I have often asked myself why Alberta and why Calgary? What is it about this part of Canada that appealed to her in the first place and has continued to suit her so well? There are, of course, several answers to these questions, some of which are biographical: Sharon is a feisty individual, some would describe her as brash and aggressive, and she has small patience with stultifying social constraints or with the hierarchical advantages of class privilege, money, family name, and rigid traditions. For

Pollock, all this constraint and privilege, whatever decorous label we give it, spells Family Compact, and her critique of such power cliques is clear in her New Brunswick play *Fair Liberty's Call*. Indeed, Fredericton, the place of her birth, is the perfect antithesis to her chosen home because Calgary was, and is even more so today, a city of energy, enterprise, growth, and *comparative* freedom. Calgary and Alberta, then in the mid-sixties and still today, give her what Fredericton and New Brunswick never could: the freedom to be Sharon Pollock. Not, let me insist, Sharon Chalmers, daughter of Dr Everett Chalmers and Eloise Chalmers, but Sharon Pollock. Changing names and changing places, however accidental these changes may have been at the outset, have long since become the outward signs of a newly invented identity.

But it is not the biography that most interests me here, except insofar as being Sharon Pollock is inseparable from being a playwright. Her plays also provide answers to my questions – why Calgary, why Alberta? When I survey her work I am struck by how many of her plays for stage, radio, and television are in some way Alberta-based. *Walsh* (1973), “The Persons Case” (her 1981 ACCESS Alberta television play about Emily Murphy), *Whiskey Six Cadenza* (1987), and her new, as yet unproduced play, “Kabloona Talk” (2006), draw on people and events from Alberta’s nineteenth- and twentieth-century history, whereas *Generations* (1980), the radio plays *Sweet Land of Liberty* (1979; 2005) and “Mary Beth Goes to Calgary” (1980), and the children’s play *Prairie Dragons* (1989), are more personal and explore relationships between individuals or families and the land.² In these more personal plays, Alberta acquires a symbolic, at times, almost an allegorical or mythic significance. When I think of Pollock in terms of Alberta, I think first of this second group of plays, in part because the history plays, especially *Walsh* and *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, are dominated by (and, thus, are *about*) individual characters and in part because the more personal plays allow her imagination room to invoke place, to conjure up space, to suggest ways in which a physical locale can shape human beings. The titles alone of *Sweet Land of Liberty*, *Generations*, and *Prairie Dragons* indicate something of what I mean. I know, of course, that I am begging several questions by summarily classifying the plays in this way and by claiming that any work of art, let alone a play, can invent landscape, but bear with me while I demonstrate some of the distinctions, qualities, and symbolic impact of a few of these plays. My basic assumptions are that works of art can and do create places and landscapes that help us to understand where and who we are; that such works of art do, in fact, produce meaning that is emotional, psychological, and broadly cultural; and that

audiences (readers, viewers) recognize not only the landscapes created in art but also invest these images with personal significance. The process of creation and reception is a dynamic one; it changes over time and becomes sedimented with associations and values.

Inevitably, any division of Pollock's work into categories – this is a history play, that is a family play – is arbitrary and fails to do full justice to the richness of a given play or, indeed, to the capacity of a designer and actors to reinvent the play each time it is produced. Nevertheless, I will use (*caveat lector*) such designations just as far as necessary to explore the various ways in which Pollock has scripted her home ground of Alberta. In the final analysis, her most public, history plays are deeply personal and intensely symbolic and her most allegorical plays are expressions of her own convictions about socio-political realities in a precise time and place. In the following discussion, I will mention the so-called history plays but I will focus more attention on these other plays. Where the history plays provide a wide-angle, or epic, view of Alberta, and give Pollock the appropriate scope to stage political, ethical, and judicial dramas about real people, the personal plays delve more deeply into how and why a place matters to ordinary people and communities. Novelists have always stressed the particular, the individual story when creating their fictional territories: think of Hardy's Wessex, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, Laurence's Manawaka. And so it is with Pollock. Mr Big in *Whiskey Six Cadenza* can tell us something about Prohibition and Major James Walsh can show us how isolated he was from the central government of the day, but if we want to touch the heart of the matter, of what it means to be Albertan in Pollock's vision, then we must listen to the Nurlins in *Generations*, believe in magic dragons and wise, buried mothers in *Prairie Dragons*, and walk with Tom in *Sweet Land of Liberty* into Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, "down to the Milk River [where] the vegetation is lush and green, the water runs quickly, the hills rise sharply, and the Indian says this place is sacred" (Pollock, *Collected Works* I, 181).

Now that both *Prairie Dragons* and *Sweet Land of Liberty* have been published they will become better known and hopefully receive new productions. Certainly, the subjects of these plays have not dated and the moral issues faced by the protagonists in each play remain relevant. Of particular interest in my present context of Alberta landscapes, however, are the ways in which Pollock locates the stories and characters of these two otherwise so different works. *Prairie Dragons* is a play for children – a Pollock play for children in that it addresses serious questions of race and gender without

the slightest touch of patronizing or talking down or merely entertaining kids – and *Sweet Land of Liberty* is a post-Vietnam tragedy about a young American veteran who has taken refuge first in Calgary and then in Lethbridge from where he can easily reach Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park. The first play focuses on two teenaged girls who must face down the men in their families and society in order to establish their own identities; this play ends happily because supernatural, yet *naturalized* forces come to their aid. The second play begins and ends in a death, a suicide to be precise, and the significance of this death is left for us to interpret, to come to terms with, or perhaps to learn from; all we are told is that the place of this death is sacred and that we must believe in this place if we are to find any meaning in the death. One of the girls in *Prairie Dragons* is Lily Kwong, the Canadian-born daughter in a Chinese immigrant family, and her father and brother both insist that Lily's role in life is to work in the family business, to become a wife and mother, and to obey the men of the family. Lily, however, is very intelligent and she wants to enter a spelling competition at school and win a prize; Lily wants a good education; she wants to be her own person. The other girl is Sarah Whitherspoon whose mother died when she was just a baby, whose older brother has gone to fight in the Great War, and whose father dies in a farm accident at the beginning of the play. At sixteen, Sarah is left to manage the farm by herself until a greedy land speculator, one Mr Lowe (who is lower than low), turns up to pressure her into selling. The American veteran in *Sweet Land of Liberty* is called Tom, and he is a remittance man whose American father sends him money so that he will not return to the US and the family home because, in his father's eyes, he has become a shameful embarrassment; this father wishes his son had been killed in Vietnam, fighting for his country, so his name could go up on the local honour roll. Instead, Tom has become a conscientious objector, an ex-soldier who no longer endorses what his country is doing to another country.

From these basic situations of challenge and conflict, Pollock develops two stories about love, freedom, commitment, and community that are deeply rooted in Alberta prairie landscapes. Her characters seek to find themselves, albeit in very different ways, within and in terms of place. They are enabled, freed into a larger vision of life's virtues and possibilities, by being where they are. Alberta, in short, is transformed from an oil rich, cattle ranching province that loves to hate Ottawa into an almost mythic realm of opportunity, hope, and spiritual rebirth. In *Prairie Dragons* that sense of a mythic and magical landscape is established right from the start because the entire play

is staged by, or comes from within, the Dragon; it is “A Dragon Tale. Tale of a Dragon!” But this dragon is neither a Wagnerian monster nor a silly stuffed toy. It is a “gorgeous DRAGON whose colours are predominantly orange and red” and it is a “Transformer,” a “Magician” a “Giver of laws,” but also a benevolent, wise, story-telling dragon who inhabits the underground paths of the province of “Alta” in the country of “Cannon” (II, 204–05). The characters in the play are called up by this dragon who introduces Sarah and Lily and turns the story over to them. More important still, it will advise them on how to overcome the men in their lives, like Mr Lowe and Mr Kwong, who want to stop them from realizing their dreams because they are only female. Not surprisingly this particular dragon has a special connection to Lily because Lily’s family originally came from China and the year in which the story takes place is 1916 – the year of the Dragon – and the year in which Lily was born was 1904, the year of the Dragon, the same year of the Dragon in which Sarah’s mother died. So Lily’s Dragon and Sarah’s mother are linked; they both inhabit the earth and from that place, in “Alta,” they watch what unfolds for their daughters. Sarah has acquired the habit of going to her mother’s grave for solace when she is beset by troubles, and at all times she wears a pearl necklace left to her by her mother, but when Lily explains her family problems and Sarah tries to help her by giving her especially difficult words to practice spelling, something very strange happens. By helping Lily, the Chinese-Canadian girl, Sarah has opened a pathway to the Prairie dragons, and the Dragon itself appears to assist and advise both girls. Amazed and inspired, Lily knows this is a sign that Feng Shui works in Canada, that the dragons too have emigrated and naturalized here, and she cries: “We’ll find the path of the Dragon, and it will make everything clear” (221). And it does because this play is a play for children, especially for female children, and Lily and Sarah will prevail. Trusting in the Dragon and her mother’s spirit, symbolized by the power of the pearl, Sarah will send Mr Lowe packing; strengthened in her resolve by the Prairie Dragon, Lily convinces her father that there are new rules in this new land and that the old guiding spirits are happy to be here now and to do things the Alta-way. But the play does not end until the Dragon reminds Sarah that she must “Speak to your Mama,” and Sarah will speak for both herself and Lily when she says – “I got faith and hope and your pearl necklace. And ... and Prairie Dragons” (226).

In this seemingly light-hearted, magical way, Pollock has deployed the resources of theatre to teach an important lesson: that prejudices can be overcome if we believe in ourselves and if we hold sacred the ground on

which we live, if we recognize home as where we are and not where we once came from, if we put down roots of tradition, family, love, and community in this place, which for Pollock (like Lily and Sarah) is the prairie of Alberta.

By contrast, there is nothing light-hearted or even celebratory about *Sweet Land of Liberty* and yet some of the same ethical issues are confronted and a similar resolution is proffered. Like so many Pollock plays, this one has a dramatic frame. When the play opens, Tom is arriving at the entrance to Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park. As he talks, he walks into the park and he tells us where he, and we, are. He has a gun with him and he positions himself at a point where he can look “over the border to the Sweet Grass Hills of Montana” and down into the campsite where visitors to the park will spend vacations (I 181). He tells us that a black bird is following him and that an Indian appears to him; he wonders if everything he does and says and sees is only in his imagination. He has come to this place to die and the Indian, real or imagined, tells him that “it’s a good day to die” (I 182). From this monologue, we cut to a legal interrogation and the past story leading up to the opening frame scene begins to unfold. At the end of the play we will be returned to the park, to Tom, and to his Indian guide/spirit, but in between we will hear (and see, if this piece is ever produced on stage) why the man called Tom has chosen to take his own life in Alberta’s most sacred place.

Sweet Land of Liberty is in many ways a play of the late seventies, an anti-war play, and a play about Canada as a possible space of rescue, idealism, and safety. And yet, even then, even in 1979, Pollock doubted (perhaps *problematized* is the better term) these associations with her native land and the home ground of Alberta. It is interesting, therefore, to pause and reflect on the geography of this play. To date, this play has not received a stage production, but now that it has been published it can and should be produced for live theatre. However, no one can recreate on stage the physical spaces that must be imagined and would be created aurally on radio. To capture the movements and spaces demanded by the plot, a designer would have to work from the central scenes of interrogation, as the police investigation into Tom’s death unfolds through flashback/imaginings, to establish Tom’s presence in southern Alberta as he rides a bus from Calgary to Lethbridge, falls into conversation with a young boy, Stevie Harris, and his mother, Rena, who are returning to their home in Lethbridge, and then follow Tom after he moves in with Rena and Stevie because Rena is renting out a room in her house. From the moments on the bus to his later more intimate relationship

with the family, Tom slowly comes to trust Rena and to develop a close bond with Stevie; for the first time in many years he finds a modicum of peace and happiness. But of course, all is not well: Rena's estranged husband has an ugly habit of showing up and threatening violence to Rena and Tom and, worse still, Tom is tormented by memories of the violent brutality he witnessed in Vietnam. He suffers from what today we call post-traumatic stress syndrome. But he had not come to Lethbridge in the first place because of Rena and Stevie; meeting them on the bus was a stroke of good luck for Tom. He comes to Lethbridge because it lies close to the southwest boundary of Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, and although we are not told so, it seems that he has planned to kill himself in this sacred place from the moment he boarded the Calgary bus. Just as his head is filled with horrifying images of war, so also his imagination constantly relocates him to the park where he is when the play opens and when it ends. Staging *Sweet Land of Liberty* would entail finding ways to suggest the beauty, mystery, and spiritual power of a real landscape, a landscape famous for its coulees, hoodoos, and prairie habitat, its centuries-old rock paintings and rock carvings, a place sacred to the First Nations, a place controlled in more recent history by the Blackfoot Nation, and a space for warriors and shamans. But this park also borders to the south on the American state of Montana, and from a bluff in the park Tom imagines his small-town Montana home, that home he cannot return to.

While I can accept the necessity of allowing this aspect of landscape-as-home, which is evoked in the play, to remain an imagined place, the park itself is another matter. Several questions are begged by Pollock's use of a real Alberta park in this play. How to *stage* it is just one, but after that a director (like a reader) must decide exactly how to position Tom – a white American – in this place *in Canada* that is sacred to another race. Given the history of White/Native relations in the American and Canadian Wests, this is a delicate matter. And yet the play does suggest that Tom's presence and his suicide in the park are sanctioned by the Indian spirits who inhabit this sacred space. Of equal importance, I think, is the question of land and liberty: Where is this land? Whose land is it? And what makes it a "sweet land" of liberty? Is Pollock placing this symbolic weight south of the border, in Montana, and thus warning us that a United States at war has betrayed liberty and has no room left for a man with Tom's experiences and views? Or is she asking us to reflect on this small and unique place within our borders as the "sweet land of liberty"? Insofar as Tom finds peace in death there and appears to be welcomed and accepted by the Indian who guides

him, I think it is safe to conclude that this symbolic place of freedom is indeed Alberta's famous, historic park. Or at least, until I can see this play on the boards, transformed from what Pollock always calls a "blueprint for performance" into a staged production, this will be my interpretation of her play.³ Just as she found spiritual beauty and an emotional *home* in the real landscapes of southern Alberta, so she has created this place for her tormented character. The most diametrically opposite place she could imagine to the bloody, napalmed land of Vietnam was Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, a land of sweet grass, spirits, liberty, and rest.

Generations is a very different play.⁴ Where *Prairie Dragons* created an Alberta of magical powers under the prairie that could be called on to assist the living, and *Sweet Land of Liberty* imagines one special Alberta place as a real, yet symbolic, site of release from torment and violence (even for a white man), *Generations* is firmly rooted in a realistic setting and in the realities of contemporary farming life. The dramatic action of the play turns on the challenges facing the Nurlin family. One third-generation Nurlin son, David, still lives on the family farm with his parents, Alfred and Margaret, and his grandfather, Old Eddy Nurlin. But the other Nurlin son, Young Eddy, has left the farm to become a Calgary lawyer; he sees the future of Alberta farmers as dim indeed, and he is not willing to expend his life struggling to make a farm pay. As the play opens, Young Eddy has come home for a visit, but his underlying purpose is to ask his father to sell off a section of the farm that would one day be his share, so that he can have the money now to invest in his legal practice. To add to the complications, and to expand on the dilemma of whether to stay and farm or sell and move to the city, Pollock introduces a girlfriend, Bonnie, who is engaged to David but is not prepared to sink her life and education (she is a teacher) into the family farm by marrying him. Bonnie cannot understand, let alone share, David's passionate attachment to the farm; she sees matters more as Young Eddie does. This conflict between David and Bonnie finds its clearest formulation, not in the arguments between the two young people, but in a serious conversation between Bonnie and Margaret Nurlin. In this critical discussion between the two women, Pollock allows both sides of the argument to emerge forcefully: Bonnie is amazed at the older woman's capacity to lose herself – and loss of self is crucial for Pollock – in a mute subservience to the farm, the seasons, and the rhythms of nature and routines of an isolated life that is ruled by men who serve the land. For her part, the gentle, soft-spoken Margaret reveals her principles emphatically when she tells Bonnie that, in her eyes,

this life as a farmer's wife has made her "part of something" that is bigger than one individual and worth being a part of, and she asks Bonnie if she is "so special, so fine, so wonderful" that she cannot imagine anything bigger to be part of (I 326).

Indeed, it seems to me that this is really the crux of the matter for Pollock and for the play. The immense question she poses is this: can we find something bigger and more significant to be part of, to dedicate our lives to, even if that commitment does entail self-sacrifice? To ground this question she has chosen a particular landscape in a specific late twentieth-century moment when men and women can, and must, make tough decisions. All around the edges of the action, like the farm surrounding the Nurlin house, lie the external, elemental forces of the prairie: earth, air, water, and fire. And present throughout the play is one other character – eighty-one-year-old Charlie Running Dog. These Alberta lands are his ancestral home, and he and his band are refusing to allow the local farmers (like the Nurlin family) access to water for irrigation because they believe the government has not provided adequate compensation for this precious resource. As the stage instructions make clear, Pollock intends Charlie to represent not just the issue of Native rights but, in fact, the land itself. She tells us that, "*time and the elements have so conditioned and eroded his skin that he looks less like a Native Canadian, and more like some outcropping of arid land*" (I 280). As tensions and tempers mount, the Indians will hold out, meetings will be convened, Young Eddy and David will clash, Bonnie and David will pull apart, and finally, in a moment of rage, David will set fire to the section of the farm that Young Eddy was hoping to persuade his father to sell. Check mate. Except that Pollock does not leave the play hanging on the brink of immediate disaster. Old Eddy, appalled at what his favourite grandson has done, strikes the younger man screaming "I'm gonna kill ya!!" (333). He built this farm; he stayed on it even when his beloved wife died. He had two boys, one of whom died as a child, while the other, Alfred, who fought in the Second World War and survived, was happy to settle down on the farm. But now that Alfred and Margaret are struggling to make the farm pay, to believe in this something bigger than themselves during hard times, this foolish grandson does something so careless and dangerous as to threaten the destruction of all that Old Eddy has worked for.

This overt, physical battle between the generations acts like a catalyst, at least on the symbolic level, because, as the old man tires, the rain suddenly starts to fall. The crisis brought on by drought, combined with the Indians'

withholding of water, is over. The fire set by David is quenched; the farm is saved. The message is obvious: if one cares enough, believes deeply enough, gives enough of one's self to the land, then the land will respond. As the play ends, Bonnie and David will go their separate ways, Young Eddy will have to wait for his inheritance, and Charlie Running Dog and Old Eddy get the final words: "We're still here, Charlie. Hell, we'll always be here" (335). If there are winners and losers in this play, then the winners, at least for now, are those who belong to the prairie, to the land and the elements, to a way of life that is big and means something larger than a single individual self. Those who cannot identify themselves with the land, as Margaret, Old Eddy, and David do, should move out and on to other kinds of lives – in the city, in offices, away from the Alberta that is home to the Indians and the farmers.

Chief among my reasons for choosing to emphasize *Prairie Dragons*, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, and *Generations*, instead of *Walsh* and *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, in this consideration of Sharon Pollock's Alberta is my sense that in these three plays she has made room for the physical landscapes of Alberta to play a role in the drama. I would go so far as to say that, in each of these plays, the land becomes a character that impinges directly on the human characters to shape their lives, deaths, and choices. Skillful set designs, sound effects, and lighting should be able to capture this symbolic, magical, or mythic presence on stage. By contrast, the two historical plays centre on dilemmas created by and between human beings. James Walsh is the protagonist and agonist in his play, and his betrayal of others and of his best self could take place anywhere. Moreover, the play we watch is his memory play; it unfolds, expressionistically, on the stage of an older, drunken Walsh's tormented mind. The lessons of this play are personal, political, and historical, and they are explored through one man's (at most two men's because of Sitting Bull's role) story. *Whiskey Six Cadenza* uses the era of Prohibition and the story of a local bootlegger as a vehicle for exploring issues of power politics within families and communities. The historical record fixes this drama in Blairmore, in the Crownest Pass, and we hear about wild rides in those infamous McLaughlin six-cylinder cars favoured by rum-runners, but the moral and emotional core of the play is not outside in the mountains, country roads, or fields. The core of this play is set in the human soul and within the breast of the family, where mothers fight for control of sons and putative fathers exploit their so-called adopted daughters. This play is less about Alberta than it is about who has the right to do what to whom

and, when a person abuses this power, what price should be paid and by whom. This play could easily be set in downtown Toronto, or in Calgary for that matter. Which raises another question in my mind: why has Sharon Pollock not yet written an urban play, a play set in her home city of Calgary? Calgary gets very oblique and passing mention in a few of the radio plays, but the only Pollock play I can think of to *use* a city setting is her unpublished 1976 television play *The Larsens*, which is set in Winnipeg.

Of course, I cannot begin to answer such a question. Only Pollock can do that and maybe she will write a Calgary, city-based play. But when I think of her in context with other major Canadian playwrights of her generation, or of the younger generation for that matter, I am struck by the absence of Calgary from her vision. Pollock has not done for her chosen city what Tremblay has done for Montreal's Main, what George F. Walker has done for Toronto (or North American urban life) in his *East End Plays*, or even what George Ryga did for Vancouver in *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. I cannot imagine a Judith Thompson play without thinking about city streets; even in a play like *Sled*, with its northerly woods setting, the streets of Toronto are omnipresent. Marie Clements' *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* is inconceivable without Vancouver's downtown east side, and I could multiply examples of urban plays from there. Whatever the reasons, whether for matters of timing, sensibility, or perhaps even locale, Sharon Pollock's Alberta is deeply rooted in the prairie land that is still visible beyond the sky-scrapers of her city. As her biographer I know that she constantly drives across the Prairies; she has done this almost from the January day in 1966 when she arrived in Alberta from New Brunswick and soon began to tour nearby towns by bus with a small acting troupe called Prairie Players. She has driven back and forth between Calgary and Banff, between Calgary and Edmonton, and, with her goods and children, between Atlantic Canada and the Prairies. She has always loved to drive, and by driving she established, from the outset, an intimate personal connection with the Prairies, which she once described, in the moments it took to cross the Ontario–Manitoba border, as opening out before her to offer “a glimpse of infinity full of significance beyond the individual” and to promise a form of rebirth.⁵ Sharon Pollock's Alberta, then, is the place of her reinvention of self, a reinvention that demanded all the amenities of a sophisticated city with an active theatre life, but that could only flourish in a Prairie landscape of the heart, soul, and imagination in which she could work and feel at home.

NOTES

1. I am only mentioning these organizations here because I discuss Pollock's work with them in detail in *Making Theatre: A Life of Sharon Pollock*, and I have devoted a chapter of this biography to her Garry Theatre, which was a major event in her life. For representative examples of Pollock's insistence in interviews that she defines home as Calgary, see Dunn or Hofsess.
2. Unless otherwise indicated, dates given are for first publication or for first production, when a play has not been published. All quotations from published plays, however, are from *Sharon Pollock: Collected Works*, volume I or II. In addition to the plays I have noted here, Pollock has written several other unpublished scripts for theatre, radio, and television that have an Alberta setting or story. These include "Mail versus Female" (Lunchbox Theatre, 1979), "Chautauqua Spelt E-N-E-R-G-Y" (Alberta Theatre Projects, 1979), "Mrs Yale and Jennifer" (Calgary, CBC, 1980), "Death in the Family" (Garry Theatre, 1993), "Highway #2: The Great Divide," co-written with Paul G lineau and Janet Hinton-Mann (Garry Theatre, 1995), and episodes for CBC television series.
3. This idea that a written script is no more than a blueprint for performance is a frequently reiterated one for Pollock. She made this point most recently in her 2005 interview with Pat Demers.
4. *Generations* was originally performed as a CBC radio play on December 10, 1978 and produced as a stage play by Alberta Theatre Projects in 1980, under the direction of Mark Schoenberg. It received a production with Tarragon in 1981 and was directed by Robert Fothergill in Baroda, India, in 1981. In October 2004, Ted Price directed a new professional production of the play for Theatre North West in Prince George, British Columbia. Although this is not one of Pollock's best plays, it does work on stage and it does capture an aspect of her sense of place.
5. Pollock made this comment to Pat Quigley during a taped lecture, with question and answer session, that she gave at Stratford, in their Celebrated Writers Series, on July 11, 1993 in conjunction with the world premiere of *Fair Liberty's Call*. The cassette is held in the Stratford Festival Archives in Stratford, Ontario, and it has not, to my knowledge, been transcribed or published. I would like to thank the archivists for their generous assistance with Pollock materials during my fall 2005 research visit. It is worth noting that Pollock describes her arrival on the

Prairies in this way during a lecture about a play set in eighteenth-century New Brunswick; underlying her remark is the realization that her New Brunswick birthplace does not appeal to her as much as does her adopted home in the West.

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