



SHARON POLLOCK: FIRST WOMAN OF CANADIAN THEATRE Edited by Donna Coates

ISBN 978-1-55238-790-0

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Equal-Opportunity Torturers in Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End* and Sharon Pollock's *Man Out of Joint*

Donna Coates

In 2007, two of Canada's best-known, Governor General's Award-winning playwrights, Judith Thompson and Sharon Pollock, produced brave new works inspired by real-life persons and events on the subject of institutional torture. In her "Playwright's Notes," Thompson describes the triptych of monologues that comprises *Palace of the End* as follows: the first, "*My Pyramids*" was inspired by the media circus around Lynndie England, the American soldier convicted of the sexual torture of Iraqi detainees in Abu Ghraib prison" [Thompson refers to her as Soldier]; the second, "*Harrowdown Hill*" was inspired by the well-publicized events surrounding the public life and solitary death of Dr. David Kelly, the British weapons inspector and microbiologist"; and the third, "*Instruments of Yearning*" was inspired by the true story of Nehrjas Al Saffarh, a well-known member of the Communist party of Iraq, who was tortured by Saddam Hussein's secret police in

the 1970s. She died when her home was bombed by the Americans in the first Gulf War” (n.p.). Similarly, in *Man Out of Joint*, Pollock draws attention to the torture and abuse of detainees at Guantanamo Bay, and specifically to Omar Khadr, the fifteen-year-old Canadian child soldier captured in Afghanistan and charged with murdering an American army medic in 2002.¹ Interspersed with the detainee stories are those about Joel Gianelli, based on Toronto lawyer Rocco Galati, and his American client Ed Leland, based on Delmart Vreeland, who appears to have accurately predicted the attacks on the World Trade Centre. As a result of his association with Leland, Gianelli becomes increasingly concerned with inconsistencies in reports about 9/11. But Gianelli is also preoccupied with the recent drowning death of his son, as well as haunted by the hardship his family endured after his Italian father and grandfather were unjustly interned during World War II. Taken together, these interlocking narratives track how multiple systems of oppression come into existence and how they are connected. As Pollock tells Stephen Hunt, “the structure of [the play] makes its own statement about how the past impacts the present, how different arenas that you work in affect other arenas. In other words, you can’t really ignore what is happening outside of our safe little cocoon that we have here” (“Downstage”).

In my essay, I want to concentrate, however, on Thompson’s and Pollock’s representations of “torture chicks,” a phrase coined after three white women – Sabrina Harman, Megan Ambuhl, and Lynndie England – were caught and charged with torturing prisoners at Abu Ghraib. I will examine Thompson’s Soldier’s role as sexual interrogator at Abu Ghraib and Pollock’s Soldier #1’s (Pete) and Soldier #2’s (Lolly) roles as “guards” at Guantanamo Bay prison (“Gitmo”).² In writing about torture, neither Thompson nor Pollock is doing anything especially new because, as American critic Coco Fusco observes, “torture is not a new element of war. Interrogation has invariably been crucial to military efforts to thwart insurgencies, and rare are the instances in which information is obtained from captured enemies without some degree of physical or psychological violence” (33). Nor is the torture

of women and children new, as recent events in Bosnia, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo remind us, although novels and plays about the subject have only recently begun to be written and produced.³ What is new, however, is that in February 2005, the Pentagon deliberately instigated a program which employed women as “sexual aggressors” (Fusco 26). According to Fusco, even “high ranking female intelligence officers in Iraq and Afghanistan authorized the use of coercive interrogation strategies – in other words, torture” (19). Like most of us, Fusco learned about the “torture chicks” when she saw those now-infamous photos of England leading a naked prisoner on a leash (a photo Susan Sontag claims depicts “classic dominatrix imagery” [“Regarding”]); giving the thumbs-up sign with one hand and with the other pointing her finger in a cocked gun position at a prisoner’s genitals; and standing arm in arm with Specialist Charles Graner (with whom she had an affair and subsequently a child) both grinning and offering the thumbs-up sign while perched behind a cluster of several Iraqis piled awkwardly atop one another in the shape of a human pyramid.

When Fusco realized that “the media frenzy over the Abu Ghraib photographs focused on the questions of the soldiers’ culpability,” she determined to figure out “how they got there, how many of them there were, who came up with the idea to do such things to prisoners and why” (26). Over the course of her research, Fusco learned that

there are now more American women waging war these days than there are those who try to prevent it . . . [The United States’] high rate of unemployment, the demand for troops, and the absence of a draft have led to the unparalleled involvement of American women in the making of war. [The country’s] active duty armed forces have more women in them than ever before in history [they comprise about 15 percent of the military population], and American women soldiers are closer than they have ever come to combat. (18)⁴

As the number of women in the US military grows, Fusco observes it is not surprising that the military would want to transform women's "particular assets" (47) into weapons and "exploit their presence strategically and tactically" (18). But what the Pentagon hoped to achieve by making women perpetrators of sexual torture is not so readily apparent. Fusco posits they may have wanted to "humanize" the US military occupation of Iraq because most assume torture cannot be "bad" if performed by members of the "weaker sex" (39); moreover, women are viewed as "much less intimidating than the over-sized Special Forces commandos in black ninja suits and masks who preside over interrogations in those notorious so-called black holes and secret prisons that are managed by the CIA" (20–21). Fusco notes that even the language used to describe what female torturers do sounds harmless: "when male interrogators perform sex acts on non-consenting subjects it is understood as sexual assault, but when women do it, it can be authorized as an invasion of space" (Fusco 33). But as she further argues, to employ women in military interrogations specifically "to provoke male anxiety, and to then label it 'Invasion of Space by a Female'. . . is testimony in itself of the state's rationalization of its exploitation of femininity" (41). Fusco then suggests that women's presence in the prisons creates the impression that American institutions engaging in domination are "actually democratic, since they appear to practice gender equity" (41). Moreover, some feminists, reluctant to place women in the role of victims, have argued that "female sexual assertiveness should be understood as a form of freedom of expression" (Fusco 50).

Canadian critic Sherene H. Razack also attempts to come to terms with why the military decided to use female torturers: echoing Fusco, she suggests that the practice marked Americans as "modern people who do not subscribe to puritanical notions of sex or to patriarchal notions of women's role in it. The Iraqis, of course, remained forever confined to the premodern" ("Kill" 223). She adds that those who attempt to justify these "new methods of interrogation" ("Kill" 220) assert they are dealing with a "culturally different enemy": "unlike the Cold War, the war on terror and the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan have

produced conditions where military interrogators need cultural help” in dealing with the Arab enemy, who is “more ideologically driven and more religious” (“Kill” 220). But declaring these prisoners “culturally different enemies” means that few have questioned the “Orientalist underpinnings” of these strategies, which infer that “unlike us, the Arabs/Muslims are sexually repressed, homophobic, misogynist and likely to crack in sexualized situations, particularly those involving women dominating men or those involving sex between men” (Razack, “Casting,” 65). She stresses that this “clash of civilizations” approach to torture “reinforced the idea of the detainees’ barbarism at the same time that it enabled the West to remain on moral high ground. First, through the idea of cultural difference, sexualized torture became something more generic – torture for the purpose of obtaining information, something that was not even torture at all. Sexualized torture, then, was devised simply “to attack the prisoners’ identity and values” (“Kill” 222). But Razack further asserts that “such methods would in fact humiliate men of all cultures both because they are violent and because they target what it means to be a man in patriarchy” (“Casting” 65).

Several feminist critics have identified the role that training plays in the racist indoctrination of soldiers. Eve Ensler notes that “brainwashing” teaches soldiers to view Iraqis as “less than human” (18), and Ilene Feinman points out that “military boot camp is far from gender-neutral training. . . . Women are now being trained to respond equally to their male counterparts with a racialized, patriarchally constructed tool kit of behaviours” (71). Clearly, Thompson’s Soldier has been handed the “tool kit” and taught to objectify and dehumanize the enemy as she carries out what she declares she is “*trained to do*, which is SERIOUS – INTELLIGENCE – WORK” (155). Soldier insists that those under her command are not “men, they are terrorists” who “look exactly alike” (159); the “RAKEES” are not humans but “APES,” “monsters in the *shape* of human beings” (160); they are pigs to “slaughter” and cattle to “herd” (160). Although Thompson does not suggest that Soldier was racist before she joined the military,

Coleen Kesner, a resident from England's home town, certainly suggests that England was: "If you're a different nationality, a different race, you're sub-human. That's the way that girls like Lynndie England are raised. Tormenting Iraqis, in her mind, would be no different from shooting a turkey. Every season here you're hunting something. Over there they're hunting Iraqis" (cited in Razack 77). While Thompson's Soldier admits that she and the others abused the detainees in much worse ways than the pictures showed – "What YOU seen is tiddly-winks," she states (161) – but none of what they did, whether laughing "at a man's willy" or forcing him to masturbate, was torture: it was merely humiliation. But as Sontag insists, "all covenants on torture specify that it includes treatment intended to humiliate the victim" ("Regarding").

But why women (like Soldier) should agree to work as sexual interrogators is also not so obvious. Fusco points out that given the recent increase in enlistment, it appears that many women consider "the military as an exceptional educational and work opportunity and as an economic solution. They characterize it as a structure that challenges them and enhances personal characteristics such as assertiveness that enable them to advance professionally and eschew limiting traditional female roles and modes of address" (61). Accordingly, both Pollock's and Thompson's female soldiers stem from the ranks of the underprivileged and view joining the military as a positive career move. In spite of having been fired several times by the Dairy Queen, Soldier is working there again when the recruiters come calling: she signs up because there is "no way in hell [she is] going back to [the night shift] at the chicken factory" (149) and claims she wants to do "whatever it takes to protect [her] country" (149). Similarly, Pollock's Soldier #2 confesses that she was "poor white trash," that she "grew up in a fuckin' trailer full of empties and dog shit," that the "smartest thing" she ever did was to join the military, which she claims has given her a "family," a "place," a "home" (302). She is prepared to do whatever they ask of her: "I get orders / . . . I follow orders. I know what I'm to do and I do it . . . I'm like a machine . . . The military counts on me and I can count

on it” (302–03). When Pollock intersperses Soldier #2’s emphatic declarations – that she is “proud of who [she] is today” (302), “proud of what [she has] become / . . .and “proud of what [she] can be” (303) – with the detainees’ descriptions of the torture she subjects them to, it becomes apparent that, like Thompson’s Soldier, she regards herself as culturally and racially superior to what she perceives of as her innately barbaric and primitive victims.

Thompson’s Soldier is also “proud” she has “fitted in,” that she did not “wussy out” in the “hardest ass prison” when her male counterparts insisted she should be “cleanin’ or cookin” (161) and then reinforced their patriarchal objections to her presence by subjecting her to what might be considered “torture lite”: they did not talk to her (isolation); they “stole” her food (starvation); they “hung [her] upside down” (hanging gestures); and “poured water on [her] in the night” (waterboarding). Nevertheless, she is proud that she gained their acceptance by being “as tough and as bad assed as they were” (161). But she also takes pride in her “serious intelligence work”: as she tells the audience, “So, there I was, little me, in ABU GHRAIB, . . . and I was the BIG boss of these BIG DEAL TERRORISTS, guys who had KILLED AMERICANS. GUYS WHO WERE PLANNING ANOTHER 9/11 dude” (162). As Lila Rajiva argues, women [like Soldier] “exulted in their power, both in the voluntary submission of their fellow soldiers to their sexual power . . .as well as in the coerced submission of the male prisoners. The triumph of the women lay in eliciting a response from men who did not want to give it. It was just this reduction of human beings to objects without their own wills that made them gloat” (228).

But according to Thompson, it was not this reversal of the male–female power dynamic that attracted public attention to England. During an interview with Anne Holloway, Thompson stated that when she “googled” England and discovered there were “66,000 sites” on her, she naively thought that people “really care[d] about the situation,” but closer inspection revealed that the comments were “sexually violent, pornographic, misogynistic things,” worse than anything she’d

“ever seen in her life” (140). Thompson lamented that not a “single one mentioned the prisoners, and the injustice, and [England’s] obviously acting out the will of the Pentagon and the will of America” (140), an observation that I will argue Thompson herself ironically failed to act on. In that same interview, Thompson stated that she thought it would be “fun” to write about England and admitted that she found herself “laughing at [England’s] lack of education” (141). Because she and Holloway “have advantages and the resources of education, affluence and intellect,” Thompson argued, they might have been able to “step out” and say what they were involved in “isn’t right” and think about “reporting” it, but she reiterated that England couldn’t do that because she’s “just a product – a product of American society” (143). When Holloway asked if she thinks “Lynnndie’s a monster,” if “there is something psychologically wrong with her,” Thompson replied that she’s “absolutely typical,” that she is a “symptom of Western society,” which she agreed has a lot to do with “capitalism” (142). In an interview with Martin Morrow, Thompson again insisted “[England] has been strung up in the public square as a monster, but that monster was created by American society” (Morrow). But in spite of these repeated references to “American society,” Thompson offered no serious indictment of it: Soldier makes frequent references to junk food (Thompson told Holloway that she chose Dairy Queen because “that’s American culture” [139]), to late-night American television talk shows, to Disney movies and Hollywood film stars. The naively patriotic and superficially religious Soldier also declares that she hates “liberals,” “feminists,” “gays,” “PEACE PINHEADS,” and the terrorists who caused the collapse of the Twin Towers. But instead of depicting a female soldier acting out the will of the Pentagon and the will of America, Thompson dwells on Soldier’s rank ignorance, her moral deficiencies, and turns her into a bimbo, an object of derision, a depiction which thereby reinforces the military’s description of those who were eventually charged (none above the rank of sergeant) as “the seven bad apples” who had to be punished for embarrassing the military and the administration.

Several critics have pointed out the problems with blaming only a few low-ranking personnel for what happened at Abu Ghraib. Razack claims that “the failure to more closely examine the actions of rank and file soldiers, and to insist on a deeper and broader public accountability secures for Americans a national innocence. If the only problem about Abu Ghraib was a few bad leaders, then there need not be any sustained confrontation with the facts of empire, both then and now” (“Kill” 218). Feinman also asserts that “the insistence on the ‘few bad apples’ theory following the release of the Abu Ghraib photos served to exonerate the rest of us from culpability, and served the administration by keeping the ‘authority’ for carrying out the torture among the lowest-ranked officers in the U. S. military – in itself contradictory, given the hierarchical command structure of the forces” (5). She adds that to concentrate on “the function of women as the focus of the torture revelations, disproportional to their actual presence in either the military or the group of soldiers convicted of torture, serves to both anomalize the incidents of torture, and to discredit ‘unintelligent and incapable women,’ while ignoring the very rank command structure that authorized the torture in the first instance” (58).

Although it is difficult to divorce Thompson’s imaginative construction of Soldier from what we already know about England, nevertheless, I find it troubling that Soldier feels occasional twinges of remorse. While she reserves the most sympathy for an American (of course) “friend” she helped torture as a child, she is also plagued by the refusal of an Iraqi man to “amuse” the torturers by obeying their vile orders. This sounds a false note, for as Joanne Laurier remarks, “England and the other ‘seven bad apples’ were utterly devoid of an awareness of the depravity of their actions” (“Standard”). In Errol Morris and Philip Gourevitch’s documentary *Standard Operating Procedure*, England seems especially unrepentant when she speaks so belligerently about the treatment of detainees: “We didn’t kill ‘em . . . We didn’t cut their heads off. We didn’t shoot ‘em. We didn’t make ‘em bleed to death. We did what we were told, soften ‘em up [for interrogation]” (“Standard”). As Razack argues, torturers like England express no shame or moral

outrage or sorrow because they have not confronted “what torture *is*: a systematic dehumanization of the Other” (“Kill” 225). Moreover, as Richard Weisman and others assert, “expressions of remorse have to include an unconditional acknowledgement of responsibility, sincere self-condemnation and, most crucially, an awareness that the victim has suffered” (cited in Razack, “Kill,” 228–29). Razack declares that “without these components, we are not being invited into a moral community in which torture is wrong. If no one thinks that the acts of torture at Abu Ghraib were really wrong or regrettable, then are Muslims/Arabs full members of the human and political community?” (229). Thus, although self-pity and self-justification run throughout Soldier’s monologue, she remains delusional, certain that the “higher-ups” will eventually exonerate her from all charges against her.

Similarly, Pollock’s Soldier #2, arguably as physically forceful and sexually threatening as Thompson’s Soldier, feels no sense of guilt or shame, because Pollock recognizes, as does Barbara Finlay, that “just as men can become torturers given the ‘right’ conditions, so can women” (211). Pollock also understands that women’s exclusion from power “has not necessarily made them immune to its seductive qualities or critical of the use of force” (Fusco 17); nor has it led them to use power differently from men. But at the same time, she suggests that because women like Soldier #2 have fewer employment opportunities than men, they are less likely to question orders and more likely to do whatever the military asks of them. Hence Pollock’s Soldier #1, who has not made the military his “home,” his “place,” or his “family,” looks forward to going home because he has become increasingly horrified by the violence of the duties he is required to perform (Pollock hints at an authorized and condoned chain of command). Unlike Thompson’s Soldier, he has become aware of the detainees’ courage and resilience in spite of their suffering (he hears them “knocking their heads ‘gainst the walls and doors” (303); “sees eyes that are beggin’ like, pleadin’ and full of pain” [308]); and begins to understand that he wishes to inhabit a “moral community” where torture is “wrong.” He concludes that

while the detainees are “caged,” everyone at Guantanamo, including him and Soldier #2, are “prisoner[s]” (304).

The play holds out partial hope for Soldier #1, who joins Gianelli’s partner Erin and his social-climber wife Suzanne (both of whom are content to remain willfully blind to the torture and abuse taking place at Guantanamo) in reading the documents Gianelli has received from Leland. (In her “Staging Notes,” Pollock indicates that “multiple dimensions of time and space are layered in the world of the play” [258]). As they read through the material, the stage directions indicate that they become *caught by information*” (319): Soldier #1, for example, offers the shocking news that Afghan president Hamid Karzai worked for Enocal, which Gianelli explains is a “consortium of companies to bring oil from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan” (317); furthermore, Condoleeza Rice was on the board, and Americans attacked Afghanistan in order to secure access to oil resources. But although Soldier #1 is becoming enlightened about the human cost of internment at Guantanamo, his future remains uncertain because he is experiencing classic trauma symptoms such as sleeplessness and recurring nightmares. As Finlay observes, “both men and women who participate in these horrors will carry the images in their minds throughout their lives, with unknown consequences for their mental, spiritual, moral, and physical well-being and that of those around them” (212).

But for now, Soldier #2 remains unmoved by the torment and anguish of the inmates. She calls Soldier #1 a “wuss” when he confesses he is affected by the suffering of the detainees, and claims that, unlike him, she has no trouble sleeping. Soldier #2 fails to recognize that women like her were, as Aziz Huq suggests, merely “instrumentalities to be taken down from the shelf and applied in the course of ritualistic abuse and torture” (131). Sadly, as Huq also suggests, the “events at Abu Ghraib [and by extension Guantanamo] are powerful evidence of the military culture’s ability to absorb and integrate women and femininity without fundamental challenge to the Manichean logic that underwrites that culture” (131). Moreover, as Angela Y. Davis argues,

“if success can be interpreted as obtaining access to hierarchical institutions and power structures that perpetuate male dominance, racism, and American political hegemony” (60), then we need to examine how these women’s “induction and training is designed to make them identify with conservative power structures as legitimate entities, and to see the exercise of force within guiding regulations as moral and politically justifiable and salutary for a democratic order” (60).

Thus while Pollock’s play introduces two soldiers who are products of “American society,” instead of pointing to the flaws of the US capitalist system, she reveals, as Laurier puts it [in another context] “the ugly face of US imperialism” (“*Standard*”), and never lets us forget what “made in America” means –hypocrisy, duplicitousness, a desire for world domination at any cost. In *Man Out of Joint*, she stresses that the Bush administration believes the “war on terrorism” can only be won by disregarding legal constraints and drafting new rules of engagement, which she carefully lays out in the opening scenes. As Louis Hobson observes in his review, “Pollock and [director Simon] Mallett have created five distinct areas on stage, including an imposing prison backdrop where detainees are tortured and abused regardless of what is happening elsewhere on stage. It is a constant reminder this is a play that wants us to react not just while we’re watching it, but after we’ve left the theatre” (“*Play*”). The play begins with a Blackout, followed by the words “Honour Bound to Defend Freedom,” spoken by the disembodied voice of “K,” a capital letter which puts us in mind of Kafka (although the name of the man in charge of Guantanamo began with the same initial). These words are followed by “*Sound: a loud cacophony of disorienting music and sound,*” and then a “*strobe light will reveal in the background a shuffling line of hooded men in orange jumpsuits, shackled hands and feet linked to a waist chain, herded by two soldiers . . . The hooded detainees will each be placed in his “cell” – a barred square of light on the floor*” (259). Almost immediately, audiences become aware of the hypocrisy of the words “Honour Bound to Defend Freedom” as the “guards” subject one of the caged detainees to “sensory deprivation” (259), and the voice-overs continue to emphasize that all detainees’

rights have been removed in “this . . . prison beyond the law” (260), a “law” which apparently gives “them” the right to torture anyone they deem suspicious. As Razack affirms,

Torture has what we might regard as an almost built-in connection to race. Quite simply, torture is permissible against those whom we have evicted from personhood even as torture itself guarantees this outcome. Nothing committed against *homo sacer* can be regarded as a crime, commented Giorgio Agamben, since the law has determined that the rule of law does not apply Whether “enemy combatants” or inhabitants of a refugee camp, the legal distinction that marks who enjoys the rule of law and who does not, often thinly disguises that the camp’s inmates are *already* regarded as a lower form of humanity . . . [and therefore] outside the law’s protection. The Bush administration produced Arabs/Muslims in a state of exception in which the rule of law could be suspended in their case. (“Kill” 238–39)

She concludes that “torture talk and culture talk” often merge: “Cultural difference, the enemy’s ‘innate barbarism,’ is an important element in the eviction of the tortured from the rule of law, and thus from humanity” (“Kill” 239).

Pollock has clearly designed the opening scenes to disturb complacent spectators, to remind audiences that, as Fusco asserts, America has a “dark history of doing extremely violent things to some people so that others here can be ‘free’ – and it is only through insisting on the hypocrisy of that double standard that democratic practices have been secured, protected, and expanded” (59). By making the torture and abuse of detainees at Guantanamo Bay visible throughout, frequently interrupting the action in Toronto between Gianelli and his client Leland or between Gianelli and his wife (the couple appears to be heading for a divorce partially as a result of Suzanne’s failure to prevent their son from drowning), Pollock attempts to narrow the

distance between viewer and perpetrator, for as Carrie A. Rentschler observes, “people may not feel obligated to act in the present if they associate atrocity with distant places and times” (300). As Fusco argues, “even though the idea of torture dominates the media sphere and public consciousness, we are compelled to imagine the full range of what it is through personal and collective factors, because most of us don’t get to see the real thing” (35). Moreover, as Sontag writes, we make less from “harrowing photographs,” which inevitably lose their power to shock, than from “narratives” which, she argues, can “make us understand” (“Pain” 80).

Thus in Pollock’s play, we do get to see (and hear) “the real thing,” or at least enactments of torture, and as John Durham Peters points out, if we witness torture, “we cannot say we do not know . . . To witness an event is to be responsible in some way to it” (708). His belief that “citizens have a duty to be informed about the events of the day” (723) is one Pollock certainly shares. Rentschler, like Peters, argues that “witnesses have a responsibility to react to acts of witnessing as something other than passive bystanders,” but she also points out that “people may simply not know how to act or what to do with their vicarious experience of others’ suffering, because they have not been taught how to transform feeling into action” (300). Aware that her audiences may not know how to transform “feeling into action” but hopeful that they do not remain “passive bystanders,” Pollock included in the playbill a list of names of members of parliament and information on how to contact them. But she would also agree with Sontag’s view that

to designate a hell is not, of course, to tell us anything about how to extract people from that hell, how to moderate hell’s flames. Still, it seems a good in itself to acknowledge, to have enlarged one’s sense of how much suffering caused by human wickedness there is in the world we share with others. Someone who is perennially surprised that depravity exists, who continues to feel disillusioned (even incredulous) when confronted with evidence of what humans are

capable of inflicting in the way of gruesome, hands-on cruelties upon other humans, has not reached moral or psychological adulthood.

No one after a certain age has the right to this kind of innocence, of superficiality, to this degree of ignorance, or amnesia.⁵ (“Pain” 104)

Sontag also insists that we allow the “atrocious images” to “haunt us,” to let the images function so that we “Don’t forget” (102), which is one of the reasons Pollock includes the story of the Italian internment and Gianelli’s father, who often cautions his son, “Don’t forget,” and “Remember.”

In presenting the atrocity on stage, Pollock also attempts to negate the notions (expressed by Gianelli’s wife Suzanne) that Canadians need not pay attention because it’s the “Americans, not us” who torture; that Omar Khadr is not “Canadian, he’s Muslim” (290); that “he was a soldier, he was killing people” (289) by forcing us to watch torture enacted on stage (not in a faraway place), most of it executed by Soldier #2. For example, when Soldier #2 realizes that Soldier #1 is ignoring a detainee who paces about his “too-small cage,” she immediately calls [the detainee] an “asshole,” “confronts” him, “knees him in the groin, and as he bends over in pain, cracks him on the back of his head” (262). A few scenes later, in spite of the other detainees’ attempts to attract the attention of the guards, a detainee hangs himself (one of three who die and are carried out on stretchers), an act of desperation that Soldier #2 appears to regard as merely a nuisance. So, too, does “K,” who announces matter-of-factly that in 2003, there had been 350 reported cases of self-harm and 120 cases of “hanging gestures” – but he stresses that reliable figures after that were “unavailable,” as the military had no intention of keeping accurate records of this kind of abuse thereafter (281). We also watch the “guards” subject one detainee to “Long Time Standing”; they shackle his feet to an eyebolt on the floor for more than forty hours, and place a second detainee, naked, in

a “Cold Cell” for extended periods of time and “intermediately” douse him with cold water (285). Significantly, we also witness Soldier #2 sexually assault a detainee: stage directions indicate that “*she slip[s] off her helmet, undo[es] a hair clip,*” and while they do not specify exactly what she does, the scene ends with her giving “*a squeeze to the testicles*” (274).

While the sexual assault is occurring, Soldier #1 immediately begins taking photos, which reminds us of Sontag’s observation that “most of the torture photographs have a sexual theme,” perhaps because “torture is more attractive, as something to record, when it has a sexual component” (“Regarding”). Furthermore, it appears that Soldier #2’s gestures stem from her training, because as Kristine A. Huskey notes, the touching and “squeezing” of “devout Muslim men’s” private parts was part of their “sexual harassment and abuse both in and out of interrogation” (176). During the shooting, however, Soldier #2 remains expressionless and makes no exhibitionist display of her sexuality: her lack of emotional engagement with the detainee indicates her desire to remain in control, and thus her manipulation of male anxiety seems especially monstrous, even grotesque. But as Basuli Deb points out, at Abu Ghraib (and presumably Guantanamo), “the camera itself became an instrument of torture, informing the tortured prisoner that this spectacle of humiliation and pain could be reproduced, amplified, and circulated indefinitely through circuits of consumption over which the detainee would have no control” (12). Moreover, according to Jasbir K. Puar, “these photos do not merely reflect the tortures committed; they also function as an integral part of the humiliating, dehumanizing violence itself: the giddy process of documentation, the visual evidence of corporeal shame, the keen ecstatic eye of the voyeur, the haunting of surveillance, the dissemination of the images, like pornography on the Internet, the speed of transmission an aphrodisiac in itself” (531). Puar further remarks that “as postcolonial scholars have aptly demonstrated, the sexual is already part and parcel of the histories of colonial domination and empire building; conquest is innately corporeal” (534).

Both Sontag and LaNitra Walker make a number of specific comparisons of these photos to American lynching photos. Sontag argues that

if there is something comparable to what these pictures show, it would be some of the photographs of black victims of lynching taken between the 1880s and 1930s, which show Americans grinning beneath the naked mutilated body of a black man or woman hanging behind them from a tree. The lynching photographs were souvenirs of a collective action whose participants felt perfectly justified in what they had done. So are the pictures from Abu Ghraib. (“Regarding”)

Walker observes that both African-Americans during the pre-Civil Rights era and the Iraqi prisoners were arrested and detained without any clear evidence that they had committed crimes, and just as the lynching of more than 4,700 African-Americans were documented in photographs, so, too, was the physical and sexual abuse of detainees (190). She notes that “images of torture from the Abu Ghraib prison were already part of America’s visual vocabulary through the legacy of lynching photography. Both sets of images depict how gender roles reinforce perceptions of racial superiority; and by comparing them, it is possible to see how white American women have moved from the background to the foreground in committing politically motivated acts of violence” (190). The Abu Ghraib photos demonstrate that they have become “equal partners in the abuse of prisoners” (191). Walker also reminds us that two of those “equal partners” grew up in states – England in West Virginia, and Sabrina Harman in Virginia – where “at least fifty lynchings were recorded” (197). Walker also draws attention to several of England’s actions that evoke images from lynching photos. For example, when England points her finger in a cocked gun position at a detainee’s genitals, she reminds viewers that “castration was a common part of the lynching process with the ritual emasculation manifested in stripping a man of his sexual and political power”

(195). Walker adds that “photographing the event or simulated event connotes further social and emotional humiliation of the individual and the community, demonstrating their powerlessness in stopping the torture” (195). In *Man Out of Joint*, Pollock may be reflecting Sontag’s suggestion that the lynching photos included “grinning Americans” in the background, because were Soldier #1 to take a wide-angle shot, he might include audiences in his photo. While we would not be “grinning” (although we might be in Thompson’s “My Pyramids”), Pollock suggests that if we do nothing after witnessing these acts of torture, we become complicit in the action.

While *Man Out of Joint* demonstrates acts of torture on stage, it also imagines the anguish of the incarcerated and tortured and charts how their levels of discomfort and anger increase. In the opening scenes, the detainees “*shift slightly within their cells, extend a hand through the ‘bars,’ react minimally to heat or cold*” (260), but as they listen to evidence of cover-ups or sense something “ominous” (such as the detainees’ suicides), they become increasingly agitated: when they read about Bill C-36, stage directions indicate that they begin to “murmur,” to “*express emotion (anguish, anger, childish frustration, madness)*” (268). Then, when they hear that Leland has obtained his information from Marc Bastien, a young and healthy Canadian attached to the embassy in Moscow who appears to have been murdered because “he knew too much” about the impending attacks on the United States, and that an autopsy, which would provide “proof,” has still not been carried out, the detainees “*rock [. . .] back and forth; curl [. . .] into a fetus-like ball, pac[e], appeal[], smil[e] in conversation with no one*” (278). (Their distress evokes no response in the “guards,” who are busy examining their photos.) But when “K” lays out the terms and conditions of the 2006 Military Commissions Act, which labels the detainees “unlawful enemy combatants” and effectively removes all of their rights and freedoms, stage directions indicate that “*a faint murmur of voices*” gradually “*grows in volume,*” until there is an “*increasing roar of multiple voices*” (299) which cannot be silenced, even though the “*soldiers*” move “*amongst them, attempting to control them, to shut them up*” (299).

Although all of “K’s” words disturb the detainees, arguably, they might find the reference to them as “unlawful enemy combatants” the most offensive, because according to Donald Rumsfeld, who appears to have originated the phrase, “technically”, this means they have “no rights under the Geneva Convention” (“Regarding”). But “technically,” they are neither “unlawful,” nor are they “combatants.” Like Fusco, Pollock is aware that “one of the slickest and scariest elements of the current war machine is the effectiveness of the strategies used to distance most of us from it physically and psychologically” (Fusco 12). “Semantic subterfuge,” which means that “the practice of torture can continue take place [*sic*] while the decision makers deliberate duplicitously about what it ‘really’ is” (37), is one of the most powerful strategies. Throughout the play, “K” refers to “enhanced’ interrogation techniques” such as “frequent-flier programs” or “waterboarding,” neither of which sound like torture, nor does Thompson’s Soldier’s insistence that they were merely “softening up” the Iraqis. Several times in the play, “K” undermines his own point when he insists that the “balanced interrogation techniques” such as “extreme sensory deprivation” or “sensory overload” lead to “positive interrogation results,” even when they have caused “personality disintegration,” (303) which would obviously render any “results” useless. But as Fusco also suggests, “now that our involvement [in torture] has become visible, we continue the ruse [that we don’t torture] by trying to call it something else, or saying we are not sure what it is” (34). According to Sontag, the Bush administration avoided using the word “torture” altogether: the most they “admitted to” was “abuse,” and eventually “humiliation” (“Regarding”). Sontag further suggests that even using the word “detainees” for those “held in the extralegal American penal empire” is problematic: “‘prisoners,’ a newly obsolete word, might suggest that they have the rights accorded by international law and the laws of all civilized countries” (“Regarding”). According to Huskey, even “high-ranking U.S. officials” have admitted that “many were brought to Guantanamo by mistake and have no connection to terrorism” (178), and as Anne McClintock also observes, the detainees “were mostly unarmed non-combatant

civilian populations – many of them innocent people Having no information to offer, they could do nothing to put an end to their agonies” (cited in Deb 10). Feinman notes, too, that “70–90 percent of the prisoners at Abu Ghraib were arrested by mistake through systematic roundups in neighbourhoods” (59). Pollock’s detainees attest they have been captured as a result of the bounty plan, which purported to help “the anti-Taliban forces rid Afghanistan of murderers and terrorists” and would pay “millions of dollars” to anyone who aids them (299). Moreover, none of the IRF (Immediate Reaction Force) was a designated torturer, but detainees who attempted any kind of protest were “IRFed” – in other words, beaten by the Immediate Reaction Force, which was, writes Jeremy Scahill, known inside the walls of Guantanamo as the “Extreme Repression Force.” But according to Michael Ratner, president of the Center for Constitutional Rights, “IRFs can’t be separated from torture. They are a part of the brutalization of humans treated as less than human” (cited in Scahill). Nevertheless, as Huskey points out, even if any of the detainees in these prisons had had information that would have “prevent[ed] future attacks” on America, “their treatment went beyond [what] we might consider to be legal or even valid interrogation for known criminals” (178).

But *Man Out of Joint* not only gives a face to injustices and atrocities by demonstrating on stage the reality of what “‘enhanced’ interrogation techniques” consist of, it also informs audiences about the widespread geographical capture of detainees held at Guantanamo when hundreds of names from Libya, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and the United Arab Emirates roll by on a screen for audiences to read. Additionally, Pollock also includes in her cast of characters the names of five “real detainees” who inform audiences about their experiences at Guantanamo. I refer to them as “real” because in her note to the script, Pollock writes that she “verified ‘detainee abuse’ with several Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) publications” (n.p.). From these sources, she also presumably gained access to actual names and occupations of the detainees (social workers and hospital administrators, among other respectable occupations) and descriptions of the abuse

they have been subjected to. Before describing their abuse, they signal their awareness that one of the goals of the prison is to remove “the inner comfort of identity” (307) by identifying themselves by name, not by number. Mirbati describes being beaten by the IRF (a large man wearing a lot of gear “jump[s] on his back” causing permanent injury to the vertebrae in his back [304]), but he receives no medical aid because he is told his injury is the “result of a degenerative disease” (305). Nechla is confronted by barking dogs whose breath is so close he is terrified of being bitten or killed (304), and he has good reason to be fearful, for as Feinman points out, there is “recent evidence that the dog handlers . . . were in fact given instructions to use their dogs in illegally violent ways” (62). The detainees also attest that any kind of protest (which ranges from writing “Have a Nice Day” on a Styrofoam cup to participating in a lengthy hunger strike) resulted in severe beatings, forced-feeding, and other types of increased torture for which no medical aid was provided. Although Pollock does not give Khadr a voice, Gianelli, who has become one of his lawyers, states that Khadr incurred “shrapnel wounds to the head and the eye” (305), was “shot three times” (306), interrogated and tortured with attack dogs at his chest at Bagram (307) before he was transported to Guantanamo, where he was then subjected to sustained torture. (Even though Gianelli has obtained proper documentation and permission to visit Khadr at Guantanamo, “K” prevents him from doing so.)

That Pollock presents the actual words of “real” detainees at Guantanamo is crucial, for according to Razack, the Americans have studiously avoided “*embodying*” torture at all: “it thus remains a particular policy or law. We seldom hear the voices of the tortured of Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo” (“Kill” 225). In the final scenes of the play, Pollock underscores that the use of torture was bound up with policies pursued by the Bush administration, which used the September 11 attack as a pretext to instigate a bogus war on terror. Even though they were warned by the Russians, the Iranians, and the Saudis, they did nothing, because they wanted another “Pearl Harbor.” Pollock’s play insists that any play about Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib must include

an analysis of oil resources and other geopolitical factors as potential causes of conflict or, as Razack also stresses, the United States “is as heavily committed to securing territory and resources as it is to the reproduction of a society organized around white supremacy” (“Kill” 221). But Pollock also suggests that this kind of criminal behaviour which flies in the face of international humanitarian conventions has backfired and may now be serving as a recruitment tool for future enemies. Tellingly, one of the detainees, who declares he is an “educated” man, states these men are “foolish,” because “someday, I will act” (309).

Undoubtedly, “torture chicks,” who believe that they are becoming the equals of men by agreeing to perform as sexual interrogators, have played their own role in the creation of future enemies. But according to Deb, they are victims of what she terms “*liberal feminist thought*,” in which “the male remains normative, and patriarchy is undisturbed as the onus lies on women to enter structures of privilege. According to this theory, women who control male detainees have successfully reversed the power inequalities at least for themselves. Exercising power violently consolidates their status within patriarchal structures into which they have assimilated” (2). But Deb asserts that a “transnational” feminist response would “attempt to deter torture in the name of women’s emancipation . . . attempt to stop imperialism from marching under the banner of women’s rights, and . . . attempt to intervene in a liberal feminist politics that advocates for the unconditional empowerment of individual women” (4). She suggests that a transnational feminist ethics would insist that “women like Lynndie England would, at their own risk, resist patriarchal manipulation of military women by defying the chain of command that requires women to engage in torture” (3). Similarly, Barbara Ehrenreich argues that

women do not change institutions simply by assimilating into them, only by consciously deciding to fight for change. We need a feminism that teaches a woman to say no – not just to the date rapist or overly insistent boyfriend,

but when necessary, to the military or corporate hierarchy within which she finds herself.

In short, we need a kind of feminism that aims not just to assimilate into the institutions that men have created over the centuries, but to infiltrate and subvert them. (4)

Davis, too, who asks why “the effort to challenge sexism and homophobia in the military [is] largely defined by the question of admission to existing hierarchies and not by a powerful critique of the institution itself” argues that “saying no” may be a positive aim: “Equality might also be considered to be the equal right to refuse and resist” (26). Eve Ensler finds that “feminism” is open to definition, but for her

feminism means reconstructing the world so that the mechanisms of dominance and violence are not the controlling factors. Rather than creating hierarchies based on abuse and submission, we would be creating partnerships based on equality and empowerment. In this world, women wouldn’t hunger to be in the military at all. We wouldn’t even have a military. (18)

Saying “no” might be harder than these feminists think, however, as several recent testimonies from “real” women in the military suggest. For example, Kayla Williams, who recounts her time in Iraq as a US Army sergeant serving in an intelligence company of the 101st Airborne Division in *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the US Army*, had obtained a BA in English Literature from Bowling Green State University in 1997 and had also learned Arabic. Thus she had more agency than England, a low-level administrative clerk when she enlisted. Williams, by contrast, trained as an interpreter and then worked as an Arabic linguist/interpreter and operations specialist. Forced to take part in torture interrogations, she confesses that even though she initially “enjoyed *having power over this guy*,” she was

“uncomfortable with those feelings of pleasure at his discomfort” (cited in Frost 143). But as Fusco suggests, Williams didn’t “find fault with the order; she found herself to be lacking in ability to perform. In other words, she personalized an ethical and legal issue and thus avoided confrontation regarding the legitimacy of the practice” (49). Fusco’s research led her to conclude that this is “not an uncommon position” among women in the military. Similarly, as I learned at a recent production in Calgary of Helen Benedict’s unpublished play “The Lonely Soldier Monologues (Women at War in Iraq),” based on interviews with military women, any complaints about their treatment (such as sexual harassment or assault) or basic procedures went nowhere. In other words, saying “no” to the military has never been that easy. Pollock’s solution (if she has one), would likely be to ensure that young women have many more and better opportunities to obtain decent educations so that they will never consider signing up for military duty a positive career move, but only a desperate last resort.

NOTES

- 1 Judith Thompson has also written about Omar Khadr. In the “Afterword” to *Omar Khadr, Oh Canada*, edited by Janice Williamson (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2012), Razack writes that Judith Thompson’s play “Nail Biter” (165–73) offers “brilliant insight into the psyche of the *Canadian* subject who manages to live with torture through narratives that shield her character from seeing its horror” (431). The one-act play features a thirty-year-old CSIS agent who interrogated Khadr at Guantanamo. Razack adds that Thompson’s “nail biter” is “Canada, the Canada that [Razack] once wrote about as anxious to prove itself as a grownup nation through participating in wars and peacekeeping ventures” (431).
- 2 I would like to thank Hollie Adams for her thoughtful paper on Pollock’s *Man Out of Joint* (and other plays) which she wrote in my graduate seminar on Canadian War Drama in 2011. I drew upon several of her critical references and some of her clever insights about Pollock’s use of photography in writing this essay.
- 3 In “The Misogynist Implications of Abu Ghraib,” Lucinda Marshall asserts that although there is “ample evidence” that Iraqi women detained at Abu Ghraib have been sexually assaulted, the issue has received little attention because “quite simply, sexual abuse against men is considered torture; sexual abuse against women by men is business as usual” (*One of the Guys*, 55).
- 4 In “U. S. Lifting Ban on Women in Combat,” Elisabeth Bumiller and Thom Shanker write that although the Pentagon claims to be lifting its ban on women in combat, in reality, more than 20,000 have served in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan: “as of last year, more than 800 women had been wounded in the two wars

and more than 130 had died." *National Post* 24 January 2013: A14. Moreover, "as recently as two months ago, four servicewomen filed a federal lawsuit against the Pentagon saying they had all served in combat in Iraq or Afghanistan but had not been officially recognized for it." (A14).

- 5 But Pollock's play also contains a number of history lessons that ensure that Canadians cannot claim to have a monopoly on moral virtue. Under the "Defence of Canada Regulations" invoked in World War Two, Italian-Canadians (like the Gianellis) who were assumed to pose a security threat were interned as enemy aliens without trial, even though most had no political affiliation and were captured as a result of mistaken identity or false accusations. Moreover, the Kingston Immigration Holding Centre, nicknamed Guantanamo North, located in the Millhaven Prison near Kingston, Ontario, incarcerates those determined to pose a risk to Canada's national security. Ironically, Omar Khadr was initially sent there to serve out his sentence, but after seven months, he was transferred to the Edmonton Institution for safety reasons. As Gianelli points out, the prison was put in place to hold "Muslim men . . . indefinitely without security certificates, without 'access to evidence against them' and with 'no judicial review of proceedings against them'" (290). Some have been held there for five or six years "without trial" and are "threatened with deportation to countries who torture" (290). The play also informs Canadians about Bill C-36, the Anti-Terrorism Act (268), which was passed in response to the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States. The bill (now expired), which granted extensive powers of surveillance and control over anyone deemed suspicious, was widely considered incompatible with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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