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## Sharon Pollock : first woman of Canadian theatre

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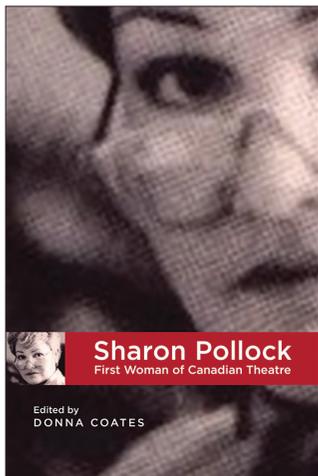
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## SHARON POLLOCK: FIRST WOMAN OF CANADIAN THEATRE Edited by Donna Coates

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## Loss and Mourning in Sharon Pollock's *Fair Liberty's Call*

Kathy K. Y. Chung

Sharon Pollock's *Fair Liberty's Call*<sup>1</sup> is a rich and complex play, which Sherrill Grace describes as "an allegory of Canada and as a treatment of contemporary issues and timeless, if not universal, ideas about liberty, human rights, war and injustice, and many kinds of violence" (287). To Grace's observation, I would add that the play offers an exploration of loss and mourning, subjects which have attracted limited critical attention. One of the few scholars to examine these subjects is Cynthia Zimmerman. In "Transfiguring the Maternal," she considers Joan as the last in a series of increasingly positive representations, from the daughter's perspective, of the lost maternal figure. In her biography of Pollock, *Making Theatre: A Life of Sharon Pollock*, Grace also emphasizes the influence of the life and death of Eloise Chalmers (*née* Roberts), Pollock's mother, throughout Pollock's large body of work. Both of these approaches highlight the mother–daughter relationship. However, *Fair Liberty's Call* contains multiple deaths that represent loss from a broader communal perspective. Pollock also expresses loss and mourning through symbolic and structural elements, specifically

those associated with liminality. These are aspects of the drama I wish to explore in this paper.

While the absence of persons can be profound, other forms of loss are equally powerful and significant. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud writes: "Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (243). Undoubtedly, abstractions such as home, country, liberty, as well as promises and hopes, honour and justice, are desired, lost, and mourned in *Fair Liberty's Call*. In fact, often the loss of a beloved person and the loss of an abstraction are intertwined. For example, for the Roberts family, the loss of home and country (real and ideal) cannot be dissociated from the loss of family members Richard, Edward, and Emily.

Freud's definition of mourning emphasizes the internal mental state of an individual. However, there is a more public facet to mourning, in which it is commonly understood as the outward *expression* of grief and loss and associated with customary ceremonies, rituals, dress, and behaviour. As such, there are elements of the social and the performative in mourning, including performers, performance spaces and contexts, conventions, standards, and audiences. There is also an ambivalent duality associated with the mourner. As Gail Holst-Warhaft notes, on an individual level, bereavement often places the mourner in a vulnerable emotional and psychological state. However, on the collective level, the outward expression of bereavement can unite a community into concerted political action or chaotic unrest (*Cue 2*). Pollock's account of her mother's funeral explicitly highlights her awareness of the vulnerable and performative aspects of mourning:

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

audience,” the people who had packed the church. (qtd. in Hofsess 52, emphasis in original)

Her description of being seen by an “audience” and her judgement of her family’s weeping as “embarrassing” reflect an awareness of mourning as a performance. In addition, her refusal to cry and to show her grief to those present suggests a sense of her emotional vulnerability and an attempt to protect herself.

While the living in Pollock’s drama struggle with their grief and the process of mourning itself, they do not always act solely as independent agents. The dead themselves seem to require actions of those who remain. In the poignant words of Annie Roberts, “Sometimes I feel his name fillin’ my head and pressin’ hard on my lips to be spoke” (75). Here, Annie is referring to Major John Andre, the British spy she betrayed to the Rebels, but her words apply equally to the other dead and other mourners in the play. And while the dead place demands on the living, so too do the living “press” upon the dead, the absent, the past, choosing whether or not to speak their names and tell their stories. And if so, how? To whom? When? Where? Which stories?

While *Fair Liberty’s Call* is about beginnings – “a country comin’ into bein” (20) – as Eddie, Annie, and Joan tell us in the verbal montage at the start of the drama, it is also very much about endings and loss, the choices they necessitate, and the mourning they provoke. The play opens with a reunion of members of Tarleton’s Loyalist Legion to participate in what Pollock’s stage directions call a “Remembrance Ritual” (37) complete with “totems” (37), ceremonial objects, and memory aids – flags, dress, war trophies, music, song, and storytelling. The veterans celebrate their battle victories and mourn their dead comrades. The play also contains the remembrance of more particular deaths: the Roberts children (Richard, who died fighting for the Rebels; Edward, who fought for the Loyalists but committed suicide rather than return to battle; and Emily, who is supposed to have died of smallpox); the Rebel John Anderson’s younger brother, killed at the battle of Waxhaws; Major Andre, the British spy caught and executed

by the Rebels; the Legion's drummer boy Charlie Meyers, who died on the exodus ship to Nova Scotia; Frank Taylor, murdered in the forest just before the play opens; and the Aboriginal Dead, represented by the human bones Joan sees in the forest.

Prior to the veterans' Remembrance Ritual, Pollock creates a context that allows an interpretation of *Fair Liberty's Call* in terms of loss and mourning on a broader symbolic basis. Her opening set description and stage directions state:

*A bare stage, the floor of which radiates in a dark-hued swirl of colour, represents the "virgin" land.<sup>2</sup> Although this space appears empty and uncorrupted, it projects an aura of foreboding, a sense of the unseen. A subtle sound fills the space as if the air itself is vibrating just below the level of conscious hearing. There are several lightning-like flashes, each followed by a split second of darkness. JOAN and ANNIE, each carrying a large bundle of belongings, and EDDIE, carrying a long gun, appear at the edge of the stage. They are followed by GEORGE, DANIEL, the MAJOR, and WULLIE. DANIEL pulls a wagon, piled high with barrels, trunks and rough pieces of wood. GEORGE has a trunk lashed to his back, and carries a keg. The MAJOR, DANIEL, and WULLIE carry long guns. JOAN, ANNIE and EDDIE step further into the space.*

*Following the lightning comes the sound of a rolling rumble of thunder, or of what might be thunder, for all sound is impressionistic, even surrealistic, rather than realistic.<sup>3</sup> (19)*

While the land is physically stationary and inert, Pollock's description, with its many verbs, is one of intense outward energy and activity. The solid and fluid, the seen and unseen, the heard and unheard, the dark and the light, coexist in this threatening, elemental space, which is empty and full, inert and alive. The characters, clearly on a journey, appear poised on "the edge of the stage" before "step[ping] further into the

space.” Here, Pollock has created an ambivalent and mysterious setting to frame her drama.

This nebulous space is not only a familiar representation of the past in the “mist of time,” but following the ideas of Arnold van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage*, it is also the liminal, sacred, transitional space of loss and mourning. Gennep identifies three stages in the passage from one social status to another: separation, transition, and incorporation, each with its associated rites. He adds, “in certain ceremonial patterns where the transitional period is sufficiently elaborate to constitute an independent state, the arrangement is reduplicated” (11). Furthermore, he writes that mourning “is a transitional period for the survivors, and they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society (rites of the lifting of mourning)” (147). In fact, Gennep envisions both survivors and deceased as embarking on parallel passages. Following a death, both groups separate from the world of the living and enter a transitional, liminal zone. If all goes well, after a period of time, the deceased continue onward to be incorporated into the world of the dead. The living survivors, in their mourning, also enter a transitional zone but, at the end of mourning, they return to the world of the living (147).

Gennep continues with a description of transitional or neutral spaces. He writes, “the neutral zones are ordinarily deserts, marshes, and most frequently virgin forests where everyone has full rights to travel and hunt” (18). In addition, Victor Turner observes that liminal or transitional people, without or between categories, are socially undefined or less well defined and thus are both vulnerable and powerful. They are vulnerable because they lack the rights and protections associated with any stable status or community; they are also powerful and dangerous because they are not bound by such rules or laws (27). In *Fair Liberty’s Call*, Eddie/Emily and Joan are examples of such unbounded, vulnerable, yet powerful, individuals. They are also women who mourn the loss of loved ones and parts of their own identity.

The licence “to travel” certainly prevails in the “virgin forest” of *Fair Liberty’s Call*.<sup>4</sup> The Roberts family and their guests, gathering for

the Remembrance Ritual, all travel through the wilderness. The freedom to “hunt” also exists in the drama. Frank Taylor is ambushed and killed. Anderson arrives intent on killing the Loyalist responsible for his brother’s death. Hearing a mysterious moaning cry, George prompts the men to move into the forest to stalk the wild cat he believes made the noise (40). Later, Eddie takes aim and fires her rifle at Major Williams (46).

This liminal freedom of movement, and of the exercise of power and violence, provides an additional perspective on the play’s fascinating carnival and grotesque elements, which combine life and death. Rather than signs of madness, one can hear Joan’s background muttering of “pink porker, pink, pink porker, pink porker” while she is “*engaged in repetitious slicing of bread, cheese and sausage*” (28–29) and her apparently incongruous but startling and powerful outburst during the Major’s assault on Annie, “like a bullet-hole in his head, like a rope catchin’ you under the chin, like a narrow ravine, a depression, a dip, like a Valley! Like saltwater runnin’ out of the bay, like the tide rushin’ in through the gorge!” (31), as eruptions of free speech, black humour, and liminal violence. The play’s song and dance are also elements of the liminal. For example, Daniel sings to Annie (39); he improvises a dance and song to the English boots he took off a Rebel corpse (37, 39); and he dances with both the Major and with Annie (54–55).<sup>5</sup> In addition to revealing his clown-like and life-affirming character, his behaviour adds to the potential for unrest and disorder, which can be both destructive and productive. Indeed, Turner identifies the grotesque, play, and disorder with liminal space as the seedbed for positive change and cultural creativity (27–28), conditions to which the hopeful conclusion of the play aspires.

Pollock’s New Brunswick forest is a liminal space of loss and mourning as well as change; it is a symbolic, psychological, and physical space, which the characters, mourners all, enter, inhabit, and pass through on a journey from one identity to another. Such formal elements resonate on symbolic and subliminal levels. They contribute to the depth and power of the drama and the “timeless[ness]” (287)

which Grace finds on the thematic level. This interpretation of the landscape as the transitional zone of mourning in turn sheds new light on Pollock's depiction of Joan's changing physical relationship to the land. Initially, Joan describes the land where she encounters the red woman and the bones of the Aboriginal dead as unfamiliar and she leaves no mark upon it:

When you stand there, you feel your feet restin' on top of the soil. You could slip. You could fall. Empty eye sockets catch your eye tellin' you somethin'. Your feet carry you back to the house but they leave no trace of your passing . . . This isn't home. They aren't our Dead. (27)

Clearly Joan is sensitive to the cultural presence and entitlements of the Native peoples. Her words also provide a formulation of home related to familial loss: home is where your "Dead" are buried.

At the end of the drama, Joan completes her narrative of encounter with the red woman and of home:

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

[.....]

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

[.....]

Eat, she says. Swallow.

And I do. (79–80)

It is possible to attribute Joan's new ability to make an impression upon the land to her learned ability to read and to listen to the signs and words of Native culture and her reception of the red woman's gift. But Pollock's provocative image is reminiscent of Genep's comment regarding ceremonies in which an individual is carried above the ground by others. Such practices, he claims, are also transition rites.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, Joan's passage leaves no traces on the ground because, as a mourner grieving the loss of home and her children, she inhabits a transitional zone removed from the world of the living, the earth. Her feet and knees later pressing upon the soil and leaving a mark suggest that she has been able to express her loss sufficiently to Anderson and her family to enable her to leave the liminal zone and be reincorporated into the world of the living.

Finally, Joan's enactment of the red woman's instruction to eat the soil is also a ritual act of incorporation, the stage which follows transition and completes the passage from one state to another. Incorporation occurs on two levels: between Joan and the land, and between Joan and the red woman. In being ingested, the earth is literally incorporated into Joan; the land and Joan become one body. In addition, sharing a meal is also a rite of incorporation, and the symbolic significance of the soil as food relates to the ethos of gifts and their circulation. Lewis Hyde points out that food is a nourishing but perishable gift that cannot be hoarded (8).<sup>7</sup> Hence, the red woman's gesture signals to Joan the nature of the relationship she intends – between the two women, between the women and the land, and, by extension, between the two cultures and their relationship to the land.<sup>8</sup>

However, the fulfillment of mourning is not easily achieved by Joan or other characters in *Fair Liberty's Call*. I see at least two obstacles to the mourning process in the play: they are flaws in the act of remembering and disenfranchised grief. Freud and subsequent researchers identify a meticulous testing of every memory related to the lost object as a major part of mourning. By comparison, then, the Loyalist veterans' determined refusal to remember and acknowledge their war crimes, combined with their focus exclusively on their heroism and

victories, are forms of incomplete mourning. For example, during the Remembrance Ritual, Eddie and Anderson remind the veterans of “Tarleton’s quarters,” their dishonourable behaviour of continuing to kill Rebel soldiers after their cries of surrender at the battle of Waxhaws. Daniel’s repeated refusal to talk about Waxhaws and Eddie’s grim acknowledgement of its brutality (38–39) demonstrate differing responses in Tarleton’s Legion to the loss of their sense of self and purpose as purely honourable, heroic, and just.

Another example of a refusal to remember and to mourn lies in George Roberts’ willed forgetfulness in disowning his elder son, Richard, who chose to join the Rebels. George insists, “I had no son with the Rebels! I cut that boy out of my heart” (34). He also prevents Joan from speaking about the loss of their sons, of Emily, and their home in Boston (23–24). In contrast, Joan and Annie defy George’s will by speaking of Richard to John Anderson. From this perspective, Joan, Annie, and Eddie, who attempt to remember more fully by acknowledging all their actions, heroic and shameful, and all their dead (sons and brothers, comrades and enemies), are the more successful and healthy mourners in the drama.

In addition, Kenneth Doka’s discussion of disenfranchised grief highlights other social dimensions to mourning relevant to Pollock’s work. Doka defines disenfranchised grief as occurring when “a person experiences a sense of loss but does not have a socially recognized right, role, or capacity to grieve” (3). This concept points out that societies have norms which try “to specify who, when, where, how long, and for whom people should grieve” (4), standards which may differ from an individual’s actual experience. Doka gives three possible reasons for disenfranchised grief: the *relationship* is not socially recognized (for example, non-kin or non-traditional relationships); the *loss* is not recognized (for example, the death of a pet or criminal); or the *griever* is not recognized (as capable of grief, such as the very young or the mentally ill) (5–6). Jeffrey Kauffman notes that “Community is the natural support network in which one’s basic sense of *identity* and *belongingness* are realized . . . Communities that sanction and support

the grief of their members, that have norms that are flexibly responsive to the needs of their members by recognising and sanctioning the suffering that exists within the community – these are sane and healing communities [emphasis in original]” (29).

The best example of a character experiencing disenfranchised grief is Joan, who encounters social obstacles in mourning the loss of her children. Edward’s desertion from the Loyalist forces and his suicide are socially shameful acts. Therefore, from the perspective of Joan’s Loyalists community, his death does not merit mourning. In addition, due to the family’s deception and replacement of Edward by Emily, she cannot even publicly acknowledge, much less mourn, his death. Joan’s loss of Richard is another example of disenfranchised grief. Because Richard chose to join the Rebels, the Loyalists see him as an enemy traitor, and his death, like Edward’s, as not meriting mourning; thus her loss is not recognized as significant. In addition, how can she adequately mourn for a son her husband publicly disowned? In this case, Richard, her husband, does not recognize her relationship to Richard as his mother. Finally, Joan also struggles with mourning the loss of Emily, who is, in Eddie’s words, “changed” (78) and, in the minds of her community, deceased. Of course, all the living members of the Roberts family must, to a degree, experience any grief they may feel over the loss of Edward, Richard, and Emily as disenfranchised by their Loyalist community. It is through the course of the drama that their loss and grief find adequate expression and acknowledgement.

Another common loss experienced by the community in *Fair Liberty’s Call* is the loss of faith in an ideal, which is both an abstraction and a defining component of the characters’ self-conceptions. For example, Eddie Roberts loses faith in her former idealism and moral identity, as well as in the political honesty of her Loyalist leaders and her father. She acknowledges that she has murdered in battle, having disregarded calls of surrender at the battle of Waxhaws, and that she is capable of murder and deceit in civil society to achieve her goals. She killed Frank Taylor to protect Wullie’s freedom and she is prepared to “remove” (77), in other words “to kill,” Major Williams. There are few

within Eddie's community who would recognize and sanction her losses and any sense of grief she may have. The Major refuses to consider Tarleton's quarters as dishonourable; Daniel, overwhelmed with guilt, refuses to remember Waxhaws at all; Eddie's civilian father is unaware of the real brutalities of war; and his/her mother vehemently calls her a "murderer" (25), linking her actions to her dead brothers and the Rebel dead. Even the peripheral characters, such as Wullie and the red woman, must contend with losses; for example, their freedom and equity are threatened by the white community's racism. Wullie, in his relationship with Eddie, and the red woman in her exchange with Joan, both demonstrate the willingness to risk the loss, or another loss, of their faith and trust in the hope of creating the "better world" (75) Annie wishes for them all.

Despite the many obstacles, mourning does eventually take place, but there are clear differences in the form and the context in which it occurs. The Loyalist veterans perform an elaborate ritual of remembrance with memorial objects and ceremonies to help verify and reinforce their identity as brave soldiers and loyal citizens. However, it is the deeds and character of the group, Tarleton's Legion, which dominate over those of the individual. In fact, when recollections of individuals do surface, such as the description of Frank Taylor's duplicity or Charlie Meyers' un-heroic death (38–39), they disrupt the ritual and fracture the unity of the group. In contrast, the women, Joan and Annie, remember their war dead without props or ceremony, in relative privacy. Their personal stories of Edward, Richard, and John Andre, confided quietly to John Anderson, focus not on heroism and glory but on loss, suffering, guilt, and death.

This contrast between the mourning practices of the veterans and the women can be considered within two separate but related frameworks: gender and socio-political differences in mourning forms. Holst-Warhaft argues that men and women mourn differently, and that in traditional cultures it was women who composed and performed laments.<sup>9</sup> Focussing on Western, particularly Greek, development, she argues that the power of women's funeral laments is dangerous

to the city or state because it “can be used as a means of inciting an uncontrolled sequence of reciprocal violence (a potential which the state may conceivably co-opt to its own advantage). Secondly, by focusing as it does on mourning and loss rather than praise of the dead, it denies the value of death for the community or state, making it difficult for authorities to recruit an obedient army” (*Dangerous* 3). She argues that women’s lament as a public expression of grief was gradually replaced by men’s funeral oration. In the case of the war dead, this meant that a mourning whose tone commonly stresses “pain, loss, emotions, resulting economic and social hardship” was replaced by one that “makes a virtue of death, provided it is death in the service of the state” (*Dangerous* 5). The forms of mourning performed by the Loyalist veterans and by Joan and Annie reflect the masculine and feminine modes of mourning Holst-Warhaft describes. The veterans’ Remembrance Ritual focuses on funeral orations, and tales of heroism and fortitude, which make death in the service of the Loyalist cause a virtue, while the tone of the women’s mourning is a more passionate expression of grief that focuses on loss, pain, and hardship.

While the frame of gender is useful, it is worth pointing out that Pollock’s work has always courted a feminist perspective while resisting any absolute placement within its boundaries. John Bodnar offers a socio-political approach to mourning that is different from, but complements that of, a gender perspective. Bodnar identifies an “official” and a “vernacular” mode of mourning in the realm of public memory, modes which represent the conflict between national and personal interests. He characterizes official culture as that sanctioned and promoted by “political and cultural leaders” interested in “social unity, the continuity of existing institutions, and loyalty to the status quo” (75). Bodnar states that official culture presents “reality in ideal rather than complex or ambiguous terms” and “desires to present the past on an abstract basis of timelessness and sacredness.” Thus, official commemorations speak “the ideal language of patriotism rather than . . . the real language of grief and sorrow” (75). Alternatively, vernacular culture is associated with groups within a whole and “reality derived

from first-hand experience in small-scale communities rather than the ‘imagined communities’ of a large nation” (75). It tends to express what “social reality feels like rather than what it should be like,” and its commemoration tends toward an expression of loss and suffering (75). Bodnar also notes that individuals can participate in both official and vernacular cultures.

Clearly, the Remembrance Ritual of Tarleton’s Loyalist Legion, with its focus on and support of nationalist group identity, military valour, and glorious sacrifice, exemplifies official culture. Likewise, the women’s stories of familial loss, which focus on individual deaths, personal relationships, and personal suffering, express vernacular culture. Thus, with Bodnar’s framework in mind, we can see that Joan’s and Annie’s modes of mourning are marginalised because they are vernacular in addition to being feminine. Bodnar’s formulation also allows us to better understand actions that a strictly gendered typography might overlook, such as the conflict between Daniel and the Major during the veterans’ Remembrance Ritual over remembering Charlie Meyers (53–54).

Both official and vernacular communities make moral and political judgements about who is worthy of being remembered and mourned. Major Williams, the chief representative of official culture, excludes Charlie Meyers from remembrance because he did not die heroically in battle, but of illness and starvation following the Loyalist defeat. For Daniel, who participates in both communities, Charlie has a personal significance; the boy’s integrity and bravery touched him. Daniel tells the Major: “He was a good boy and would have been . . . an asset! to this god forsaken place . . . had he got here!” (54). Charlie was “a good boy” who embodied a promise of the future and he died in Daniel’s arms. Pollock shows Daniel struggling to find a testimony that would give the boy meaning in the language of official culture and stumbling on the objectifying, legal, and financial term “asset.”

Interestingly, while Daniel seeks the participation and support of Eddie to tell the story of Charlie’s death, she remains silent, reluctant to participate fully in the men’s Remembrance Ritual and unable to

publicly join in the women's more feminine and vernacular mourning.<sup>10</sup> It is Annie who answers him in a shared act of narration and testimony, which is both a means of community building and a validation of grief. In fact, the call and response, question and answer structure of their exchange exemplifies antiphony, which Susan Letzler Cole identifies as a ritual feature of mourning. Cole writes that "antiphony, dialogue, refrain – some of the oldest features of Greek lament – survive in the modern Greek *moirólógia*" (22). Margaret Alexiou explains this is "because antiphony is still imbedded in the ritual performance, with more than one group of mourners, sometimes representing the living and the dead and singing in response to each other" (qtd. in Cole 22). In fact, Pollock uses this vocal technique near the start of the drama in a scene where Joan, with Annie's assistance, describes Edward's suicide (23–24). The women's question and answer recitation publicly establishes and validates Joan's loss of Edward and her reality in an act of ritualistic communal storytelling.

We therefore come full circle to the formal structures and ritual symbolism of mourning. Despite attempts at silence and forgetfulness, the secrets and losses of the community in *Fair Liberty's Call* are eventually revealed, remembered, and recognized, as Joan describes Edward's suicide, Emily's disguise, and Richard's departure. While Daniel insists that he does not want to remember Waxhaws and Tarleton's quarter, the men discuss both events. They also expose Frank Taylor's brutality in battle and his greed, deception, and racism in civilian life. Anderson reveals his Rebel identity and speaks of his brother's death. Annie recounts the personal price she paid to visit Richard in the prison ship and her betrayal of "Sweet Major Andre." Eddie admits to murdering Frank Taylor and voices her angry loss of faith in the honesty of her leaders. George finally acknowledges his rejection of Richard and coercion of Edward and Emily. Remembrances of love and bravery, as well as expressions of shame, pain, loss, and grief – in other words, a more complete mourning, both individual and communal – take place.

Pollock has written a symbolic play about national origins that is hopeful, yet permeated with loss, remembrance, and mourning. This combination of national beginnings with loss resonates with Ernest Renan's observations about nations and nationalism. He states that "historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial. Unity is always effected by means of brutality" (11). In addition, "the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things" (11). He also claims that "suffering in common unifies more than joy does. Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort" (19). Thus, violence, loss, and suffering often accompany the beginning of a new country, as they do the passage from one social state to another.

In *Fair Liberty's Call*, Pollock highlights the historic brutality and injustices at the origins of Canada. She alerts us to our choices and our responsibilities, past, present, and future, and asks which common things we – as individuals, communities, and as a nation – will choose to keep in remembrance and mourn and which we will choose to forget. In addition, recalling the words of Kauffman, we can see that Pollock also suggests that the health and sanity of a community and a nation are dependent not only on its wealth and power, but also on its responsiveness to the needs of all its members, including the recognition and support of their losses and suffering. In this sense, while some scholars characterize Joan as a mother driven insane by grief,<sup>11</sup> it is equally possible to see her behaviour as the result not of grief, but of an unhealthy community that refuses to recognise the losses and permit the mourning of all its members.

Finally, while Renan does not elaborate on what "duties" and "common effort" grief imposes, Pollock dramatizes several possibilities. Anderson's desire for revenge, George's rejection of Richard, the Roberts's concealment of Edward's death, and the Legion's "disowning" of Tarleton's quarter exemplify destructive "duties" and "common

efforts,” as well as failures in mourning. Alternatively, Annie provides a more hopeful and compelling response. Near the end of the drama, she reveals to Anderson that she betrayed the British spy John Andre, leading to his capture and execution by the Rebels, and withheld from the British forces the plans to West Point he had given her for safe-keeping. Anderson tells her the plans were unimportant.

ANDERSON: They [the plans] wouldn't have made any difference to the war.

ANNIE: Maybe they would. Maybe they wouldn't. I know it changes nothin' for Richard. Or Edward. Sweet Major Andre. I wonder if he thought of me at the end . . . Sometimes I feel his name fillin' my head and pressin' hard on my lips to be spoke . . . There's nothin' I can do for him now. There's nothin' I can do to put paid to my brothers or you to yours. We oughta be lookin' to a better world for our children. That's the only way to serve our brothers. (75)

Here, then, in its final articulation in *Fair Liberty's Call* – an exchange between two people grieving the destructions of war, the loss of home, and the deaths of their siblings – mourning encompasses the individual and the communal, private emotions and public actions; it becomes an obligation to create “a better world for our children,” a service to the past, the present, and the future.

## NOTES

- 1 Throughout this paper, unless where noted, my quotations of *Fair Liberty's Call* come from the 1995 publication. The 2006 publication contains revisions, which I point out when they are relevant. I chose the original text because it contains elements that contribute to the play's symbolic depth. I would argue that the omission of some of these elements in the later text cloaks one source of the power and resonance in the drama. The earlier text allows us to see more clearly what is invisible, but no less present, in the later version.

- 2 The reference to the land as “*virgin*” is absent from the 2006 play text, although the direction, at the end of the drama, that Eddie and Wullie return “*the stage to some semblance of its virgin state at the beginning of the play*” (78), remains the same in both texts.
- 3 Also absent in the 2006 version are the “*lightning-like flashes*” and the sound of “*a rolling rumble of thunder, or of what might be thunder . . . impressionistic, even surrealistic, rather than realistic.*” These elements are replaced by the sounds of “*a horrific battle, gunfire and cannon, men yelling encouragement and despair mixed with the cry of the wounded and the thunder and scream of horses*” (365). These changes reduce the abstract and ambiguous feel of the opening and focus more on the specific horrors of war and the recent past.
- 4 Pollock herself used the term “‘*virgin*’ land” (19) in her 1995 set description.
- 5 The juxtaposition of Annie (life) with the boots (death) is also a liminal dissolution of categories.
- 6 Gennep writes that such actions are “intended to show that at the moment in question the individual does not belong either to the sacred or to the profane world; or, if he does belong to one of the two, it is desired that he be properly reincorporated into the other, and he is therefore isolated and maintained in an intermediate position, held between heaven and earth, just as the deceased on his bier or in his temporary coffin is suspended between life and death” (186).
- 7 Hyde writes, “A gift that cannot move loses its gift properties . . . Another way to describe the motion of the gift is to say that a gift must always be used up, consumed, eaten. *The gift is property that perishes . . .* Food is one of the most common images for the gift because it is so obviously consumed. Even when the gift is not food, when it is something we would think of as a durable good, it is often referred to as a thing to be eaten [emphasis in original]” (8).
- 8 Zimmerman suggests an alternate but complementary reading in which Joan’s words “I do” echo those spoken in a marriage ceremony, thereby signifying a union between Joan and her new country (158).
- 9 While laments are mainly sung for the dead, Holst-Warhaft notes that they are also composed for other forms of departure and loss such as emigration and marriage (where women leave one family for another [1]).
- 10 Eddie stays on the periphery of both forms of recollection and mourning. She helps construct the set for the Remembrance Ritual but does not participate in the military storytelling. She speaks to Anderson of a boy with the Loyalist Rangers who went home after Cherry Hill and killed himself; obviously a reference to her brother Edward, but she does not identify him as such (41). In the second half of the drama, Eddie joins the men in their deliberations rather than her mother and sister in their sharing of familial loss with Anderson.
- 11 For example, Walker describes Joan as “a middle-aged woman who, through grief and despair, has become mentally disordered” (191) and Zimmerman describes her as “half-crazed by grief” (157).

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