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## Sharon Pollock : first woman of Canadian theatre

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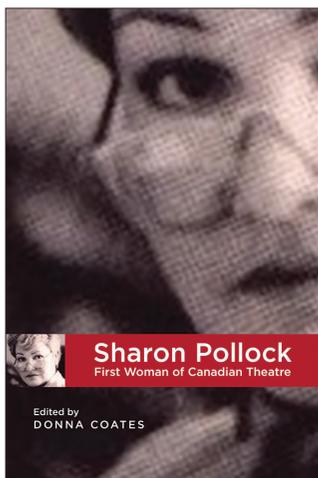
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## SHARON POLLOCK: FIRST WOMAN OF CANADIAN THEATRE Edited by Donna Coates

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## Sharon's Tongue

*Lindsay Burns, Pamela Halstead,  
Grant Linneberg, and Laura Parken*

*(Based on the words and works of Sharon Pollock)*

### THE WEST

WOMAN 1: I come from a country of mothers, daughters, and grandmothers.

WOMAN 2: This country's going to flower and bloom like a rose in the wreath of the Empire.

WOMAN 1: Canadians have this view of themselves as nice civilized people who have never participated in historical crimes and atrocities. But that view is false. Our history is dull only because it has been dishonestly expurgated.

WOMAN 2: You don't see the whole picture. There are other considerations.

WOMAN 1: I do not think of myself as a Canadian.

- WOMAN 2: Well now, you've caught my interest. What is it? What the hell are you here for?
- WOMAN 1: My region is people.
- WOMAN 2: (*Addressing the audience*) In her mind's eye she'll paint his sky the colour of her sky and his fields, the colour of her fields, and the dry wind driving the grit into the back of your throat and right through your eyeballs she'll think of as a refreshing and different level of breeze, which she can hardly wait to experience. She'll think that right 'til the moment she steps off the train.
- WOMAN 1: I am an Albertan in so far as I choose to live in this particular part of the world, because it speaks to me. The sky, the light, the land, that internal state of passion and challenge of the conventional embedded in Alberta's past, and resonating in its present, keeps me there.
- WOMAN 2: You see it kind of makes her like she didn't come from here, like, she kinda chose here 'stead of endin' up here.
- WOMAN 1: That sense of space that simultaneously enhances one's awareness of self as an individual, and self as a very small part of something infinitely large, keeps me there. Alberta and I are engaged in a dialogue, and if either of us were to stop speaking, I would no longer be an Albertan.
- WOMAN 2: I know it doesn't totally explain it . . . but when someone comes to a place where they can turn around four times and see nothing but flat land and blue sky, it's a shock. Sort of like going to the moon I imagine . . . only without the press.
- WOMAN 1: A *place* can be home, the sky the hills.
- WOMAN 2: You're such a bullshitter, you know that?
- WOMAN 1: I lie on my back in a field full of yellow mustard at midnight.

WOMAN 2: You're a great one for stories.

WOMAN 1: The Northern Lights are out, and I run with the dog, my feet pounding the ground with great shafts of light overhead. I run and I run with the dog. I'M TURNING THE EARTH WITH MY RUNNING UNDER A KALEIDOSCOPE SKY.

WOMAN 2: We talk in this country, we don't sing! We talk! What the hell is goin' on here?

### WOMAN'S PLACE

WOMAN 1: I am not a possession, a thing.

WOMAN 2: You should teach her some manners.

WOMAN 1: I'll leave if I want to.

WOMAN 2: Are you just gonna sit there? Aren't you gonna do anything?

MAN: You see what she's like – who wouldn't give her a belt in the mouth, livin' with her would drive anyone nuts.

WOMAN 2: She's what you call a liberated woman.

MAN: Maybe you'd have accomplished more if you'd married a nice Jewish doctor and spent your time raising kids and funds for Hadassah.

WOMAN 1: Times change.

WOMAN 2: She's incapable of disciplining herself like a lady and we all know it. If a man can't manage his own daughter.

WOMAN 1: Make him understand that we're people. Individual people, and we have to live separate lives–

WOMAN 2: There are certain things we cannot change.

MAN: You are going to end up a silly old woman with nothin' but a cat for company.

WOMAN 1: I write! I'm good at it!

MAN: And that means you can ignore your father and your brother and dump this Buchanan jerk and forget your kids and family?

WOMAN 2: Look if you are going to tell your father you don't want to do what he wants you to do –

WOMAN 1: There's gotta be other options.

MAN: Do you know what you want?

WOMAN 1: If I like what I'm doing, can it really be wrong? I caught a man, I sat at home, I was alone.

WOMAN 2: Even as a child, her . . . nature was . . . irritable and impassioned.

WOMAN 1: He likes tits and ass and whiskey.

MAN: Enough!

WOMAN 2: Perversion. Unnatural. What mad thoughts entered your mind?

WOMAN 1: Which leaves the impairment of my intellect an open question, I think we can at least agree on that.

MAN: This girl has a way of wrappin' you round with words and then she tightens them up 'til your eyes pop out and you're strugglin' just to draw a breath.

WOMAN 1: Are you thinking about dropping dead?

WOMAN 2: How can you say that?

WOMAN 1: The lips move, the words come out.

MAN: (*To Woman 1*) Are you listening to me? (*To Woman 2*) She is obstinately defiant of my authority.

WOMAN 1: I want my words to count because they are mine and I count!

MAN: Is it my fault that you need to be noticed!

WOMAN 1: I will write! With this (*hand to heart*) And this! (*clutches stomach*) And this! (*both arms embrace herself*) And

these! (*strikes her legs and falls to her knees*) And this!  
And this! And this! (*holds her hands up hitting herself*)  
What have these seen and heard! (*her eyes and ears*)  
And what has come from here! (*her mouth*) What  
splintered shards of meaning turn and twist in here but  
are sometimes still and beautiful! Muddled Disjointed!  
Out of tune and out of time you tell me but it's all I have  
to Shape and Mould! What else can I make something  
from, but this Poor Thing? It's all I have, why can't I? It's  
mine! Why not? Why not, you tell me why not!

MAN: My recommendations for institutional recommitment  
or release will be acted upon.

## LOVE GONE WRONG

MAN: There will be no more of her “artistic expression”.

WOMAN 1: How is a politician like a church bell? One peals from  
the steeple – they say I danced too close and was too  
affectionate on the dance floor. I can be charming. I  
caught a man. When I see him, I feel myself bursting.  
Didn't I have the right to decide to sleep with him? To  
love him? I tore my heart out and flung it on the floor  
and he trod on it! It's here someplace. Tomorrow it will  
be swept up and tossed out with the trash! Unless of  
course that cat finishes it first. But on my heart, if no  
one could find it here, you'll see an imprint of a foot,  
oh he danced a fair fandango on it. (*Beat.*) We all got  
marks, shows yuh lived, yuh never gave up.

MAN: That's not a very nice story.

WOMAN 1: I'm sorry. I really am. It's just that you've caught me at a  
bad time – between getting up and going to bed. That's  
a joke. You can laugh.

## MENTAL ILLNESS

WOMAN 1: This isn't me you know. This isn't really me, this is someone else . . . My mother always said, don't snitch, and don't play with snitches. Didn't your mother ever tell you that? (*Beat*) What kind of a fool do you take me for? What are you then, I said. Are you all in my head? And I, despite the slowness of my wit, have noticed certain things. You always say don't worry. But, of course, I worry. It's natural to worry. What if the things you hear, the things you don't want to hear, what if those things really happen inside? I spent my whole life wonderin' and I'm still at it and it's a waste of time. I drove her crazy. They say that. They do. I drove her crazy, yet they're the ones taught her complete self-indulgence and not one iota of responsibility.

WOMAN 1 & 2: Listen to me! It can happen to any of us.

WOMAN 2: Everything is always so . . . sad, isn't it? Yeah . . . why is that? I don't know. I feel as if I wasted something. Sometimes I want to scream. I just want to stand there and scream, to hit something, to reach out and smash things – to hit and smash and hit and smash and . . . and then . . . I would feel very tired and I could lie down and sleep. Sometimes I don't even think you listen, or else you listen but you don't hear what I'm saying, you hear the words, you don't get the meaning of the words! You listen like you hear other words! Sometimes you watch so close so you can see when my lips stop moving so you know I'm finished.

WOMAN 1 & 2: You don't know anything.

WOMAN 1: I don't give a fig for regulation or rules, only ones I make myself. And if in the past I chose to observe that regulation, it was only because a suitable occasion to break it hadn't risen. Something was always about to happen and if it didn't, I made it! I knew that the edge

was more interesting than the middle and the leap more interesting than the slide – If you're going to fall, Jump! I know when trains are coming . . . and when they're coming, I don't go that way then . . . You could say I was looking for human generalities made specific. It's a matter of interpretation. Why is nothing simple in this life? It all seems to me perfectly simple. Why do people make it complex? The simplest thing . . . complex. Why is everything so goddamn complex?

WOMAN 2: Sometimes if you just keep talking it will come to you . . . It doesn't always work. Nobody listens to me, can't you hear me? I said *don't* talk about it. I don't want to talk about it. Stop talking about it! Enough! The subject is closed. Closed! Do you hear me? Don't say that. Don't say that! I'll kill you if you say that to me! I try to keep my temper, I've been nice as I can be.

WOMAN 1 & 2: I've bit my tongue and smiled a lot, I've listened when they've talked a lot, I haven't really teased a lot. Except when they've been rude a lot – I guess that I found out a lot – And now I'm tired, really tired of it all, And I feel like doing something really dirty, Something nasty, mean and filthy, foul and wretched – like . . . like . . .

WOMAN 1: Well what're ya gonna do! Mope around the rest of your life? It's a dilemma alright. If I promised to be a good girl forever and ever, would anything change?

WOMAN 2: I have been loved. People have loved me . . . When they found me most loveable, I was pretending. It was not really me . . . They said I danced too close and was too affectionate on the dance floor, so I pinned mistletoe on my backside and kept on dancing, dancing, dancing! It may have been lies, but that still doesn't mean it weren't true. Knowledge is a terrible thing. It calls for action. And one must act or not act, and live with that. Which will lead to another mental and physical collapse,

one that I in my present state am unable to tolerate financially, physically or mentally! I say have the courage to fear. Surely that rings a bell.

WOMAN 1: I mean it does for me.

WOMAN 2: Oh she may have said things, thought things, wrote things –

WOMAN 1: It won't reflect reality. No one, it seemed, worried about her depression it was her fear of paper concerned them. I'm not mad I have a chemical imbalance.

WOMAN 2: I need to do more, I need to . . . I need . . . I'm tryin' to build a little trust here.

WOMAN 1: I would have to deny that.

WOMAN 2: I don't see how distortion justifies locking me up. Is it psychiatry's view that past experience counts for nothing? Psychiatry's view is paranoia, exacerbated by drink! No trust, no deal. Shall we drink to it? You realize as well as I do that this is only the tip of the iceberg.

## **OUTSIDER 1**

WOMAN 2: Don't you feel anything?

WOMAN 1: You wouldn't understand.

WOMAN 2: Yes I would. I would try. I'm not here to argue with you. I'm here as a friend.

WOMAN 1: I have very few friends.

WOMAN 2: I bet you were the kinda kid that was always luggin' home birds with a broken wing.

WOMAN 1: What've you been doin', talkin' to my mother?

WOMAN 2: Bet you put 'em in a box by the bed and in the mornin' you discover your cat ate 'em, nothin left but feathers on the floor.

WOMAN 1: What're you standin' there starin' at? Eh? You never seen anyone cry before?

WOMAN 2: I'm sorry.

WOMAN 1: You're sorry, what've you got to be sorry about? It's not your lousy life! Do you think we're aberrant?

WOMAN 2: I don't even know what it means . . .

WOMAN 1: To vary from normal, to stray . . . I just want to be me, take after no one.

WOMAN 2: Hell I know it's hard, but we gotta fill out forms, and beat 'em at their own game.

WOMAN 1: I'm a whore and what you do is offensive to me! What you do would gag me! I'm a whore and when I look at your job, I could vomit!

WOMAN 2: You don't see the whole picture.

WOMAN 1: I'm a puppet? Manipulate me right and everything is possible . . . I'm a person. I exist. I think and feel! And I will not allow you to do this to me.

WOMAN 2: That sense of justice and fair play, that's a good thing, but it's got to be tempered with a sense of reality. You'll learn.

WOMAN 1: You don't know who I am or what I think.

WOMAN 2: What's past is past! . . . I'll stand by you.

WOMAN 1: Nobody *listens* to me, can't you hear me? I said *don't* talk about it. I don't want to talk about it. Stop talking about it!

## SEX

- MAN: You're a very pretty girl. Has anybody told you that?
- WOMAN 1: Don't even think about putting your hand on my ass.
- MAN: It's a friendly gesture and it's a nice ass.
- WOMAN 1: Never initiate action when you haven't the guts to carry through.
- MAN: I'll tell you what I think . . . I think . . . that you're aware that there is a certain fascination in the ambiguity . . . You always paint the background but leave the rest to my imagination. There you are you silly goose.
- WOMAN 1: Who be the goose and who be the gander here, eh?
- MAN: You're a quick one.
- WOMAN 1: It is not a good idea, technically or artistically, to sleep with the company manager when the producer signing the cheques is husband.
- MAN: I know. Don't fuck around. Write that on something. Refer to it often.
- WOMAN 1: Listen carefully . . . This has to stop. It can't go on.
- MAN: Fuck Bert.
- WOMAN 1: I did.
- MAN: He was an asshole.
- WOMAN 1: He was always nice to me! Polite, kind, he wasn't like most men.
- MAN: Ladies and gentlemen! It walks! It talks! It reproduces! . . . Can we afford to be without it? I say "No!"
- WOMAN 1: You're not like you seemed.
- MAN: I've spent my life raisin' horses and I'm gonna tell you somethin' – a *woman* is just like a *horse*! You keep her on a tight rein, or she'll take the bit in her teeth and next thing you know, road, destination, and purpose is all

behind you, and you'll be damn lucky if she don't pitch you right in a sewer ditch!

WOMAN 1: You! – Are a bastard!

MAN: Don't be like that. Say you're sorry.

WOMAN 1: I'm sorry.

MAN: Come talk to me. Not gonna talk to me?

WOMAN 1: No.

MAN: Come on, I'm all by myself. (*Beat*) Why do I bestride my world like colossus?

WOMAN 1: Diet?

MAN: You know, I can't help but feel you don't give full vent to your powers of persuasion.

WOMAN 1: Two-bits-a-crack in a dark alley.

MAN: We know we got nothing to say.

WOMAN 1: So why are you here?

MAN: I told you. I think you're pretty.

WOMAN 1: Don't look at me like that.

MAN: Like what?

WOMAN 1: I don't know, don't do it.

MAN: Hey, you know how things oughta to be and I know how things are. Now you put those things together, I think you got a pretty powerful thing happenin' . . . Don't you?

WOMAN 1: You never listen, do you!

MAN: Ready or not you must be caught.

WOMAN 1: No! There's something you don't understand. You can't make me do one thing that I don't want to do.

MAN: You go through men like boxes of Kleenex.

WOMAN 1: I'll leave if I want to – I can.

MAN: She's what you call a liberated woman. She is immune to the charms of the predatory male.

WOMAN 1: When he gets out of the shower his penis looks like a snail that's lost its shell.

MAN: It can happen to any of us.

WOMAN 1: The great Canadian cocksman.

MAN: Tell me how you account for her positive assessment? He screws her. A roar in the blood as it sped through the veins.

WOMAN 1: Bullshit.

MAN: Seduced, charmed and taken in by this woman who is adept at seducing and charming, when she wants to be. You are a dosser, a daughter of joy, you sail along on your bottom.

WOMAN 1: You're a great one for stories.

MAN: A little hand on ass – it's how business is done.

WOMAN 1: Fuck off!

## MEN

MAN: I'm tellin' yuh somethin' now shut the fuck up and listen. Everything big. Nothing small. Put things in perspective. I come from a long line of brilliant people. I can be charming. What daddy wants daddy gets. You don't. You don't move. You don't speak. You don't do anything. If there's any doing to be done, I'll do it. I'll do it right now. Maybe it's me. Wanting my way in everything. Always had it that way. Pity to change. Don't you think? I made decisions when decisions had to be made, I chose a road, and I took it, and I never looked back. Some people value this aspect of my character and others think it just makes me a pain in the ass. And I'll tell you this . . . whatever we do, by

the time we're finished, they'll have flip-flopped to the other side of the fence. You follow me? We brought you up we can put you down. Some people talk, and some people listen, but by God, I act, and if . . . it weren't for people like me . . . people like you . . . would still be down in the slime. (*Beat.*) I don't suppose you got any idea how stupid you look. You're not very bright are you? If a man can't manage his own daughter, how the hell can he manage a business? However, we aren't here to assign guilt, we can do that later. Perhaps salvation or damnation is at hand here. (*Pause.*) You're a very pretty girl. Has anybody told you that? I'm tryin' to build a little trust here. I tell terrible lies. But I wouldn't take her word for things. That one, I tell you right from the start, her nose is in the air so far I wonder she don't drown when it rains. What a piece of bad luck, eh? Jesus my whole life's a piece of bad luck. I admit it! I loved her. I love the absence of any feeling of inferiority. I love the sincerity and selfishness. Utterly selfish. I loved knowing what others sought, I had. Glamour. They all said she had glamour. Not the usual kind. Not that kind. Special. Her own kind of glamour. Do you think she's glamorous? Let me tell you something – I think there is nothing wrong with her . . . that losing eighty pounds and tripling her intellect wouldn't cure. Maybe she's become svelte. And maybe pigs can fly. I feel ashamed. I don't know why. Or else I do know why. Guess I don't wanna face that. (*Beat*) It's a dilemma alright. It all seems perfectly simple to me. Why do people make it complex? The simplest thing . . . complex. I shouldn't be talkin' to yuh like this. Take, take, take and never give. Why does everything have to be a threat. Why can't it be a challenge? We need more challenges and fewer threats. That's what we need. Times change. That's just somethin' people say to get what they want. Real things, things that count, never change. Could I be getting old and cranky?

## HAVE YOU TOLD YOUR MOTHER?

MAN: Have you told your mother?

WOMAN 1: Not yet.

MAN: You just don't know your own mind.

WOMAN 1: At least I have one . . . I didn't mean that.

MAN: Oh . . . you probably did . . . I always thought . . . we liked one another.

WOMAN 1: We do.

MAN: I suppose you see me . . . in a very particular way.

WOMAN 1: I, despite the slowness of my wit, have noticed certain things.

MAN: It's a dilemma alright.

WOMAN 1: What do you listen to him for, he's an ignorant person, can't you tell that?

MAN: He cried and said he was sorry.

WOMAN 1: Bullshit, Daddy.

MAN: Jesus Christ I hate to hear a woman talk like that.

WOMAN 1: You're such a bullshitter, you know that?

MAN: I'll go back downstairs and I'll sit in the kitchen and I'll pretend that I don't know.

WOMAN 1: What if the things you hear, the things you don't want to hear, the things they won't let you hear, what if those things really happen?

MAN: You're a great one for stories.

WOMAN 1: Look, you and I can be straight with each other. I try to keep my temper, I've been nice as can be. I bit my tongue and smiled a lot. Well it's a secret that everybody knows. Soooo, nobody speaks of it. It's that kind of secret.

MAN: Do you know what you're saying?

WOMAN 1: You sound worried.

MAN: You think too much. Your head is full of scrambled thoughts and I must think of where my interests lie.

WOMAN 1: Birds are comin' home to roost and there is not one thing you can do to stop that! Not a thing!

MAN: Looks like all those birds are gonna be vultures.

WOMAN 1: I say have the courage to fear.

MAN: That's not a very nice story.

WOMAN 1: He didn't tell it because it was nice, he told it because it was true.

MAN: I know what you're saying but it wasn't like that.

WOMAN 1: So what was it like, you tell me.

MAN: You never listen, do you?

WOMAN 1: For Christ's sake, speak the truth!

MAN: What's honest, honest is nothing, nobody wants honest.

WOMAN 1: Did . . . did you think you could just tell a story and everything would be right?

MAN: I think you believe I'm as they describe me to say such things.

WOMAN 1: I merely ask if the behaviour of the father was deviant, wicked or corrupt?

MAN: A lie cannot endure. I don't wanna be committin' myself to a lie.

WOMAN 1: Lying is perhaps the least of sins you contemplate in the night.

MAN: You really want to know?

WOMAN 1: Yeah.

MAN: He screws her.

WOMAN 1: Name her. Name her!

MAN: Enough! The subject is closed. Closed! Do you hear me?

## THE MENAGERIE KEEPS GROWING – SONG

- MAN: *(spoken)* Listen! The animals. The animals play a big role. *(Singing)* *Birds with a broken wing.*  
*Cat ate 'em – feathers on the floor.*  
*The eagle turns on its mate.*  
*The Great Dane is poisoned.*  
*You've stirred up a hornet's nest, haven't you?*  
*You're a lamb looking for a slaughter.*  
*He crawls for crumbs like a mouse – There's gotta be other options.*  
*The mule stops in her tracks – I shoot him for meat for the huskies.*  
*Birds are comin' home – Looks like those birds are gonna be vultures.*  
*(Spoken)* In Ohio a bunch of guards rounded up these pet cats the prisoners had befriended, including six, four-day-old kittens. Dashed their brains out against a wall. The incident was leaked, and letters poured in by the dozens all from irate cat lovers. Not one expressed concern for the poor buggers locked up in an institution where those guards wield power without restraint, and virtually no review. Cat lovers.
- ALL: *(singing)* *I think pigs are alright . . . I've known some not bad pigs*  
*I think pigs are alright. . . It's the pigsty that turn them nasty.*
- MAN: *(spoken)* Did you know that if a pig falls in a trough, the other pigs will eat him. Pursue them like a wolf that tears at the soft underbelly of a fleeing doe.
- ALL: *(singing)* *I think pigs are alright . . . I've known some not bad pigs*  
*I think pigs are alright . . . And maybe pigs can fly.*

MAN: *(spoken)* Really. The animals play a BIG role.  
*(Singing)* A thin mangy old cat that's gone wild, chipmunks,  
a skunk and a squirrel,  
Nikki a desert grey fox – I go for a walk with a husky  
Sweetie, the mule who's kept by the creek, the sled dogs, the  
Great Danes and Laddie a lion can lie down with a lamb

ALL: *(singing)* This is only the tip of the iceberg

MAN: *(singing)* A big, black, silver-tipped dog. I hear the wings of  
insects  
*The wolves, the foxes, you silly goose – The menagerie keeps  
growing!*  
*The raccoon and the skunk; the two wildcats, Coalie my  
mare and Bert's gelding. The eagles, the coyotes, the deer  
and the elk –*

ALL: *(singing)* And mom served them up for dinner!

## MOTHERS

ALL: What's your mother like?

MAN: Always there . . . cooking and cleaning and agreeing.

ALL: What's your mother like?

WOMAN 1: She's warm when you hug her, her eyes are blue and she  
wears glasses.

ALL: What's your mother like?

WOMAN 2: She's a thin mangy old cat that's gone wild. Nothin' left  
to nourish herself or her own.

ALL: What's wrong with Mama?

WOMAN 1: She had her heart set on a specialist.

ALL: What's wrong with Mama?

WOMAN 2: She had to do awful things. The milk a human kindness is curdled.

ALL: What's wrong with Mama?

MAN: I don't like to go anywhere with Mummy when she's like that.

ALL: How did Mama manage?

WOMAN 2: Lie around, weep, cry, incapable of the simplest action!

ALL: How did Mama manage?

MAN: Making cookies for something, she holds her arms out to me, she cries, she says welcome home.

ALL: How did Mama manage?

WOMAN 1: She's been like this for years, that's just Mama.

### LOUSY MOTHER

WOMAN 1: Everything's fiction. Isn't that what you say?

WOMAN 2: Maybe I did. Maybe I didn't. What does it matter?

WOMAN 1: I had to rely on myself cause there was fuckin' little else to rely on!

WOMAN 2: Life with you necessitates drink.

WOMAN 1: We never had a home.

WOMAN 2: Not true.

WOMAN 1: Is too.

WOMAN 2: I am your mother. That's *what* I am. But it's not *who* I am.

WOMAN 1: Perverse meaning deviant, wicked, corrupt.

WOMAN 2: I feel ashamed. Wanting my way in everything. Always had it that way.

WOMAN 1: You don't even see me. You don't see anybody but those stupid stupid people who think you're God. You're not God!

WOMAN 2: Why do we always end up yelling and screaming, why do we do that? I care about you! I tell you I love you and you never listen!

WOMAN 1: It's all make-believe, isn't it?

WOMAN 2: I have a chemical imbalance.

WOMAN 1: And that means you can ignore your kids and family?

WOMAN 2: I am not prepared for the guilt.

WOMAN 1: Perhaps it is easier to take a bullet to the body than a blow to one's prior conceptions.

WOMAN 2: It's not my fault!

WOMAN 1: Is it my fault that you need to be noticed? And to do what you need to do to be noticed, you need to be drunk? That is not *my* fault!

WOMAN 2: I have caused disharmony in our family. I admit it!

WOMAN 1: You think you can manipulate me right and everything is possible . . . I'm a person. I exist. I think and feel!

WOMAN 2: Do you love me? (*Beat*) It is a simple question.

WOMAN 1: Nothing's changed!

WOMAN 2: Everything I done makes up me – the good things, the bad things.

WOMAN 1: You've always done it! As long as I can remember! You don't know who I am or what I think.

WOMAN 2: Course I do.

WOMAN 1: You think you do but you don't.

WOMAN 2: What kind of crazy talk is that?

WOMAN 1: I don't feel anything towards you.

WOMAN 2: Really?

WOMAN 1: You accept no responsibility.

WOMAN 2: God you make me mad.

WOMAN 1: You're a lousy mother, make something of that.

## ALCOHOL

WOMAN 2: I'm present because of an invitation to an evening of entertainment amongst my dearest friends, and this is what greets me?

Are you just gonna sit there? Aren't you gonna do anything? I said come on! Get up! Do something! Do you want to spend the rest of your life in Nowhere? Where's the music – you gotta have music for a party!  
(*Beat*)

Come talk to me. I'm not here to argue with you. Don't be like that. Say you're sorry. I'm sorry. Hell I was drunk, I didn't mean nothing, you know that, when did I ever hit you when I was sober? (*Pause*)

You got a big mouth, that's always your problem.

Why do we always end up yelling and screaming, why do we do that? Actually I don't care. At this moment I really don't care.

You tell me, was I wrong to do that?

How many times have we had this conversation? How many times must we have this conversation? I say . . . we've had enough arguing and fighting today . . . I'm tired . . . really tired. (*Beat*)

Let me tell you something – You gotta understand everything I done makes me up – the good things, the bad things – I done things you wouldn't believe. I was successful you see. I made something of myself. I chose a road, and I took it, and I never looked back. God

knows, you have to keep your wits about you. I have caused disharmony. Guess I don't wanna face that.

Is anything wrong? Only just about everything in the whole world.

I could use a drink. Life with you necessitates drink. It's a means of survival. You don't even see me. You look at me and there's nobody there.

Are we to have a drink? You stand there like a stuffed Hussar. For God's sake, pour, or move and let one act who's able.

A thing worth doing is worth doing well...May take more time, but that's not the point, is it?

Disgrace! You're a disgrace!

Get to work, your mother says.

You disappoint us.

I apologize for my stupid daughter.

You should teach her some manners.

She keeps on like this, what will she do when she's old? You see what she's like – who wouldn't give her a belt in the mouth, livin' with her would drive anyone nuts. Shall we drink to it? If you yell you can get it yourself.

Dedicated to drink.

You wanna know something funny? He said he thought getting a little cut was like pokin a hole in a plastic bag of cornmeal and everything would just drain out. Just oozed outta me over the years like jelly juice through a cheesecloth bag and all I got left inside is dry old pulp.

They say one's strongest instinct is self-preservation. I would have to deny that.

The great drunk! Not a nice drunk! A nasty obnoxious and obstreperous drunk!

How people act is a lot more truthful than what anybody can say. He cried and said he was sorry . . . he whispered . . . he said it wouldn't happen again. He said it was the pain. It was because of the pain.

We know "accidents," don't we.

I should have done something. He was an asshole. I don't know how I missed that.

I know the question. I don't know the answer! How the hell would I know? Which leaves the impairment of my intellect an open question, I think we can at least agree on that.

I said a drink would be nice. You're a good girl. I would not want you to find out anything that would make you hate me. Because I love you. And I am a judge of character. The 'bility to judge is not something you cultivate, it's something you're born with. I could discern your potential to love, and to be loved, to be honest, to be loyal, to trust, to be worthy of trust.

Sounded more like a litany for a dog than a daughter.

I'm sorry.

I think you're pretty. Once I was pretty. When I was . . . 15, when I was 16. Before I got married, now I'm old. Don't look at me like that. I'm not thin and pretty. I got hair like wire.

You only love me when I do what you want!

What kind of a fool do you take me for? Because I knew, even if you did know, you wouldn't come – and my heart would've burst from that pain.

It reduces me to rely on the likes of you. I abhor you, you are beneath contempt, had I the strength I'd tilt your head and slit your throat. Well I just might do it anyway. Because it is a very strong thought in my mind.

Someday you'll be dead and I'll be happy! You all say she's sick, she isn't sick. She's drunk. What're you starin' at?

Don't like to see your mother like this? If you've got something to say, you say it. You might not . . . like seeing me like this, but once I'm outta here, I won't have to be what I have to be here.

I'll be gone, I've tried so hard to get away, and now, I'll get away, I'll be gone, leaving behind all of this.

I think of the peace of the coffin.

Write this down. One can only hope, after struggling through the vale of tears, one can only hope that the necessity of the journey, the meaning of the journey, will be made clear at the end, whether one rides a golden cloud into eternity or plummets like a stone. And you rip it out and crumple it up and throw it away.

I shouldn't be talkin' to yuh like this. I fear I'm not good company tonight. I intend to go to dinner. And you – you can go to hell.

## MURDEREE

WOMAN 2: I was cast as the murderee.

Caught and crushed, close to death

Something was wrong between you and me

Strugglin' just to draw my last breath

Beaten within an inch of my life

It was my fault they are going to say

When at last my body is found

As a woman to vary from normal, to stray

This is what happens when you fuck around.

Beaten within an inch of my life soon to be found underground.

## MURDER/DEATH

WOMAN 2: I was married for some years to a violent man. I spent a great deal of time planning, quite literally, murderous schemes to rid me of him. I implemented none of them for none struck me as suitably foolproof. I crept with my children into the night when it was forcibly brought home to me that in all likelihood I was cast as the murderee, not the murderer in my little dreams.

WOMAN 1: So, out we come . . . yelling bloody murder.

WOMAN 2: For me, you know it came at a moment at which I felt I either was going to kill myself, if not literally then metaphorically, or else I was going to allow myself to be born and live.

WOMAN 1: Are you death come for me now?

WOMAN 2: What makes you say that?

WOMAN 1: I didn't hear you come in. (*Pause*) This place is killing me. You are killing me.

WOMAN 2: It can happen to any of us.

WOMAN 1: Don't say that.

WOMAN 2: You have been judged and found guilty and sentenced to death.

WOMAN 1: I thought we were all sentenced to death. Will killin' me ease the ache in your heart?

WOMAN 2: I'm gonna kill you one day, see if I don't.

## OUTSIDER 2

MAN: You're not nervous are you?

WOMAN 2: No. Well maybe a little.

MAN: Don't be. There's nothing to be nervous about.

WOMAN 2: You wanted to speak to me?

MAN: Are you familiar with “he who pays the piper calls the tune?”

WOMAN 2: Who always pays when them that can, don’t? The innocent pay.

MAN: One begins to wonder whose side you’re on.

WOMAN 2: If you have any values higher than the possession of land, money and prestige, I ask you to be outraged that your government values property more than human beings!

MAN: Out here, you don’t see the whole picture. There’re other considerations . . . You play chess . . . Sometimes a pawn is sacrificed on one side of the board to gain an advantage on the other.

WOMAN 2: They had taken the government at its word – being savages, they weren’t too familiar with governments and all, so it was an understandable mistake . . . All that’s needed to assure their success is a clearly defined conception of moral necessity.

MAN: You can put it this way – we don’t mind them dying for us, we just don’t want them living with us.

WOMAN 2: Who’s second rate when you run out of brown people?

MAN: I’ll tell you this . . . whatever we do, by the time we’re finished, they’ll have flip-flopped to the other side of the fence. You follow me?

WOMAN 2: Doesn’t this tell us how little we know of their culture? Of their mindset? Of how they perceive and interpret the actions of the white man when they come into contact with him? What is shared, what is not shared? What offends, what does not offend? What do we strangers, we foreigners, know? We’re ass over teakettle when it comes to knowing.

MAN: You realize as well as I do that is only the tip of the iceberg.

WOMAN 2: They will hate us with a perfect hatred.

MAN: You've stirred up a hornet's nest, haven't you? You've opened up Pandora's Box. You've created a maelstrom.

WOMAN 2: I would have to deny that.

MAN: We brought you up we can put you down.

WOMAN 2: I demand to know what advantage is to be gained.

MAN: What's a critic? Why that's a legless man who teaches running.

WOMAN 2: I'm thought of most often as a dose of salts; not palatable, but essential for the health of the body. You always say don't worry. But, of course, I worry. It's natural to worry.

MAN: They say one's strongest instinct is self-preservation.

WOMAN 2: Well now, you've caught my interest. What is it? What the hell are you here for?

MAN: You disappoint us.

WOMAN 2: I should have done something.

MAN: Never initiate action when you haven't the guts to carry through.

WOMAN 2: Sometimes it's the struggle that counts. I fear for my country and I fear for my people...

MAN: You cannot stop this happening.

WOMAN 2: What kind of a fool do you take me for?

MAN: The two of us could quarrel about a number of things. I'm tired of quarrelling.

WOMAN 2: Why is nothing simple in this life? I wanted to do what was right...

MAN: We don't need rules to play, there are no rules for us. I am a gentle person, but gentle people must act when injustice engulfs them. In an operation like this there is no room for error. The smell of bubblin' tar makes a man eloquent.

WOMAN 2: You have a heart. What does your heart say? *(Pause)*  
Well...it's a good day to die.

## WAR

WOMAN 1: Don't talk.

WOMAN 2: We gotta talk sometime.

WOMAN 1: You do the talking.

WOMAN 2: What's your name, soldier?

MAN: No names, sir.

WOMAN 2: Right. No names . . . How long have you been here?

MAN: Ever since I got here, sir.

WOMAN 2: I see. You're not afraid?

MAN: No sir.

WOMAN 2: Good. Although it leads one to suspect your intellect. We will never speak of what transpires here this night, it will die with you. It will die with all of us. Would you . . . help someone die?

MAN: Why do you ask that?

WOMAN 2: Some people are better off dead. I might be better off dead.

MAN: Then I'd say you're in deep shit and acting with grievous disregard for professional ethics.

WOMAN 2: It's necessary the Government act quickly to assert its sovereignty and jurisdiction. We're in the process of determining and extending our borders geographically.

An integral aspect of this is the extension of our boundaries morally.

MAN: All that's needed to assure success is a clearly defined conception of moral necessity. Do you agree sir?

WOMAN 2: A moral man don't need to think. Measures must be taken. Respect and listen. Obey. (*to woman 1*) Well are you going to sit there like patience?

WOMAN 1: What do you want me to do?

WOMAN 2: Your job.

WOMAN 1: My job? I don't approve of any of this. You went over my head so I'm here. To – mediate. To witness – whatever, I'm not sure what. I won't be party to the forcing of things.

WOMAN 2: Won't you? And isn't it a terrible job?

WOMAN 1: What are the advantages to be gained from this . . . this sacrifice? I demand to know what advantage is to be gained.

WOMAN 2: Hell, prime ministers, politicians and presidents kill more men than the inmates of this place ever did. Sometimes it's the struggle that counts, to struggle to keep on struggling.

WOMAN 1: For what?

WOMAN 2: A just cause!

WOMAN 1: Determined by who?

WOMAN 2: Yourself!

WOMAN 1: Oh we'd have a great kinda order then, wouldn't we?

WOMAN 2: What kinda order have we got now?

WOMAN 1: You can't believe there's people willing to fight for things they're not gonna win!

WOMAN 2: I just gotta win – and you just gotta win. I want you to look at yourself! You're not stupid, you're not insensitive

to things but . . . it's like all your choices have been made for you and . . . sometimes you rant about this or that, but you keep right on going! You never ask why am I doing this, do I really want to do this? You ask how to do it, when to do it, and where to do it, you never ask why. You just don't know your own mind.

WOMAN 1: At least I got one. There's gotta be other options.

WOMAN 2: It's a sense of responsibility, that's what it is. I take the risks, and I find my reward in the fulfillment of my task. I begin with loyalty, move on to money, end up with threats . . . I remember standing very still, scrawny and pasty, very still, afraid to move . . . in the middle of silence, listening, like a mouse on a pan, listening for the beat of the wings of the owl . . . very still . . . I'm the one who has something to lose!

WOMAN 1: Don't you feel anything for them?

WOMAN 2: You wouldn't understand.

WOMAN 1: Yes I would. I would try.

WOMAN 2: One has to make decisions. Commitments. To one side or another.

WOMAN 1: What side are you on?

WOMAN 2: The winning side. When I say move, you bloody well move, when I say jump, you say how high. In this stinking world there's two kinds, there's the rule and the ruled – and when I see the likes of you, I know where I stand.

WOMAN 1: I can save none of the others and I cannot save myself.

WOMAN 2: I don't need saving. My position assures my safety.  
(Pause) Our relationship is not an adversarial one.

WOMAN 1: Then why do I feel that it is?

WOMAN 2: I've no idea.

WOMAN 1: Not reassuring.

MAN: I'd like to write a last letter home to me mum . . . if we . . . if we were on the verge of war, or anything like that.

WOMAN 2: You aren't the first one who thought he knew. Nor will you be the last.

MAN: And, of course, all hell broke loose there, what with the kids screamin', women runnin' and men lookin' for somethin' to hit back with and the whole works naked as the day they was born, it bein' the middle of the night as far as they were concerned. Pursued them like a wolf that tears at the soft underbelly of a fleeing doe. She cries, oh murder! Nobody comes, she is flayed and gutted, nobody comes. I wanted to do what was right . . . and excitin' and . . . and make me mum proud. People ask me why did I go? People ask me what was it like? People ask me what do I think now that I went? Was it worth it?

WOMAN 2: Suppose you could deter your neighbour from runnin' into you on the road by seizin' his children and tyin' them to the front bumper of your car. Suppose everyone were to do likewise. It's clearly evident accidents would decrease indeed the chances of a single child dyin' on a car bumper would be slight. Perhaps by miracle no child would die. In any event we can predict with absolute certainty that on balance more lives would be saved than lost and that's what nuclear deterrence is all about, folks. So when you hear balance of power holds innocents hostage I want you to think road safety and children!

MAN: For a long time I prayed to God. I prayed and prayed. I thought it was a mistake. I thought maybe he didn't know. I don't know what I thought. I prayed and prayed . . . Now, I don't believe in God. And if there is a God, then I don't like him.

WOMAN 2: We all be guilty and we all be innocent. We were followin' orders and responsibility and murder don't come into it.

MAN: How can it be so sunny, so beautiful, when such ugly things are happening. It's strange.

WOMAN 2: What's that?

MAN: To try so hard not to die, and now so close to death, to feel no fear, no fear.

WOMAN 2: The whole thing has been most educational.

WOMAN 1: Was it? I'm asking you a question! Was it worth it?

WOMAN 2: Worth it. What is "it", what is it?

WOMAN 1: You wouldn't know? Or you don't know?

WOMAN 2: I just . . . don't ask myself that question.

## TRUTH/LIES

WOMAN 2: Look, you and I can be straight with each other. We know we got nothing to say.

WOMAN 1: So why are you here?

WOMAN 2: Same question for you.

WOMAN 1: I told you. I thought I could help. Once I have opened his briefcase he cannot plead innocence. You know . . . you do this thing . . . you stare at me . . . You look directly at my eyes. I think . . . you think . . . that if I'm lying . . . it will come up, like lemons on a slot machine.

WOMAN 2: I'll tell you what I think . . . I think . . . that you're aware that there is a certain fascination in the ambiguity . . . You always paint the background but leave the rest to imagination.

WOMAN 1: What's honest, honest is nothing, nobody wants honest.

WOMAN 2: I was thinkin' I thought hearin' the truth would help you.

WOMAN 1: Liar.

WOMAN 2: I'm was thinkin' I was wrong. She don't care about the truth 'cause she's built her whole life on lies, on what she wants to believe to keep that pot boilin'. That's when she feels most alive. You sit around sippin' your wine, playin' your reggae records, bobbin' your head and your ass, and singing "everybody is cryin' out for peace – none of them is cryin' for justice" – Well, someone took you at your word, this is it, people are gonna die, this is real! So fuck off!

WOMAN 1: I wasn't even there that day.

WOMAN 2: Do you want to drive me mad?

WOMAN 1: Oh, yes.

WOMAN 2: Did . . . did you think you could just tell a story and everything would be right?

WOMAN 1: It may all have been lies, but that still doesn't mean it weren't true.

WOMAN 2: Do you see no contradiction?

WOMAN 1: Tween what?

WOMAN 2: Where does the truth lie?

WOMAN 1: Truth lie. Oh yes.

WOMAN 2: And the truth, as you perceive it?

WOMAN 1: Truth. Lies. Contradiction. All of em.

WOMAN 2: Are you lying?

WOMAN 1: About the storyline – or the timeline?

WOMAN 2: Either.

WOMAN 1: Everything's fiction. Isn't that what you say?

WOMAN 2: When you say that –

WOMAN 1: Say what?

WOMAN 2: When you think you can do anything. You are a danger.  
That's something I know.

MAN: A danger to who?

WOMAN 2: To yourself. And to others.

MAN: Why's that?

WOMAN 2: She's either a fool or a liar.

WOMAN 1: So which am I? Tell me.

WOMAN 2: A liar. Oh she may have said things, thought things,  
wrote things – It won't reflect reality.

WOMAN 1: Wrote letters home and never told them a thing that was  
true!

WOMAN 2: Because you . . . you . . . are a third-rate writer, with  
nothing to say . . . and I, I am a writer of some talent  
and genius, As *assessed by others*, not myself. I speak the  
truth.

WOMAN 1: Why don't I believe you?

WOMAN 2: Because you never accept what anybody says is how  
anything is.

WOMAN 1: That's not true.

WOMAN 2: Let me tell you something –

WOMAN 1: Bullshit.

WOMAN 2: I wouldn't take her word for things.

WOMAN 1: Bullshit, bullshit!

WOMAN 2: Do you think good writing guarantees publication? Or  
bad writing blocks it? Quality has nothing to do with it.

WOMAN 1: For Christ's sake, speak the truth!

WOMAN 2: Let us forget "strictly speaking" for a moment. How  
about trying "laxly speaking", "loosely speaking",  
"informally speaking" – could you find it in your heart

to lay a charge “loosely speaking”? I could go to the press. Tell everyone what’s happened here today.

WOMAN 1: Oh they’d never believe you. It would throw so many things into question. If they believed you, they’d have to act. No one really wants to do that. It’s a matter of interpretation.

WOMAN 2: You’re writing, aren’t you? Inside your head, you’re writing. After everything you’re still writing! You’re not listening! You’re writing!

WOMAN 1: I’m making something up. Maybe everything I’ve said in interviews, speeches, bars, lecture halls, kitchens, hotel and living rooms, on stage and off, in answer to some variation of why me and theatre is a lie. Maybe I make theatre because I make theatre. Maybe I’ll stop when I die. Maybe all this is a lie.

WOMAN 2: I need to find out which of these stories is true.

### **WAS IT WORTH IT?**

WOMAN 2: Was it worth it? Sentenced to the whole naked works. This . . . sacrifice? Honour, truth, and the vitality of historical crimes and atrocities. Did I think this sacrifice . . . this going to the edge of the cliff would lead to meager financial returns and a precious unique indomitable spirit? No.

WOMAN 1: I come from a long line of brilliant savages. Unsanitary by habit, I took something nasty, mean and filthy and made something of myself. By challenging political and cultural assumptions I had the courage to fear. I avoided a life in medicine by dumping jerks. Never seeking salvation or damnation from the great imagination. And you ask was it worth it?

MAN: Artistic endeavours with lots of friends, plays for children and action figures. A roaring success makes

people nervous and more often than not ends up in histrionics, windows barred, dishonesty expurgated by a blow to one's prior misconceptions. However we aren't here to assign guilt. A very strong thought in my mind is that one man's persuasion is another man's torture.

WOMAN 2: Somewhere there is an imperial directive stating rented theatres and roses for the star, are acts of self-indulgence. I gave my life to them and they inflict injury and pain. Talent and genius, the internal state of passion to make theatre has been most educational and what's past is past. I take risks with destructive acts and I chose 'her', theatre, because of my great capacity for judging lies and fascists. I know Looney Tunes when I see 'em. And you want to know if it was worth it?

WOMAN 1: I have caused disharmony with this vale of tears. Perhaps you thought I would ride a golden cloud into eternity but I have always embraced plummeting like a stone. I have learned to expect splintered shards from the indulgent and established elite. Besides, I am always up for drinking scotch. But you question if it was worth it?

MAN: This splendid spectacle 'informally speaking' was a clearly defined conception of a moral necessity. A maelstrom to some it was self-preservation to me. And you ask was it worth it? I was following orders to discern your potential to love and be loved. Using luminous aura and road apples I mastered the art of stirring up a hornet's nest for the health of the body. Does this set of circumstances – suggest that it wasn't worth it?

WOMAN 1: Circumstances force a decision, I captured it all in an orange Campfire notebook with a soft lead pencil. There's no magic formula or prizes for good behaviour for a daughter of joy. Life is savage and short and so it should be. Perhaps I will fall in dishonour in the dust.

But until then I will not surrender the huge multi-faceted crystal of truth, the passion as natural as a flower turning its face to the sun. We are all sentenced to death. It's your choice, you could escape the graveside ritual come home and choose to take my work and rip it out and crumple it up and throw it away. You'll pretend everything's alright but soon you'll see I have murdered your peace of mind with my conscience. Then you can ask yourself if it was worth it.