



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

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## Ownership and Stewardship in Sharon Pollock's *Generations*

*Jason Wiens*

Concerns around the ownership and stewardship of land and resources are central to Sharon Pollock's 1980 play *Generations*.<sup>1</sup> The conflicts of the play extend into three frames. At the primary, domestic level, the play represents a conflict within the Nurlin family, who have farmed in the Medicine Hat area for several generations. The main conflict is over patrilineal privilege and obligations, with the eldest of two sons, Young Eddy, having rejected the farming life for a law career in the city, and the youngest, David, having decided to continue the farming life to the overt approval of his grandfather, Old Eddy, and the more equivocal support of his father, Alfred. The action of the play concerns Young Eddy's return to the farm in the hopes his father, grandfather, and brother will release the equity capital of his birthright by selling a section of the land, thereby providing him with the liquid capital to fund his own law practice. Further complicating the domestic conflict is David's girlfriend, Bonnie, a schoolteacher and Young Eddy's tacit ally, who encourages the Nurlins to abandon the farming life.

At the level of the wider rural community near Medicine Hat, Pollock presents a conflict between white farmers and the local Indian reserve, some of whose members have blockaded the “irrigation water from the reserve river” (165). Pollock stages that conflict primarily through conversations between Old Eddy Nurlin and Charlie Running Dog, an elderly member of the reserve, and the only Aboriginal character in the play. Characters also refer to off-stage actions and characters relating to this conflict, including community meetings and Sneider, a “hothead” local farmer and friend of David Nurlin.

That conflict in turn invokes a third frame of conflict, that between the local community and the federal government, which has negotiated the arrangement over the irrigation water with the Indian reserve, an arrangement the reserve is renegeing on because, according to Charlie, the band council has decided the government is not paying them enough for the water, and “Council says the government don’t hear us yellin’, maybe they hear yuh” (165). The disagreement between the reserve and the federal government leads to frustration with and hostility toward the latter on the part of the white farmers. The play subordinates the second conflict involving access to water and Aboriginal title to the other two conflicts.

I read *Generations* through the intersection of two regionalisms: a literary prairie regionalism that the play deliberately both extends and modifies, and a political regionalism that was informing the increasingly hostile debate over federal versus provincial control of natural resources in the 1980s, though of course the resources of concern then were not the resources at issue in the play. The more topical question over control of energy resources becomes displaced in the play, I argue, onto the context of a struggling family farm, a context more suitable to naturalist treatment and, I suspect, more evocative of audience sympathies.

I wish to historicize both the political conflict during which the play was staged (and which shaped audience response to the play) and the literary regionalism that the play appears to embrace. One might read *Generations* as performing the ideological work of naturalizing

patriarchal property rights at the domestic level of the family farm and colonial relations at the normative political level of Canada's fraught federal arrangements and treaty agreements with First Nations. In this reading, the construction of the land as a mythical space, which compels an inescapable organic relationship with those who farm it, is part of this ideological work. However, I suggest that despite Pollock's ostensible attempts to cast the land as an "omniscient presence" having "mythic proportion" (Pollock 156), as well as the play's subordination of what Carole Corbeil observed was an "underdeveloped plot concerned with the Indians' ownership of property rights" (cited in Conolly 272) to the dominant, normative political conflict of federal-provincial rights, *Generations* actually works to make visible the material reality of invented property relations at both the domestic and wider political level.

The strongest anti-government, and more specifically anti-Ottawa, voice in *Generations*, is David Nurlin, the youngest man in the play. Indeed, the play makes clear that it is the younger generation, among both the farmers and the Natives, who are more willing to voice their frustration with government and take drastic steps to have their message heard. In the first exchange between Old Eddy and Charlie, Charlie explains why the Natives are holding the local farmers' water hostage in order to get the attention of the federal government:

CHARLIE: Council says the government don't hear us yellin', maybe they hear yuh.

OLD EDDY: That's not yuh talkin'.

CHARLIE: No?

OLD EDDY: No, it's them others, the young ones.

CHARLIE: Yuh got 'em too. (165)

For David, the structural problems facing the farm go far beyond the immediate concerns with irrigation; at one point he tells his father Alfred, “We’re not talkin’ water, what the hell, water! So the crop dies in the field, we lose money – shit, we can harvest and sell it and lose money! That’s the problem and gettin’ reserve water is not gonna solve it!” (171). David’s solution is the “alternative action” of holding back “the product of our labour” (172), and the play ends with David joining his neighbours in their mass cull of livestock by setting fire to one of his own fields to send the government a message. At various times in the play, David rails against the lot of the farmer in general: “Fair? You wanna talk fair! What’s fair about Eddy and the whole fuckin’ city sittin’ drinkin’ scotch and feedin’ their faces while we bust our ass to put food on their tables! Two-thirds of the goddamn world dies of starvation and the farmer’s low man on the totem pole!” (206). At other times he directs his anger at eastern Canada: “Look we been carryin’ the East on our back for so goddamn long they think we’re the horse and they’re the rider” (204). And in one exchange with Young Eddy and Bonnie he targets the Liberal party specifically:

DAVID: Hey listen Eddy, it’s gonna be a humdinger tonight – first of all we got media types, and Stocker from Edmonton, and a dingbat from Native Affairs – that’s for the dam business – and then to top her all off, a coupla Liberal interpreters for national agriculture – Jesus, wanna bet when they travel west they’re wearin’ bullet-proof vests – and earplugs?

BONNIE: Maybe you should try voting Liberal.

DAVID: Maybe they should try listening.

BONNIE: Maybe you should run for office, Dave.

DAVID: Maybe you should mark papers, Bonnie.  
(181)

In addition to this overt invective by David, the jokes in the play tend overwhelmingly to have political overtones, which either express cynicism toward normative politics in general or hostility to Central Canada and the federal government in particular. For example, in the opening scene of the play, when a hungover David Nurlin talks with his grandfather in the morning, the two exchange jokes:

DAVID: You wanna hear a joke, Grampa?

OLD EDDY: Fire away.

DAVID: How is a politician like a church bell?

OLD EDDY: Yuh tell me.

DAVID: One peals from the steeple – the other steals from the people!

*They laugh.*

OLD EDDY: Here's one for yuh – do yuh know how Canada is like a cow?

DAVID: How is Canada like a cow, Grampa?

OLD EDDY: Well sir – she feeds off the West – she's milked dry by Ontario – and she shits on the Maritimes!  
(161)

Other jokes reference particular politicians, including Pierre Elliott Trudeau. At one point David asks Old Eddy if he heard “they found out who was mutilatin’ all the cattle . . . About someone cuttin’ off their sex organs,” and when Old Eddy asks “Who was it?” the punchline delivers “Trudeau – he needs more pricks for his cabinet” (177). Joe Clark, the federal opposition leader – and briefly prime minister – of the time, does not get off the hook, either. David tells Young Eddy this joke: “Trudeau is walkin’ along the street and he sees Clark carryin’

this here duck and he hollers, 'Where are you goin' with that turkey?' and Clark, he says, 'Look stupid, this is not a turkey!' and Trudeau says, 'I am talkin' to the duck!'" (184).

If *Generations* draws upon and speaks to what came to be called Western alienation, the producers could hardly have asked for a more fortuitous time to stage its premiere. The play opened during a week marked by conflict between Alberta and Ottawa over changes to the energy revenue sharing scheme that would eventually become known as the National Energy Policy. Its premiere, at the Canmore Opera House on October 28, 1980, took place the same evening the Liberal government in Ottawa passed a federal budget which promised that the domestic oil and gas industry would be 50 percent Canadian-owned by 1990; proposed that Petro-Canada, then a Crown corporation, take over one of the foreign-owned oil companies; introduced a new tax on natural gas and gas liquids sold in Canada or exported; imposed an 8 percent production tax on oil and gas companies; and promised that the Canadian price of oil and gas would never exceed 85 percent of world energy prices. The proposed changes would see Ottawa's share of revenues from oil and gas rise to 24 percent from 10 percent, see the industry's take decline from 45 percent to 33 percent and the provinces' share fall from 45 percent to 43 percent (Simpson 1). Two days later, then-Alberta premier Peter Lougheed delivered a televised address in which he stated Alberta had decided to cut its oil production by 15 percent in retaliation for what it saw as a federal threat to its resource ownership. In his speech, Lougheed described the federal government's moves as akin to someone stripping off a farmer's topsoil, or "walking into our homes and occupying our living room" (Sallot and Williamson 2). His were interesting choices of metaphors that sought to compare the oil and gas industry to a family farm and shift the debate to the domestic level. This is precisely the metaphorical displacement, I argue, that is at work in *Generations*.

A number of contemporary reviewers of the play did not hesitate to situate the performance within the wider political context of the day, or at least allude to that context, even by remarking on its absence

from the play. In his *Theatre in Review* response to the Alberta Theatre Projects production, Allan Sheppard remarked that “*Generations* is nothing less than an attempt to confront the question of why Albertans are as they are, and act as they do. And it does so without once mentioning oil and gas, the constitution or multi-national corporations (though Trudeau and Clark jokes do pop up from time to time)” (Sheppard C26). Brian Brennan observed in his *Calgary Herald* review that while he had not found Pollock’s work to that point to be particularly funny, this play was an exception, and “the anti-Trudeau jokes seem so timely, one would have sworn Pollock sat down to write the play after watching Lougheed on television the other night” (cited in Conolly 270). Carole Corbeil begins her *Globe and Mail* review by quoting David Nurlin’s statement “I feel a power out there,” and then remarking that he “is talking about the prairie land, not oil” (cited in Conolly 271). And Martin Stone somewhat bizarrely concludes his review of Toronto’s Tarragon Theatre’s production by observing that “The play focuses on a part of Alberta where life for the working farmer is far removed from the luxury of TV’s Dallas. Or Calgary’s oil scene” (Stone n.p.)

But the contemporary response to the play that most elaborated on its relationship to the political context was Philip McCoy’s review of the play for CBC’s Arts West and Arts National on October 31, 1980, the day after Lougheed’s speech. McCoy begins by quoting Kenneth Tynan’s observation that a play review “is a letter addressed to the future; to people thirty years hence who may wonder what it felt like to be in a certain playhouse on a certain distant night” (n.p.). McCoy suggests that “Pollock’s play is about the burdens and responsibilities of ownership, a subject preoccupying the minds of Albertans these days with a worrying and fearful persistence. *Generations* is about the ownership of land and not about the ownership of oil and gas production rights, but that only makes it all the more thought-provoking since land has about it a mystique which petroleum does not” (n.p.). McCoy then reminds his listeners that “on the way to the theatre on Thursday evening nearly all of us in the audience had listened to Peter



Lougheed's calm suggestion that if Ontario owned the oil, we'd all be paying world prices for it. So it was with the shock of recognition that we listened to Sharon Pollock's farmers accusing Ottawa and the East of ruthlessly riding the backs of the wheat producing provinces of the West. Their metaphors were earthier and their language was coarser than Lougheed's but the message was the same" (McCoy n.p.). *Generations*, it should be noted, actually aired in an earlier incarnation as a radio play in 1978,<sup>2</sup> but the degree to which it anticipated and spoke to the normative political context of late 1980 was remarkable, even if, as I suggest, the conflict is displaced from the resources deep within the earth to its produce at the surface.

According to Alison Calder and Robert Wardhaugh, recent arguments about the prairie "region" and the literature produced there have begun to question the way in which "the particulars of prairie history are subsumed into a generalized timelessness" (7). Calder and Wardhaugh further observe that "up to the late 1990s, critics of Canadian prairie literature [. . .] seem to have constructed a category of 'Canadian prairie writing' in which landscape dominates culture and geography effaces history" (8). One might be tempted to read *Generations* as fitting neatly into this construction, given the insistence on the geography's "mythic proportion" in Pollock's stage directions (Pollock 156), or some of the dialogue in the play, such as when David and Alfred look at the horizon, and David asks his father what he sees, to which his father replies, "Nothin'" (202), which seems to imply a timeless landscape. On the other hand, I read the play as continually emphasizing the cultural construction of the landscape and the historical and economic contingencies upon geography, given the play's emphasis on property relations as an invented, historical system.

Diane Bessai has observed that the "standard notion of doctrinaire 'prairie naturalism' primarily has its roots in the earlier modern fiction of the region" (189), including the work of fiction writers such as Sinclair Ross, Frederick Philip Grove, and Martha Ostenso. She further argues that this tradition

evokes a view of the pioneer and early post-pioneer stages in the social development of rural prairie society. Characters are caught in a perennial struggle with a hostile wind-swept landscape that continually defies human effort to bring it under human control. They endure poverty, social isolation, personal alienation and domestic entrapment. (189)

In the context of a broader discussion of Barbara Sapergia's play *Roundup*, Bessai, as an aside, aligns *Generations* with the work of regional dramatists in the 1980s who write out of a consciousness of this rural tradition in fiction, "not in slavish conformity to it, but in order to re-examine it, enrich it and in some measure to subvert it through dramatic form" (189). In *Generations*, she argues, "the stereotypical conflict between allegiance to the land and the need to escape its tyranny takes on a positive note with the re-alignment of expectations and the recognition of individual power of choice" (190). I would further argue that *Generations*, despite Pollock's emphasis on the "omniscient presence and mythic proportion of **The Land**" (Pollock 156), demystifies the ties of the Nurlins to the land not only by emphasizing the materiality of those ties but also, in raising the competing claims to ownership and stewardship repeatedly in the play, by questioning the legitimacy of invented patrilineal property rights themselves. That is, while *Generations* seems intended to mystify the relationship between the land and its inhabitants, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in a fashion consistent with how prairie naturalism had been understood to that point, the underdeveloped elements of the play ultimately reveal the political contingencies and historicity of those relations.

Pollock has commented in an interview that the eventual dramatic naturalism of the play's set design was at odds with her initial vision. As she tells Robert Wallace and Cynthia Zimmerman,

I had a lot of problems with *Generations*. We went through that whole thing where you paint rooms, you build the set, you take it down. If I had had my druthers, if I could

have found a way to do it, the play would not have happened in the house. There would be no kitchen because once you're in the kitchen, you've got all the stinking things you've got to do in the kitchen, like cook the food. If I could have placed the characters into space, into that field with the prairie going on forever, I think I could have created a more interesting piece. (Wallace and Zimmerman 120)

We need to distinguish between the prairie naturalism which Bessai describes above and which is particular to critical discourses shaping what had come, by the 1980s, to be known as "prairie literature," and the broader tradition of dramatic naturalism which has its roots in the nineteenth century, while recognizing the overlapping concerns of these different naturalisms. To me, the play's insistence on assigning the land mythic significance, while consistent with prairie naturalism, runs counter to what I understand as the hyperrealist conventions of dramatic naturalism. The naturalistic set design of the play sets up a contrast between the new place, realistically rendered as a kitchen, and the old place, evocative of a past passing into myth and associated with the "eternal Aboriginal," but most of the action of the play takes place in the domestic space of the former. Readers of the play will note immediately the importance Pollock places on the land, not only in her comments describing the setting, in which she writes, "There should be some sense of the omniscient presence and mythic proportion of **The Land** in the design," but in her designation of the land itself as "a character revealed by the light and shadow it throws on the Nurlin's [*sic*] lives" (Pollock 156). It also seems significant that in her notes on the characters, she aligns the two oldest characters, Old Eddy and Charlie Running Dog, explicitly with the land. She writes, "[the land] has many faces, but Old Eddy sees it most clearly when he stands in the heat of summer or the dead of winter in his Southern Alberta back section watching the sunrise, and looking right across the expanse of Saskatchewan all the way to Winnipeg" (156). Despite the

impossibility of seeing Winnipeg from southern Alberta, this detail should alert us that, in this play, Pollock imagines the prairie region as a cohesive unit, thereby further aligning it with the concurrently burgeoning regionalism in prairie literature. She also suggests that a presumed geographical uniformity defines the prairie provinces as this cohesive unit. Of Charlie Running Dog she writes, “Time and the elements have so conditioned and eroded his skin that he looks less like a Native Canadian, and more like some outcropping of arid land” (156). This identification, however brief, of the Native character with the land might be read as problematic, though significant, given the struggle in the play over control of the land’s resources. But here Pollock is not differentiating between Old Eddy and Charlie by suggesting the latter enjoys a more authentic, because autochthonic, relationship to the land, but rather equating them as men who have forged an organic relationship to the land after working it for decades. Denis Salter concurs and refers to a “phallogocentric desire to make the land submit to their will” (xxvii) in the play, and one exchange between Old Eddy and Charlie, which Young Eddy recalls, nicely supports Salter’s observation, “Old Eddy, Grampa, was sayin’ the land was like some kind of monster a man had to wrestle and fight, and it was always throwing drought and frost and I don’t know what at you – and you fought away like some kind of Greek hero I guess – and Charlie was sayin’ no, no, it’s like a woman, you gotta woo her and win her” (Pollock 183–84).

Images of aridity and thirst proliferate in *Generations*, and not just in explicit reference to the drought conditions or the conflict over irrigation. The play opens in the morning in the Nurlin house, the stage directions tell us. Old Eddy enters the kitchen and proceeds to make strong coffee, filling “*liberally the filter basket of an automatic coffee appliance with coffee*” (158). We then see David enter the kitchen, and “*take[. . .] out a large jar which once contained mayonnaise but now contains water. David drinks from the jar, leans on the fridge, rests his forehead on the cold interior*” (158). Seeing David, Old Eddy recognizes his grandson is hungover, and the following exchange occurs:

OLD EDDY: Hard night?

DAVID: Uh-huh.

OLD EDDY: You stick to a good rye like I tell yuh, yuh wouldn't be so dry in the mornin's.

DAVID: Yeah. *He takes another swig from the jar.* (158)

This exchange sets up a discussion of alcoholic beverages, which leads to a further discussion of the differing class significations between such beverages, but what interests me is the emphasis on David's self-inflicted dryness at the beginning of play, as well as the fact that he drinks the water from an old mayonnaise jar. The parsimony of the farm household in which no container goes to waste immediately equates with the necessity of hydration. The exchange between Old Eddy and David ends with Eddy announcing that he is heading out to "speak to Charlie 'bout them blockin' the irrigation water" (161), an exchange which makes explicit the overt conflict between the Natives and non-Natives.

In fact, the opening sequence establishes drinking as a motif that extends throughout the play, which is replete with references to and scenes of characters drinking various beverages, including beer, coffee, rye, scotch, tea, iced tea, and water. This is an element of the play's naturalism – there is a drought and the dialogue mentions the heat of the day numerous times – but it also comes to emphasize thirst as an ongoing concern in the play. Other domestic exchanges subtly remind the audience of the lack of water. In the initial exchange between Alfred and Margaret, Alfred asks her about the water pressure as she prepares to rinse dishes. When she tells him it's low, he responds, "It's the well, coupla more days and that'll be it" (168). In Act Two, after an exchange between Old and Young Eddy in which Young Eddy is about to ask his grandfather about selling a piece of land but decides against it, we see Alfred enter the yard and try to draw water from the water pump, but with no results: "Come on you beggar, don't go dry

on us now,” he says, before greeting his oldest son (194). Young Eddy takes a turn at the pump and manages to draw water before they enter the house. He then offers his grandfather a glass of water before the grandfather changes the topic to whether or not Young Eddy drinks scotch. I note these domestic exchanges over water is to point out that while characters can and do reference the wider concern in the community over access to water – they mention the crops withering for lack of water as well as the native blockade – the dramatic naturalism of the play iterates the water issue at the domestic level.

The primary, domestic conflict of the play turns on Young Eddy’s rejection of patrilineal privilege and its obligations, as well as his encouragement of his brother to do the same, albeit in his own interests in raising capital to fund the launch of his own law firm. This conflict also turns on the question of what ties these men to the land. Salter argues that the play suggests “the land will ultimately possess those who try to tame it” (Salter xxvii), and, in fact, at the end of the play, David appears to resolve his own conflict over his rights and obligations to his family’s property through a mystification of the land. In his final exchange with Bonnie, he tells her,

*Out there . . . is . . . something – I know it. Out there . . . is a feelin’ . . . you don’t get other places. Other places its hidden in all the dinky scenery, but on the prairies it’s just there. A power. Can you understand that? [. . .] I don’t care if you understand it or not, I understand it! Sure I could do some stupid job somewhere else, but when I’m standin’ out there . . . well . . . there’s just somethin’ ’bout a person standin’ there on the prairies, everything else stripped away. It makes things simple. (Pollock 223)*

David’s references here to a “power” and his inability to articulate what holds him to this land suggests a transcendent, mystical force that exceeds human material concerns. David makes this speech immediately after the climactic scene in which he has fired his own fields

and physically fought with his grandfather as rain falls, quenching the earth's thirst and extinguishing the flames in the fields and with it the men's conflict, itself a scene with mythic implications that departs from the play's naturalism. The fact that he makes this speech in the closing minutes of the play suggests we accept it as the play's resolution of the domestic conflict by appealing to the men's enduring, mythic, and phallogentric relationship to the land.

*Generations*, then, might be read as exemplary of a dominant dramaturgical structure that Ric Knowles identifies in post-centennial Canadian drama:

Variations on patriarchal, socially affirmative dramatic and narrative structures (and their mutually affirmative social formations and structures of consciousness), while they have dominated the Western world since Aristotle first articulated them in *The Poetics*, were (for various social and cultural reasons) particularly influential in Canada in the years following the centennial celebrations of 1967. (*Theatre*, 31)

*Generations* illustrates Knowles's argument, as its explicitly patriarchal thematic concerns and implicitly phallogentric structure – complete with the violent quasi-Oedipal struggle between grandfather and grandson at the play's climax – demonstrates that “this Aristotelian / oedipal / biblical narrative, then, has become the standard structural unconscious of dramatic naturalism in Canada as elsewhere, and the meanings and ideologies that it inscribes, fundamentally conservative and patriarchal (imitating as it does the rising action, climax, and return-to-status quo falling action of the male orgasm and focusing as it does on the male experience), constitute the primary and affirmative social impacts of the plays that use it, whatever their (conscious) themes or subject matters” (31). Yet this reading of the play would accept that the marginalization of its voices of alterity – specifically of the women and of the First Nations – effectively silences them. It would also

ignore the fact that the play hardly ends with a satisfactory resolution of all conflicts. Finally, it would not recognize that the play offers an alternative, materialist presentation of patriarchal and colonial property relations, as opposed to a mythic, naturalized presentation.

Other scenes in *Generations*, after all, suggest that the men's connection to the land is material rather than mythic. Old Eddy tells David early in the play, "She's all yours . . . and your father's . . . and Young Eddy's, it's a legacy" (176), but this legacy entraps rather than empowers the men. Alfred's complaint at one point in the play, that "I sometimes wonder who owns who" (174), is less a personification of the land as hostile and resistant to human domination but persistently drawing the men to it, than it is a recognition of the economic entrapment and frustration he feels. Bonnie is hardly a sympathetic character in the play, but she voices a critique, which the action of the play seems to support, of Old Eddy's obsession with patriarchal legacy. When David says of his grandfather, "He paid for [the land] with his own flesh and blood" she responds, "And now you're gonna pay, why can't you see that? You're gonna serve in Old Eddy's place when he dies – in Young Eddy's place – and our kids would be expected to do the same! I don't want that – this country uses people up and wears them out and throws them away!" (191). When Old Eddy tells Bonnie near the end of the play, "when I go, what I'm leavin' is land, not money" (219), he imagines the land as eternal and money as ephemeral. But the play as much suggests that the land – as equity capital – imprisons, and money – as liquid capital – empowers.

Knowles has argued that "Pollock's earliest plays to deal with issues of race do so primarily by pointing out injustices historically performed and historiographically erased by Canada's current dominant cultures. As such, they tend to focus on the white men who perpetrate the injustices rather than on the 'Indians'" (*Theatre*, 138). He is writing here of *Walsh* and *The Komagatu Maru Incident*, but the same might be said about *Generations*: the play certainly foregrounds the "white" perspective in the conflict over irrigation water. Yet *Generations* invites us to read significance in Charlie's silences and laconic responses.



The play ends with Old Eddy and Charlie together at the Old Place, and with Eddy telling Charlie in the play's final line, "We're still here, Charlie. Hell, we'll always be here" (Pollock 224). This ending, with the two oldest characters in the eternal space of the Old Place, might suggest a very different reading of the play from what I am advancing here. Cynthia Zimmerman, for instance, writes that "Pollock grants this pair of ancestors a mythic, archetypal dimension. Representing endurance and proud continuity, they voice the play's optimistic conclusion" (80). But in a brief exchange in Act I, Young Eddy asks David if Charlie is still alive, to which David responds, "Oh yeah, still hangs around the Old Place, Grampa says just down from the rise is where Charlie's mother's people used to camp . . . so . . . I guess he feels like he owns it in some kinda way" (183). The "some kinda way" Charlie feels he owns it might cast an ironic light on Old Eddy's final words, the Nurlins' struggle throughout the play over who should own the land, and the broader constitutional conflict of the time, in which I have suggested the play might be read. *Generations'* acknowledgment, however brief, of an alternate claim to the land, and in fact an alternate understanding of ownership and stewardship, at the very least historicizes the colonial, patriarchal property relations which the play might be seen to otherwise naturalize, and from which all its conflicts derive.

## NOTES

- 1 *Generations* was first performed by Alberta Theatre Projects, Calgary, at the Canmore Opera House, 28 October 1980. It was later performed by Tarragon Theatre in Toronto in 1981. In 1994, the Centre for Canadian Studies at M.S. University Baroda in India staged a single performance of the play as part of a workshop conducted by visiting professor Robert Fothergill. I am not aware of any recent Canadian production. I have not seen a performance of *Generations*; as such I find myself more or less limited to the textual, literary analysis of the play, which Knowles has asked us to eschew in favour of an emphasis on the contingencies of performance ("Voices", 110).
- 2 I would have liked to compare the script of the radio play with that of the 1980 stage production, but the Sharon Pollock Papers at the University of Calgary do not include a typescript, nor does Pollock have a copy in her personal papers.

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