In a 1982 interview, Sharon Pollock speculated on the direction of her work to come, declaring

I think that the plays that I’ll write in the future will be more about women. I knew there’s a play that follows *Blood Relations* about woman who is unable to kill either her father or her other or, indeed, even herself. Obviously it’s about women and madness (*Work* 118).

Pollock’s subsequent plays do indeed vaguely answer this description, exploring different configurations of ‘women and madness’ in domestic, political, and psychological terms. In *Whiskey Six Cadenza* Leah feels helplessly trapped by her perverse relations with her foster parents (including Mama George’s conniving at the situation), and ends up having Mr. Big Kill her. In *Doc*, we see a daughter haunted by the spectra of her mother and grandmother’s self-destruction, and by the overwhelming figure of her father; though in the end, the play embraces the positively reconciling parental-daughter tensions. But Pollock embraced the theme of ‘women and madness’ even more directly in *Egg*, a play never produced in its original form, though from the large-cast *Egg* was eventually attached the one-
woman drama *Getting it Straight*. In *Fair Liberty’s Call* madness is constructed as the vision of a mother traumatized by war, and in *Saucy Jack* the madness and sanity are contingent upon the accuracy of memory.

The tone of *Egg* is quite unlike the work for which Pollock is best known. In some ways it resembles the kind of grotesque irony associated with George F. Walker. Among Pollock’s works, it is close to the absurdist satire characterizing her two early unpublished plays than any of the more subtle, psychologically-based drama she had been writing in the intervening year. However, *Egg* is far more complex and grotesque than either of those early plays. There are three interrelated spheres of action in *Egg* arising from an attempt to show how multi-national corporations, military syndicates and ordinary human beings affect one another. The central character is Martha, as escaped mental patient who is the forerunner of Emu in *Getting it Straight*. It becomes apparent that Martha’s ‘mental illness’ is a result of her inability to live with the condition of the nuclear bomb threatened world created by patriarchal, corporate and militaristic interests. Her husband, George, is a General engaged in a promotional campaign intended, as he explains, “…to get people round the world being the concept of war as a means to peace. There are worse things than turning the globe into a cinder falling through space, but it isn’t an easy proposition to sell.” (24)
Consequently, when Martha escapes, the doctors decide not to “impose on the General at this time of lot of hullabaloo concerning tunes wife he was basically warehousing at our institution” (24). Instead they announce that she is infected with a ‘deadly, eighteen hour’ virus.

Meanwhile, at the offices of Universal Inc., the military’s partner in the ‘Whole Earth Nuclear’ campaign, we see two contrasting groups. In one room, three women- a television produced, a financial officer and a secretary- unpack eggs from a carton and calmly discuss the problems of sexism in their homes. In another, the male CEO of the company, R. D. Farkerson, rants erratically and paradoxically to a male subordinate about his distrust of the women who seem to be infesting his company.

We are surrounded by women. Have you noticed that? They’re everywhere. It’s frightening. Everyplace you look. Women I’m starting to notice their faces. I catch myself, every once in a while, looking right into their faces...We need some statistics on their numbers. Because I think there’s more of them. And I’ll tell you something else. There’s got to be a reason the Chinese kept having them out on river banks because the Chinese are a very smart people (42).
As it turns out, Farkersons’ fearful misogyny has some basis in the emergent circumstances for, led by Martha, a massive international coalition of women and Beggs, the General’s male assistant, who renounces his manhood and don’s drag (51), decides to overthrow the absurdly violent patriarchy and set up a peaceable matriarchal civilization in its place.

The approaching showdown between the male and female forces appears at times, almost apocalyptic, though at others, a much smaller, localized revolt. Meanwhile, Martha rallies her followers with a series of strange inspirational speeches augmented with poetic passages from a disembodied ‘voice’.

Martha. We are living inside an egg. Sisters and the egg is blue, and if you screech up your eyes just a little, open your mind just a little, and try to listen a little...
Voice… The unseen world in no longer a dream it’s floating just within grasp
A shimmering radiant heavenly rob
I know the way
To move, yes move towards that.
Martha. We can stop the spread of war, we can give the word to the women of the world, that word’s Unite. No more war. It’s started, sister. Listen. (She holds the hand containing eggshells up. There is a murmuring of women’s voices in a number of languages) All you have to do is believed, sister. […]
We take control. We talk to the world of women. We deliver a culture shock to the world of me via satellite link-up! We blast their dislocated minds into meaning.

We tell them loud and clear
We do not believe your promises!
We will not follow you commands! (50-52)

The women capture Farkerson and force-feed him a giant, boiled egg, including shell. Farkerson regresses to a child-like state, and tells the story of how, at his birth, he was mistakenly named ‘R.D’ by a nurse who did not understand that his mother was calling him “Artie” (60).

It appears that Pollock had not quite decided how to end the play when she abandoned it. The other men are still determined to fight, as they declare by singing:

For fatherland, motherland, homeland
We have the right to die
We love our land, We’ll make a stand
Nation is all
The state will not fall
Let women wail
Men will prevail (79).

But as the forces outside besiege them, Martha speaks to Farkerson,
Did you know, Arthur that we are living inside an egg? And the egg is blue. It’s a royal blue that’s been lightened up with buttermilk…. The egg opens up, like… a thousand Suns… and the Egg… says…. stare ugliness in the face, don’t … don’t turn away from the pain and suffering... no… may be you can just do a little bit… but if a great many do a little bit. Then a lot will get don… (95).

And here the play ends, with a hint of personal responsibility, but with the plot largely unresolved. Because Egg was never finished to a production-ready state (a note to director Guy Sprung makes it evident that this is an early draft), there are a number of outstanding questions which make it difficult to interpret the play with any great confidence. For example, it is tempting, with the hindsight bestowed by Getting it straight, to consider the action as a projection from Martha’s mind: a ‘psycho-machia’ drama. However, apart from a few non-realistic elements, there is not enough to support such a reading in the draft as it stands.

The non-realistic elements in the play would be at least equally compatible with the sort of fabulist, satiric propaganda which would be found in say, Brecht’s Goods Woman of Setzuna. The puppets and songs and the montages of advertising and radio announcements which punctuate the action would neatly support an ongoing ironic commentary were that Pollock’s intention; through as it stands the propaganda is rather underdeveloped.
At any rate, the political implications are better integrated in *Getting it Straight* (1989), the main difference being that everything is set unequivocally within the frame of a genuinely mentally distressed woman who is attempting to work out a sane understanding of an irrational world. Where, in *Egg*, the grotesque distortions sometimes detract from the political criticism, here the seamless transitions form legitimate fear and anger into paranoid terror and hostility not only make for a persuasive psychological portrait, but create a compelling, passionate argument for a sane and content world view.

In *Getting it Straight*, as Eme says at one point. “…Real and unreal [are] shuffled like a deck of cards” (89). That plus heavy demand upon the spectator or reader; but the difficulty of discriminating between sane analysis and insanity is the most rational response to a disordered world. Or, as Eme herself puts it, “they say ‘I ’m mad/I say enola gay little boy fat man!’” (89). She is referring to the bomber plane, Enola Gay, and its cargo of atomic bombs which were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki I 1945; ‘little boy’ and fat man’ were the respective code names for the smaller and large prototypes developed through the Manhattan Project.

The plot of *Getting it Straight* is fairly straightforward, though it takes some close attention to pick it out of the text. Eme (short for Emily), a mentally disturbed middle aged woman, having been taken on an outing to a rodeo, has left
her group and is hiding beneath the grandstand. Less clear is the background story to which Eme continually but elliptically alludes. Most of Eme’s allusions are in the nature of personal memories of her immediate family. We hear, for example, of her affection for her grandfather, and also of minor, seemingly arbitrary details about her father and brother. It would be unwise to lightly dismiss any of these memories, however trivial they may appear, for perhaps the most important recurring theme in Pollock’s work is that of memory besieged by social forces. For Pollock, the authentic recollection of the past is the chief means of establishing personal integrity, so most references to characters personal memories are in some way crucial.

One passage, lifted almost verbatim from Egg, concerns Eme’s father’s name, transcribed at birth as “R.D.,” rather than “Artie.” The joke is not a rich one, so at first glance this seems an odd detail to preserve for transference from Egg into the new script. But in a play dealing with mental illness, it is likely that Pollock is nudging our attention in the direction of history’s most famous “R.D.,” R.D. Laing. The idea is supported by Eme’s mentioned of a “layman’s guide to schizophrenia” (89): a reasonably accurate description of R.D. Laing’s controversial, best-selling 1960 study of schizophrenia, The Divided Self. There Laing tired to invert established preconceptions about insanity by arguing that labeling some individuals as ‘Crazy’ is merely expedient mutual agreement used in
dysfunctional circumstances where one person does not fit what has been determined to be the norm. Applied to Eme’s situation, the theory implicitly asks whether it is not the ‘social norm’ (which, during the Cold War, included the terrifying logic of maintaining nuclear overkill capacity to deter war) that should be regarded as insane. Thus, buried in the homonym ‘R.D./Artie’ is the question: who is mad?

Another at first seemingly insignificant detail is Eme’s recollection that, in childhood, the “only way Bubu [i.e., her brother, now a wealthy and powerful man of forty-two] could win a board game was by divine intervention”. Her parents told her “games aren’t that important, let Bubu win tonight” (101). This is a common parental request of an older sibling, but in context of Eme’s anxieties about global power, it is a microcosm for passive acceptance of the geopolitical ‘boys’ game’ of nuclear deterrence. More recent among Eme’s scattered ruminations are here references to Myrna, apparently jumped or fell to a concrete surface (107). It is difficult to tell whether this latter image is a fantasy or it actually occurred at the rodeo Eme has just fled, repelled by the violence inherent in the sport.

However most striking among these ambiguous images are Eme’s references to her husband’s briefcase. To the extent to which these allusions can be made coherent, it seems she once secretly opened it, finding documents pertaining to
nuclear warfare. She fears that, it state of horror, she then murdered her husband (125). But this notion is dubious even to Eme:

maybe I dream it
Myrna says they say I dreamt it
I say no
no
I say strike out strike down this is a lesser
crime I am guilty of that I accept that I hope I
killed him, to have known and done
nothing? that is the crime of that I am not guilty
not guilty of that (125-26).

Much as Laing questioned the validity of judgment about the madness of some people living in alienating and destructive circumstance, Eme questions the immorality of murder in a situation where to be peaceful is to connive at plans involving the possible obliteration of the human race.

Set against these ‘memories’ is Eme’s vision for the future, chiefly drawn from Egg. Indeed, Eme often uses egg imagery in passages taken almost verbatim from the earlier play:

We are living
inside an egg and I
I see that it’s blue
and the egg opens up
and a bright light
like a thousand suns and if I can open my eyes
just a little open my mind just a little try to
listen a little […….]
the visible world is no longer real
it’s shattered and turned into glass
a mirror of ugliness agony shame
you know the way you know the way of change
to change all of that the unseen word
is no longe dream it’s floating just within
grasp a shimmering radiant heavenly orb you
know the way to move yes move… (123-4)

The egg image is appropriate in several ways: an egg encloses potential for future life, yet is sealed off from the outside world and the life within cannot emerge without effort; the fragility of an egg suggests the vulnerability of the earth, which can be destroyed through recklessness; the eggs’ surface is continuous, without beginning or end, like the vast unity Eme dreams of; the egg is associated with nurturing by females. As did Martha, Eme ends the play with a “call for action” to “all members of the female sex” (126). She envisions them spinning:

... a gossamer net of women’s hand’s and Rapunzel’s hair and that net will encircle the globe and if a person stood on the far left star of the utmost edge
of Cassiopeia’s chair that net would twinkle in the inky cosmos like fairy lights on a Christmas tree- and what would it spell?(126).

Earlier, when she recalls giving the same speech to Myrna, Eme’s answer is “love”. Myrna had laughed, so Eme furiously tried to smash Myrna’s face into the floor (122). The irony of Eme’s violent response perhaps indicates Pollock’s skepticism, her awareness of the difficulties in realizing such a transfiguration of the world into a place of universal co-operation.

Still Eme’s interweaving of mythical figures and cosmic imagery to create a vision of universal harmony is undoubtedly pleasing. Her allusions to Cassiopeia (who aroused the wrath of the patriarchal Olympian, Poseidon, by boasting of her daughter’s beauty), and to Rapunzel (locked away because of her beauty), raise again the question of whether it might not be that she his incurred entrapment because here thinking is too beautiful and good for the world, rather than too flawed. As usual, Pollock prefers the ambiguity of the open question to definite answers. Perhaps the biggest open questions is inherent in the grandstand shadows cast across the space Eme occupies, suggesting, says Pollock in her opening stage directions, “what may be bars [or] ribs.” Is Eme’s condition necessarily one of imprisonment within the bars of insanity? Or is she, like Jonah within the ribs of the whale, trapped only temporarily in her despair, a stage in a journey whose ultimate objective is universal enlightenment?
With Fair Liberty’s Call, Pollock returns to a historical setting comparable with the early history plays (in this case a 1785 Loyalist community in New Brunswick). Fair Liberty’s Call also returns to the family-based themes she had explored in the 1980s. However, there are significant differences in the treatment of these circumstances in Fair Liberty’s Call, which arise from the concerns Pollock had been addressing in the intervening years. For example, Joan, the matriarch of the Roberts family, is thematically related to Martha from Egg and Eme from Getting it Straight: a middle-aged woman who, through grief and despair, has become mentally disordered, unable to reason and often uncertain of her location or the identity of others. As we might expect from Pollock’s previous work, Joan’s mental state stands as a touchstone for the disordered world of the play as a whole. And, as we also may have expected, the environmental dysfunction here has something to do with resistant relations with the past. In this case, however, the dramatic issue is not focused upon one individual cultivating a healthy perspective on history; rather, it is the concern of a whole community. So Joan’s predicament is much what we would see if we were to discover Eme, not secluded with her own thoughts beneath a grandstand, but among a fractious and confused family who had not yet foresworn the violent outlook which has caused her mental breakdown in the first place.
Joan’s husband, George, is former Bostonian loyalist who fought against the American Rebels, a violently-minded man who fought remains angry at the Rebels and embittered about being beholden in his adopted country to the plutocratic Committee of Fifty-Five Families. Joan and George lost both their sons in the War of Independence, but they still have two daughters, Annie and Eddie. The latter was born Emily, but has been dressing and living as a man since she took her dead brother’s name and place as a soldier at sixteen/ an honorary member of the Roberts family is Daniel Wilson, Annie’s fiancé and ex-corporal in the loyalist Legion. The other two loyalist character are Major Abijah Williams, representative of the local establishment, and Black Willie, an ex-slave and scout for the Legion, and Eddie’s loyal companion. Finally, there is a Major John Anderson, who eventually reveals him to be a vengeful Rebel.

All the characters are highly conscious of the need of establish correct relations with her past; but they are by no means in agreement about now these are to be constituted. The play begins with a series of interlaced speeches about the past. Pollock says of this scene, “They have a compelling need to tell; to tell before someone else tells; to correct a former mis-telling; to tell before they’re unable to tell, or prevented from telling.” (17)

Despite this competitiveness to establish their own narratives, they are sensible of the need to arrive at some kind of joint account of the past. To this end,
the loyalists of the Roberts household have devised a “Remembrance Ritual.” “Totems, souvenirs and trophies of war” (36) are dragged out to invoke the honorable struggles that gave the Roberts family its essentials identity. “Gotta fill the place up with things that speak of the past,” says Daniel. To which the Major responds: “Else how’s a man to know who he is” (37).

The impulse to affirm identify in this way appears to stem from a demand tacitly made by the land. The chorally shared first line of the play is: “you want to know where to put your eye so you can hear the heartbeat of the country comin’ into bein’ (19-20). But by then Pollock has already introduced the idea in her description of the initial setting:

A bare stage, the floor of which radiates in a dark-hued swirl of color, represents the “virgin” land. 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 (190).

The sense of incipient power in the land effectively demands that the past be divulged truthfully, that the menacing emptiness of place be dispelled by the attention to the collective history.

As with all tribal recollections of primordial struggles, the problem is that there is a selective bias at work in the memories of the participants. An exchange
between Annie and Anderson sums it up: “I notice you’ve got a powerful recollection of some things, and none at all for others,” “An accident of war” (43). But even among supposed allies there is no guarantee of agreement. While the ritual is underway, the exasperated Major yells at Daniel, “You’re not rememberin’ right!” (53) that is through the appropriate haze of veneration.

But the paramount source of dissent in the Remembrance Ritual arrives in the person of Major Anderson, the former Rebel who brings into this house his indictment of the Loyalists’ merciless slaughter of the Rebels, including Anderson’s fourteen-year old brother, at the battle of Waxhaws. Anderson’s plan is to hold the others hostage until the murderer of his brother is surrendered for execution.

In some respects, Andersons function within Sweet Liberty’s Call is similar to that of the Inspector in J.B. Priestley’s An Inspector Calls, or even the ghostly gunfighter in the Clint Eastwood western, High Plains Drifter. A stranger who, like an avenging angel heralding Judgment Day, arrives in an arrogant, corrupt and hypocritical environment to forcibly polarize differences and galvanize the search for truth among the inhabitants. Andersons’ siege quickly shows that the pieties regularly invoked by the Loyalists throughout the play are hollow shams. The vaunted commitment to courage and honor crumbles into craven self-preservation, each man tries, by turns, to shift the blame onto the shoulders of another or to offer
reasons why his personal value suggests that his life particularly should be spared. Or, more precisely; each of the white men reveals such despicable weakness. Pollock is careful to preserve the dignity of the one black man, Wullie, and Eddie, whose travesties keeps her among the men (indeed, she proves the most “manful” of the lot).

What is behind Pollock’s effort to discriminate between the behavior of those who are white men and those are not is, I suggest, less a matter of insisting upon essentialist differences in race or sex than of her being interested in finding out fresh ground upon which less violent and adversarial cultural alternatives might take root. Surely a new world is conceivable in which people would see the incongruity in the very idea of a ‘due process’ in condemning a man to death? And since those dominant in the established culture are male while, the founders of Pollock’s alternative culture are not.

In pursuing this notion of a new society, Fair Liberty’s Call drifts closer to times to the conventions of romance than those associate with the history play. Reconciling these two genres poses no little difficulty. For where the ethic of the history play (at least in Pollock’s hands) is founded upon the paramount of truthful remembrance, the ethic of romance is based on the hope of redemption, optimistic values having more to do with faith than with a ruthless scrutiny driving the search for historical truth. Where, after all, in examining the past, does are put one’s “eye
to hear the heartbeat of the country coming into being?” One is looking for “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”.

Pollock’s solution is to delicately juggle her depiction of the known facts of history so as to place them within conventions of romance that can accommodate real moral concerns. For example, taking her cue from the reciprocal moral transgression attached to both sides of the War of independence, Pollock uses a version of the mirror-plotting common to many romances in order to lift the siege in this play. Anderson’s single-minded determination to avenge his brother’s death is dissolved when he finds himself faced with Annie’s admission that she betrayed a loyalist spy into the hands of the Rebels to avenge her own brother’s death. Realistically, that this would suddenly end the hostility is no more ‘natural’ than that the ‘natural perspective’ embodied by Viola and Sebastian at the end of Twelfth Night should bring that play to a happy conclusion. Both devices are sleights of hand, using fortune’s symmetries to distract our attention from the past, turning it to new beginnings. Thus, Major Williams becomes a sort of vanquished blazon figure, leaving the Roberts home with a final threatening speech like Malvolio’s, thereby clearing the way of inauguration of a new world. Joan, in a moment reminiscent of Hermione’s resurrection and her reunion with her lost daughter, Perdita, begins to recover her life in the present, to see that Eddie is
indeed her daughter, Emily. “It’s a new world, Mama”, says Eddie, “you gotta look up close” (78).

Finally, pursuing the hope for a better world Pollock hinted at when she preserved Eddie and Wullie from degradation, the freed slave and emancipated woman declare they will remain together to start a new family. Meanwhile, Joan envisages a blessing from another alternative to patriarchal authority:

I feel my feet pressin’ flat against the surface of the soil now. I kneel reading’ the contours of the skull and listenin’ to the words spoke by the man with the missin’ jawhouse, 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 glades of trees and she hold out a bowl, she offers a bowl of earth [...]Eat, she says, swallow. And I do (79-80).

The new world being made herein, meant to transcend the antinomies and violence of the old, to begin new lives, having acknowledged and atoned for the errors of history.

To be sure, Pollock could be charged with including in a biased mythologizing of the past not much different from that she condemns the loyalist for perpetuating, of succumbing to the temptation of wishfully revising the past by putting something as improbable as the Eddie’s transvestism and union with Wullie into her play. But by this stage, Pollock had grown less interested in precisely reconstructing history than in exploring ways of reconciling her sense of
the mistakes of past with her project of encouraging ethical constructions for the future.

Pollock’s recent play, *Saucy Jack* (1983), was certainly approached in such a frame of mind. *Saucy Jack* treats a subject that has fascinated many writers, the mystery of the most famous serial killer in history, Jack, the Ripper. Yet, where most treatments of ‘Jack the Ripper’ focus on the questions of whom he was and why he committed the murders, Pollock argues that such questions are irrelevant. For her, the numb of the issue is that, “The women are killed because they can be killed with relative or complete impunity. It is done because it can be done. That reason is sufficient for those who undertake such actions.” (*Saucy Jack*, 5)

To be sure, that may be a thin theory of human nature, and it disregards the obvious fact that the vast majority of the population living in London in 1888, notwithstanding opportunity, did not choose to become serial murderers and indeed were horrified by the crimes. After all, that is precisely why Jack the Ripper becomes notorious still, the comment is a focused declaration of the political premises underlying this play. The character Kate might speak for Pollock when she sings ostensibly as a warning to Montague:

There’s no time to tell you how
He came to be a killer
But you should know as time will tell
That he’s society’s pillar
For he is not a butcher
Nor yet a foreign skipper
He is your own light-hearted friend
Yours truly, jack the Ripper (28).

In short, social implications, not the personal details of the man known as Jack the Ripper, are the issue here. Accordingly, notwithstanding any similarities between Saucy Jack and Pollock treatment of the late nineteenth-century’s next most legendary murderer in *Blood Relations*, the differences are significant.

In *Saucy Jack* and Pollock’s political thesis demands that Jack should not be alone, monstrous figure, but someone who operates with the assistance, or at least the connivance, of others; the murders must not be seen as social transgressions but, on the contrary, as acts which enjoy social support. Hence, it is left unclear just who was responsible for the actual murders, Eddy (Prince Albert Victor, grandson to Queen Victoria and heir to the throne) or Jem (James Stephen, friend and former tutor to the Prince, and the more forceful personality). Responsibility is thereby spread, and a further blurring of the guilt will follow. Jem’s plan is to displace suspicion for the murders onto their mutual acquaintance, Montague, by murdering him and planting evidence upon the body. However, the plan is not quite as straightforward as that, for he has also hired Kate, a “music hall entertainer and actor,” to enact each of the murdered prostitutes.
Jem’s motive of having the murders re-enacted is unclear, despite a comment of Pollock’s which we will come, in a moment. In part, the uncertainty arises because Jem has received a head injury sometime in the past which makes him frequently speak and behave in very peculiar ways. The play begins with a long, frighteningly irrational monologue which Jem delivers in the presence of Kate. Apart from its arousal of anxiety for Kate’s safety, the effect of the speech is to discourage us from expecting Jem’s subsequent behavior to have logical reasons attached to it. Accordingly, while Jem says that his object in having the murders re-enacted is to “save Eddy,” it is not at first apparent how this could be so, especially given that Jem is at least equally suspect. That element of sadistic nostalgia which prompts psychopaths to preserve souvenirs of their murders perhaps figures to some extent, yet this does not satisfy as a final explanation of Jem’s motivation, because there is no sign of the salacious glee we would expect in such a case.

Pollock raises the issue in her introductory note:

The end or objective or motivation for the re-enactment of the women’s deaths in the play is not to achieve the death of the women, but to achieve some other end or objective that relates to the relationship between the men. Love, loyalty and friendship are words the men use, but the actions through which such noble sentiments manifest themselves are the one of betrayal, duplicity and murder (5).
To be sure, they could hardly be out to “achieve the death of the women,” because the women are already dead. Yet Pollock’s point about the “objective that relates to the relationship between the men,” remains cryptic. The men are indeed utterly despicable, but this is little help. In what sense does their discreditable partnership motivate the re-enactment? The point is clarified a little further on, when Pollock declares:

I am less interested whether Jem, or Eddy, or some combination to them and possibly other, are indeed guilty of the murders than I am interested in the whys and ways Jem attempts to bind Eddy to him as well as to confirm or negate his fearful suspicions regarding his own role in the Ripper events. He’s caught in a terrible dilemma. If he is indeed guilty of the crimes, he is “Sane” for his clouded recall is founded on reality. If he is innocent of the crime, his memory and mind serving up false data and he is “insane” (5-6).

Thus the key to sanity, in Pollock’s formulation, is not whether one’s behavior is rational or psychotic, but whether one remembers accurately or not. This would be a rather remarkable assertion, where it is not that we have been prepared for it by the decisive role played by memory in virtually all of Pollock’s previous plays. Where Ibsen showed how the past could determine a character’s destiny, Pollock shows how the past determines one’s destiny and, hence, sanity. Jem wants the murders re-enacted because he seeks validation for certain version of the past. To be sure, at one level, he hopes Eddy can tell him who was actually
responsible for the murders; but the main emphasis leans upon the issue of whether Jem and Eddy will remain partners in the act of recollection.

Further light is shed by the style of the re-enactments. It is quickly apparent that the vignettes are not meant to be realistic, either in the sense of capturing what the murdered women might have actually said in the street, or in the sense of being likely versions of what might he devised by two murderous aristocrats and a music hall performer. For one thing, the writing is too poetical to be commensurate with either such project. For example, Kate ends her speech as Polly in this way:

Up and out and in, with the cry a slaughtered horse ringin’ in my ears, and the press a Buck Row markin’ me back-But hold-look – look at the sky, it’s glowin’, yet it is... there’s a wonderful fire down on the docks and its lightin’ up the heavens, oh I wish I could be there, see the flames feedin’ on the wood, reachin’ up over the water, the water and fire and wood, wish to could be cup be up close, right in the middle, surrounded by flames burnin’ in hell and floatin’ to heavn on a spire golden smoke (26).

Essentially, the speech is a stylized, poetic condensation of Polly’s whole character, the combination of stream-of-consciousness, catch phrases, fragments of autobiography and mental imagery quickly, deftly adumbrating a whole life a soul. The contrast between this and the corner-like forensic inventory initiated by Jem which immediately follows could not be starker for, in Kate’s speeches, the
important level of meaning lies not with mimetic but with symbolic and thematic concerns.

Plainly, then, the re-enactments in Saucy Jack have quite a different function from the re-enactments in Blood Relations, where the actress enters into the terms of a reality prescribed by Miss Lizzie so as to work through the sense of Lizzie’s real or imagined behavior. Miss Lizzie already knows what happened in the past; the re-enactment is intended to edify the Actress herself (and, of course, the audience).

The actress is Saucy Jack is far more autonomous. Because Jem does not himself know the extent of his and Eddy’s role in the murders, he could not be much of a coach to Kate; and he certainly has no interests in teaching his actress. Indeed, it is pointedly established that the prior contact between Jem and Kate has been minimal. She is never called Kate by the others; her name and occupation may be known only to us. Except when performing, she remains a silent, anonymous figure, seeming to occupy a different level of reality from that of the men.

The significance of maintaining Kate’s dramatic autonomy and of providing her with such evocative, stylistic rendering of the murdered women seems to be this: Kate is engaged in a sort of mortal competition with the men for the control of
the past. The contest is mortal not in the sense that anyone’s actual life is at stake (thought Montague’s is certainly endangered, and Kate’s may be). Dramatically speaking, what is most potently and stake is the inner lives of the possession of their own souls. The matter is related to Pollock’s recurrent theme of the role memory in protecting individual integrity against deterministic forces. Jem seeks validation for his dubious memories even at the risk of conclusively establishing his own and Eddy’s guilt. In Pollock’s dramatic world, the power of recollection bestows not only sanity but validity; for those whose memories prevail set the terms of sanity, determining who is sane or insane, and thus, in essence, which truth claims are valid.

Hence, Jem passionately wants to ‘re…. member’, as he frequently puts it, to reestablish the validity of his (and is class’) vision of the world by reassembling or remembering the dismembered fragments, as if with the dismemberment of the women’s bodies there has occurred a fundamental disintegration of objective truth itself. In the process, Kate grows stronger and more powerful through her vivid re-enactments of the souls of these murdered women. Pollock writes that through her performances Kate evolves

...from a silent, unknown, nameless figure […] to the only vital or potent figure or force in the play when the final blackout occurs. Her exploitation has not victimized her; it has empowered her. She is larger than herself at the end. [...] She lives. They die.”(6)
It is irrelevant to object that Kate would not be allowed to escape with her life were the men really the ruthless murderers they are meant to be. Pollock has created a confrontation between two versions of the past to pose the question of which is more valid and, because this trail unfolds within the dramatic imagination, the authority which determines the outcome of the confrontation is not that of a social class, or brute force, or even political office, but an authority of the imagination that determines which is more convincing which more compelling, which more truly vital. There is little doubt that, in such terms of the spirit, those like Jem and his cohorts are quite, quite dead.