Chapter V

Conclusion

The selected plays of Sharon Pollock taken for this study unveil the curtain to the Canadian way of life. The study also emphasizes that irrespective of environmental differences and climactic conditions, human prerogatives remain the same, the world over. It is proved that literature forms a great link in human life as it is a bonding factor which helps people identify themselves, by presenting similar experiences in dissimilar climactic and living conditions.

People seek different things for finding fulfillment in life. If their priorities are devoid of humanitarian disciplines then the world is at risk. This is because of the impending danger of breeding uncivilized citizens, who, caught in the mire of achieving devious ends, fail to recognize their responsibilities towards fellow human beings and their society. Sharon Pollock willingly takes responsibility for the incidents that have happened around her with a motive to usher in changes for the better. As a playwright, she writes with sincere involvement and commitment to society. Her penchant to draw from past real life incidents and familial situations is well known amongst Pollock's readers. This strategy is purposive of a self-analysis of a different nature, instead of analyzing one's own actions one is made to account for the actions of his fellow human beings. The playwright's focus is neither on the psychological analysis nor on the mental state of the protagonists. On the contrary, it is on the circumstantial aspect---what made the protagonist resort to take up a particular course of action?

It must be noted here that Pollock is not much concerned with the 'How' than on the 'What' of the concerned issue. What made the protagonist or the concerned actor perform such a deed? Pollock strategically manoeuvres the reader/spectator to accept her point of view which is to make him realize and accept his responsibility towards society. This,
Pollock believes will ultimately ring in a cycle of changes which would definitely benefit society and make the world, a better place to live in. It is indeed amazing to note that the reader/spectator, irrespective of his stand at the outset of the play, is drawn towards accepting the conviction of the playwright with the play's progress. If Pollock has the capacity to effect such a change amongst the viewers then it becomes clear that she will be capable of creating a ripple effect which would eventually bring in the necessary alterations in people's perspectives and actions to better the living conditions of man on this earth. Accomplishing a change would help acquire, not necessarily a victory for the playwright but it will help achieve meaningfulness in life for all those people who have experienced the necessity for a shift in the workings of a society.

It can thus safely be stated that Pollock has become an accomplished playwright. Her themes and techniques have unified to bring about the desired effects of the playwright's intent. In several plays, the plot development necessitates that novel dramatic techniques be adopted so as to help easy comprehension amongst the audience. Pollock's involvement in theatre related activities as instructor, administrator and dramaturge has helped her devise novel methods of projecting the play. These techniques are advantageous in multiple ways---they help in the development of the plot, enhance the quality of the play by providing new experiences to the audience, bring in the desired intent of the playwright by convincingly projecting the events.

Dramatic techniques are special in plays because they help achieve what myriad descriptive paragraphs accomplish in other genres. Pollock has adopted several technical devices to help smoothen the transformation from page to stage. Some of the techniques employed breathe in freshness into theatre by evoking mixed emotions in the spectator. They also further the cause of the playwright's purpose.
In *Walsh*, Pollock's employment of a 'Prologue' sets in the serious tone as was necessary for the general overtone of the play. Stage directions dictate that there should be no break in staging between the Prologue and Act One. This is probably to keep the continuity flowing. The incident at The Little Big Horn that had happened in 1876 and that which instigates the proceedings of the play is narrated by Harry. The Prologue primarily serves two purposes—audience learn of the background of the play. Secondly, the scene (which is from Walsh's point of view) projects the great mental stress that the incident had afflicted on him.

Heidi. J. Holder suggests that the significance of the Prologue is to bring the ultimate effect of a character who is “trapped in a night mare of helpless repetition” (111). The original version which had speeches to be read aloud was deleted by Pollock in the revised version for production in 1974. This shifted the emphasis to the defining action that entrapped Walsh and manifested the hidden brutality of the Canadian government's policies toward the Sioux (111).

In Act Two, when Walsh is highly dejected by the manipulative traits of his superiors and is in dire need of a companion to share his thoughts, Pollock employs a black out. When the lights come back, his wife, Mary is seen sitting on the stage, embroidering and Walsh is at a distance away from her. They read aloud the contents of the letters that they have exchanged over the years. This scene is particularly effective in that it projects the inner most desires of Walsh. He voices his opinions on corruptive government policies making the audience aware of his views and at the same time hinting that from that point on, things would get out of his control. The scene primarily signals the beginning of his downfall.

Jamie Portman credits the play “as an old-fashioned well-made play” (137). The traumatic and important event of the death of Sitting Bull is reported onstage by Clarence,
a recruit to the NWMP but “Pollock ensures that we hear about it in a way which is theatrically effective in the quality of poignancy and irredeemable loss which it evokes” (137). The voice-over readings which link the various scenes effectively enlighten the audience of the government proceedings and the US-Canadian relationships (137).

The huge task of depicting an incident which belongs to the distant past is simplified by the usage of various techniques. The prologue, the voice-over readings, and the reports of Harry, Louis and Clarence clarify any haziness with regard to the unfolding of the plot. The off-stage music scores indicate---through faint drums, singing and muted voices---the arrival of the approximately five-thousand odd Sioux. The lighting, silhouettes and the muffled sounds of people mourning indicate the arrival of the Nez Perces' who intend to cross the Canadian border into the US. Pollock's stage directions are spelt clear in order to lighten the task enacting scenes which involve a large number of people. Her clever delineation brings in the clarity to help understand her viewpoint and minimize the complications encircling such a stupendous task. The intended motive of drawing sympathy for Sitting Bull and the Aboriginals; of highlighting the exploitative nature of government machinations and of signalling the death of Walsh's self-respect is attained partly through the employment of powerful dialogues and partly through the techniques employed.

*The Komagata Maru Incident* opens with a 'Production Note' which clearly delineates that “the scenes flow together without blackouts and without regard to time and setting” (*KMI* 227). Pollock's intention must have been to bring about quick shifts in action. She also instructs the characters to “never leave the stage” (*KMI* 227). This again goes to imply that she does not want a relief between scenes. It is Holder's comment that “the manipulation of the sense of time in the play suggests the mental stress suffered by Walsh and Hopkinson; the structure often seems determined by their fears and anxieties” (117).
Pollock is careful in arranging an “open grill-like frame” (KMI 227) in order “to give both the impression of a cage, and the superstructure of a ship” (KMI 227). Both of these are necessary to set the tone of the play. Here again, she is ambitious in depicting an incident which happened in the Vancouver of 1914 and that which required her to have a ship in the background. Her deft employment of dramatic techniques help her tide over these difficulties with relative ease.

Moreover, the character of T.S, who represents The System, dons many roles and presides throughout the play, rings in the note that just as animals are ordered about with a cane in a circus, immigrants were ordered about without a qualm in the Vancouver of 1914. Pollock avoids confusion by making T.S, the Master of Ceremonies adopt roles of government officials; he comes to represent a system (i.e) the government. This focusses on the aspect that the common feature in most government officials is that they are devoid of any finer feelings for humanity. They are mere puppets who perform the duties assigned to them without delving into the morality of their causes. The following is the view presented by Diane Bessai in the Introduction to Blood Relations and Other Plays speaks of the theatrical reconstruction of the brutal incident that happened in 1892 and that which is referred to, (by Pollock in the 'setting' of the play) as the year of the “dream thesis.” She says, “structurally this is the most sophisticated of the plays, taking the form of a play-within-a-play in which, ten years after the acquittal, Lizzie's actress friend . . . acts out the crucial scenes under the stage directions of Lizzie herself” (Intro 9). Sharon Pollock is clear in her 'Production Note'--- “There is no necessity to “get people off” and “on” again for, with the exception of The Actress and Miss Lizzie (and Emma in the final scene), all characters are imaginary, and all actions in reality would be taking place between Miss Lizzie and The Actress in the dining room and parlour of her home” (BR 13). This explanation diffuses any confusion that might have otherwise seeped in when
Lizzie and the Actress switch to Bridget, (the Irish maid) and Lizzie's roles consequently. It also helps the audience follow the course of events from Lizzie's point of view which becomes very essential because Pollock's purpose is to evoke a sympathetic reconstruction and it helps preserve Pollock's marvellous ambiguity--- Did Lizzie actually kill her parents?--- which is partly responsible for the play's immense popularity.

The theatrical version of the events surrounding the brutal murders of Andrew J. Borden and his second wife, Abby in 1892 is retold in 1902 with a flash back structure. Pollock relates to Wallace in the interview, “Sharon Pollock,” that this play is purely “to preserve the ambiguity” (124). Her verdict “that all of us are capable of murder given the right situation” (124) comes to take a standing only because of the employment of adopting a role play which remains central to Pollock's dramatic technique. John H. Astington's opinion is that the production photographs remind one “that the costumes and settings are those of the intentions of Chekhov and of those formidable axe-men Ibsen and Strindberg” (263). He lays stress on the fact that “Lizzie's situation is of her time: today she would be gone” and that “Ghosts of the older dramatists haunt the play, whether or not Pollock was making conscious reference to them” (263). What remains commendable in Lizzie is that she emerges a survivor and this largely falls on the clever adoption of the theatrical devise of a play-within-a play. This is referred by Susan Stratton as the central device in the complex of non-naturalistic devices (dreams, game-playing, images) employed by Pollock (73).

The third play, Generations, taken for study dramatises the special relationship between man and the land on the prairies. It calls for the omniscient presence of the land in its design. Pollock has, therefore, to face the challenge of projecting the vastness of empty land on the stage. This is indeed a difficult task because theatre by its very nature cannot project a sweeping landscape as good as motion picture or TV drama. Pollock has
simply to compensate for this lapse by confining the action to the kitchen of the Nurlins’
and by presenting a portion of the extremely weathered “Old Place” against the backdrop
of the prairie which extends as far as the eye can see. In an interview with Robert Wallace
published in ‘The Work,’ Pollock has acknowledged that she had had a lot of problems
with the set for this play. She explains that she would have preferred to place her
characters in the field with the prairie going on forever. She relates that she had been
incapacitated due to the dearth of designers who shared her views.

However, what remains appreciable here is that Pollock has not been stalled by
the limitation of presenting such a theme in drama. She has to be credited with a
proportionate degree of success in her venture considering the fact that ‘Generations’ has
been performed in stages worldwide, outside the Canadian territory. It must also be
mentioned that the depiction of the outdoors come as a welcome relief to the audience,
for, most plays sticking to convenience, choose an indoor ambience for their setting.
Sounds of the car starting up and pulling away, flashing of lighting and rumbling of
thunder, the changing patterns of light and shadow (suggesting the passage of the day),
the roar of the fire and the fall of the rain compensate for the other set backs and present
the majesty of the prairie in a quaint manner.

The next play, One Tiger To A Hill, a fictional prison drama although inspired by
an actual historic event is in no sense meant to be taken as a docu-drama. In order to
achieve this end, Pollock makes the main characters, Everett Chalmers speak directly to
the audience at the outset and towards the closure of the play. The play is structured as a
memory play and it becomes Chalmers’ duty, as the narrator, to change the sensibilities of
the audience by completing the enactment of his memory (Zimmerman 71-72).

Pollock gives a detailed description of the setting in the published text. All
characters are to be on stage and those of them who are not in the prime scene are to
assume a soft freeze. The set had to have a grid of bars to be suggestive of confinement.

Pollock specifically instructs:

> The flow from scene to scene is most important. There is always some light on, for example, the warden’s office, when a scene is being played in the outer or inner office. The lighting transition from scene to scene is not that of a cross fade, for before light in the active scene is fading, light for the next scene is building, anticipating the scene. (OTH 75)

Pollock’s intention to include and culpably involve everyone present becomes clear. So much so that John Ferguson’s design for the 1990 production of the play included a few members of the audience who were seated on the stage. Pollock’s endeavour suggests that each and everyone in society should bear the responsibility for the actions and deeds of fellow human beings. She deftly employs theatrical devices to suit these purposes. A change in her instructions may lead to a change in the effect of these scenes on the audience. The deployment of such techniques definitely relate to the proposition of her ideals. Each detail is purposive of a cause. Chalmers’ final speech where he speaks directly to the audience is to inject some sense of responsibility in the audience and to infuse that theatre, as a derivative act, can supplant a change for the better.

Diane Bessai in her introduction to the play Whiskey Six Cadenza comments that “Sharon Pollock’s Whiskey Six Cadenza is the most elaborate in structure and stage design.” She continues:

> Her [Pollock’s] multiple setting allows for over-lapping action into discrete interiors and occasionally the street; through impressionistic scenic projections she also suggests the physical
environs of the town in a manner that reinforces the play’s literal as well as metaphoric meaning. (Intro ix)

Zimmerman also speaks of “the elaborate set which in the premiere involved mirrors, screen projection, and vague smoky images. The two primary acting areas---the Alberta Hotel lounge and the Farley kitchen--- are backed by the Crowsnest Pass landscape” (The Making 81). She quotes Bessai, when speaking of the beginning and ending of the play which has dance sequences and voice overs. This impressionistic interweaving of musical and visual images “compositely create a pattern of the ‘multiple realities’ that fatefully dominate the lives of the characters” (The Making 81). This goes to prove that, Pollock’s techniques, each serve a purpose.

Even Johnny’s memory recall in the final scenes is to juxtapose the past, present and future so as to project the ironies and tragedies. In the Playwright’s Note to the printed 1983 edition, Pollock specifies that the dance sequence, voice-overs the refracted and fragmented images reflect the production components of the Theatre Calgary premiere and that they are options which productions could consider. However, she emphasises that she thinks of them as “strong indicators of the play’s ambience and nothing more or less than that” (WSC 139). This clarifies the importance of the link between theatrical techniques and their corresponding impact on the audience.

*Doc* employs a strategy which traverses through multiple levels of dream, memory and reality. Therefore the structure becomes complex. Moreover, as a memory play it ranges widely through time and space rejecting chronology. Pollock endeavours to surmount the technical difficulties by facilitating greater freedom to the Production houses regarding characters’ exits and entrances on stage and by making Catherine enact different stages of her life. So, Katie, Catherine’s younger self also appears onstage and speaks across time to her older self. The changing perspective inherent in the same
personality, with the passage of time, gives play to exorcising the ghost of the past. An adolescent, Katie is observed through the perspective of the adult Catherine; the feminine perspective helps to rid the traumas of her childhood. The Playwrights Note explains clearly---“She [Catherine] is able to speak across time to her father, to her mother and to her younger self. CATHERINE and KATIE blend, sharing a sense of one entity….This should not be interpreted to mean that CATHERINE and KATIE share one mind or are always in accord. They are always in conflict (Doc 367). The kaleidoscope of memory, the refracted images and the fragmented scenes give the play a non-linear structure. Diane Bessai in “Sharon Pollock’s Women: A Study in Dramatic Process”, concludes thus:

This play does demonstrate Pollock’s ever increasing capacity to master the complexities of her stage craft as the means of widening her range of dramatic subjects…. At some future time Doc may well seem the mark of a transitional phase in Sharon Pollock’s oeuvre. (65)

The on stage exchange of ideas of the same person is effected to this end.

*Fair Liberty’s Call*, the next play for analysis calls for a 1785 New Brunswick setting. It opens with the note that “all sound is impressionistic, even surrealist, rather than realistic” (*FLC* 9). This sets the tone for this history play which relies heavily on stage setting and costumes to help visualize the wartimes. It also suggests the wealth and power of the empire. The costumes and war memorabilia relate Pollock’s reliance on metatheatrical devices to bust the Canadian myth of moral superiority and to relate to past betrayals and sufferings.

Pollock indicates in her stage directions that the space, a bare stage, the floor of which must radiate a dark-hued swirl of colour---“although this space appears empty and uncorrupted, it projects an aura of foreboding, a sense of the unseen” (*FLC* 9). Soon this “swirl of dark colours on the stage floor is gradually supplanted by dappled light evoking
a glade in a stand of hardwood trees with sunlight fitting through the leaves” (*FLC* 10). At the end of the play “the floor seems to glow with a dark rich grid swirl of colour as the lights are fading”. Anne Nothof in “Ironic Images: Sharon Pollock’s Stratford Productions” interprets Guy Sprung’s production of the play at Stratford Festival’s Third Stage in 1993, thus:

At the end of the production, when Anderson had abandoned his revenge and departed, Eddie and Wullie had decided to stay and make a place for themselves, and Joan had seen her imprint in the soil, the rich swirl of colour was again evident as the light faded and the colors of war and violence converged with those of hope and renewal. (25)

Thus, one sees the importance of employing various dramatic techniques to suit the purposes and intent of each play and playwright. A visual medium should be able to evoke contrasting emotions in the spectators and arouse in them passionate reactions. If this is achieved then the play could be commended with success. As Pollock has stated in an interview with Anne Nothof --- The power of metaphor and a shared cultural literacy make almost anything possible [on stage]. Theatre is at its most powerful when it is least literal” (179).

Summation:

Chapter I is the introductory chapter which gives an overview of Canadian Literature and projects its variety. Canada’s multiracial communities give its literature a very distinct flavour. The views and perspectives of the different races towards similar experiences account for its uniqueness. The rich tapestry is highlighted by the Canadian writers who have displayed an immaculate concern for racial prejudices and unjust discrimination. Sharon Pollock comes into focus in this genre, as her plays are laced with
the hope of bettering the living conditions of people in Canada. In this chapter Pollock is weighed against her contemporaries. This is to highlight that in Canada; the people of the global communities complement one and another rather than vie with one another for supremacy.

The selected plays of Sharon Pollock --- eight plays in all --- are briefly discussed so as to lay the foundation for further dissections in the forth coming chapters. Sharon Pollock’s intentions in selecting her themes are probed into and her purpose in resorting to theatre is projected.

The views of a few critics on Pollock and her works are quoted in order to establish that Pollock’s works have been widely acclaimed within the country of Canada as well as outside of its geographical boundaries. This again proves that Pollock’s ideologies bear significance not just within a country but across the globe. The exact quest of the dissertation is stated in the thesis statement--- Is a Pollock play an instrument of ethical investigation?

The title of the dissertation has been justified. The terms “social” and “conscientiousness” are defined in accordance with *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. The term “conscientiousness” suffuses a moral sense into the action whereas consciousness stops short with only creating awareness. This is precisely the reason for choosing the term “conscientiousness” rather than selecting the term “consciousness” which is by large evoked by most literary works. Sharon Pollock’s specialty lies in bringing in the element of right or wrong, and marks her off as a “committed playwright.” As Malcolm Page cites, she is indeed committed to the cause of bettering society. Man has arrived from a barbaric condition to a civilized position but it still remains that he should arrive at refinement of this civilization. Pollock’s plays infuse the need for this marked difference between civilization and refinement in civilization. The chapter also
delineates that her specialty lies in her subtlety as against blatant sermonizing. A few such conscientious writers of the past are brought to the fore. This is not to compare their status with Pollock’s but to project that Pollock’s contributions have substantiated the stance of prominent writers from other parts of the globe.

The concluding part of Chapter V gives the chapter divisions and the chapter titles. It proceeds to explain the chapter contents and briefly states the purpose of each chapter. Chapter II “Indelible Cicatrices” is devoted to plays with history as their background. Chapter III “Connotative Cruxes” involves family politics whereas Chapter IV “Sombre Musings” talks of the link between both these themes. Chapter IV is thus a fusion of history and family. All the three Chapters---Chapter II, Chapter III and IV---work towards establishing that when conscientiousness is evoked in people, the chances of incorporating changes for the better are strong and bright. Chapter V, “Conclusion” discusses Pollock’s presentational theatrical devices and cast that dramatic techniques further her cause of producing an effect on the audiences’ collective consciousness. It brings the dissertation to a cumulative culmination by establishing that Pollock’s plays combine elements of reform and entertainment which in turn establish that there is a delight in reading or viewing a Pollock play. This delight is and will be the reason for erasing petty differences and incorporating good changes in society.

Chapter II discusses the ineradicable marks left by the scorching incidents from the yesteryears as viewed by Sharon Pollock in her plays. This reconstruction of the past, the old that has been done with the purpose of remoulding and ushering righteousness in society has to be commended with a fair degree of success. This is because the plays discussed here, Walsh, the KMI and FLC establish that the bruises procured have left scars and these cicatrices are indelible. It is the playwright’s prerogative to arouse conscientiousness in the masses so that such incidents may not be repeated in the histories
of the world. The first nation citizens’ concern for fellow beings’ respect and well being is incredible and overwhelming.

Exploitation that had swayed the Canadian past has been highlighted in Walsh. The 1876, Little Big Horn incident during the Custer debacle has been relied upon by the playwright to create an awareness of the past and mainly to forestall the happening of such degenerating incidents in future. In KMI, again, by delving into the 1914, Vancouver-Komagata Maru Incident she has proven that exploitation by government officials has been imminent. William Hopkinson and T.S, the master of ceremonies endorse that selfish motives had camouflaged the true principles of democracy. The plays projects how the people who should have been protected by the government, are ironically exploited in order to satisfy the whimsical and unethical formulations of the government. The war times of New Brunswick in 1785 remains the background of FLC. Here, Pollock has established that irrespective of subjective opinions, exploitation had ruled the roost even within families. In the family of George Roberts, one is able to study the machinations of the human mind that, in connivance, resorts to eke benefits out of every situation without bearing on morality or duty. Thus, it comes to be proven how exploitation is a grim reality in these plays discussed; it also stands that if and when this undesirable aspect is relegated to the past then the chances for a better, fairer world would become bright.

The second theme---internal struggle---has been undertaken to project that such turmoils dictate the inner voice which is capable of creating or destroying conscientiousness in man. Major Walsh stands as the primary example in this. In his conflicting emotions between personal inclinations and outward pressures one can witness the mental torture inflicted in him. In the end, the destruction it causes is total and irredeemable. Such is the power of the inner struggle.
The split self of Major Hopkinson in *KMI* is another example that reiterates the importance of balancing. His inability to come to terms with the reality of his origin creates a void which ultimately destroys him. It erodes his peace and suppresses his wishes by suffocating him. The death that embraces him at the end therefore comes, not as a punishment but as a relief because it gives him the peace that he had much desired during his life time.

*FLC* throws light on Joan Roberts’ plight. In her, one is able to witness that the horrors of war supplant a struggle which requires great strength and will power to overcome. Hope is a redeeming factor which, towards the end helps in reconciling her to seek out the future with a positive outlook. It is the struggle that marks George Roberts as a failure. This is because he is unable to prioritise his needs and act with moral consciousness. His struggle to lead his family to a better condition fails as does his loyalty to remain a Loyalist. Both of these are due to his inability to strike a balance between his desires to amass wealth and his concern for his family’s well being. Thus, it stands that the inner struggles of mankind are a reality that veil the power to make or destroy man’s peace. A conscientiousness created will definitely help avert mishaps in future because relating to situations makes people wary.

The third theme, racism, proclaims that colour consciousness lies at the root of most problems faced by humanity. The treatment of the Sioux in *Walsh* is plainly based on colour. Racist attitudes, here, destroy codes of human conduct and strike at the base of value system. There is indeed no justice in discriminating purely on the basis of the colour of the skin. It is outrageous to note that even the exemplary behaviour of the Indians, (Sioux) in the camps fail to procure for them their rightful demands. It is difficult to understand why a clan should be ordered about in its own homeland.
The *KMI* has racism etched on it --- the pathos of the possible Sikh immigrants stranded on the streamer for prolonged period claims the support of readers and audience alike. The violation of a human right is formulated with such profundity that the audience response (to stand up for a cause and adopt a remedy) is immediate. Wullie presents the strong issue of racism in *KMI*. His bondage and indenture talk of the atrocities of slavery. Eddie epitomizes justice by helping Wullie relieve himself from the manipulated bondage of Frank Taylor. The positive approaches of both these people help one realize that propelling right attitudes can dispel undesirable components and help live life with zest and in peace.

The fourth theme, humanitarian concerns, proclaims that ethical concerns enhance the creation of a congenial atmosphere for spreading good will amongst people. It also establishes that this aspect helps smoothen the defects in society. Humaneness brings in the hope for betterment as it is this trait that is special to human beings and that which differentiates man from beast. In *Walsh*, one evidences that Clarence, although only a recruit rises in stature when placed in comparison with Major Walsh. This is purely due to the presence of the humanist trait in him. Walsh’s spirit is stifled in his confusion between supporting the Sioux and remaining dutiful whereas Clarence’s “good heart” (*Walsh* 163) wins him accolades.

The *KMI* scans the emotions of the people involved in the incident and thus acquires a laudable depth. The character of “a woman”, the Sikh immigrant who embodies the sufferings of the three hundred odd prospective immigrants bespeaks for the dire necessity of humanitarian concerns. Over and above the rules and regulations formulated by governments, it should be understood that unless human actions are laced with humanitarian concerns progress of mankind would be impeded. The plight of the hungry, imprisoned immigrants in the ship is indeed heart rendering. Pollock’s notion to
supplant the need to ring in a moral touch finds a voice through Evy who although a 'whore' (*KMI* 252) stands up for “honest work” (*KMI* 252).

*FLC* cites incidents from war times to support the views that humanist attitudes nurture life whereas inhumane attitudes multiply barbaric acts. The play exemplifies Annie and Eddie as personifications of humanity as their demeanour marks that goodness can be tapped and that global values can be stamped on earth. Annie acts with maturity and her words, powerfully tinged with wisdom make the audience realize that evil can beget only evil. Eddie’s conviction to restore justice to the afflicted marks her as a champion for the human cause. Both these siblings prove that goodness can be elicited by displaying humanitarian concerns because when one claims responsibility for human action then morality will come to be manifested.

The fifth theme, conformation to a set of a specified code of ethics, ensures that harmonious existence can be made possible. It is this code of ethics that upholds social values which goes to prove that it is necessary to create conscientiousness in this respect too. The lack of ethics in the prevalent system which is deciphered by Harry and Clarence marks them as champion of betterment because they are able to perceive what officials higher in the hierarchy are unable to. Colonel Macleod and Walsh act without a moral qualm in their dealings with Sitting Bull. However it should be accepted that in this case, the government, and its formulations are responsible for propagating the lack of ethics rather than the individuals who carry out the orders as part of duties. This stands true even in the case of TS, in *KMI*. His haughtiness and moral superiority flout the rules of the code of good set of ethics. A totalitarian theory is adopted and there is no concern for judicial administration. However, it becomes difficult to blame the individual when the entire judicial system is at fault. The play definitely promotes moral consciousness in depicting the fault prevalent in society. The plays present that conscientious workers are
made to compromise in order to satisfy the ulterior motives of the government. This
disregard for ethics becomes very common during war times---FLC projects that
disturbance proliferates uncouth behaviour. Values are subjugated because survival of the
fittest becomes the dictum. The episode of the “Tarleton’s Quarter” proves that ethical
behaviour is an empty expression when revenge is in the air. The soldier’s immorality and
Frank Taylor’s disregard for an ethical code display that an ethical bind would have
checked disreputable acts.

Sharon Pollock’s cause to social justice remains dominant in all these themes.
Pollock’s bold venture to explore the ignominious is done mainly to create a change for
the better. Her motive to kindle the emotions of the reader/audience by evoking through
her interpretations of personal obligations in Walsh, KMI and FLC relate to social causes.
The plight of the afflicted people evokes sympathy and creates a desire to uphold human
rights. If Pollock had merely documented events of the past, then the impact would not
have been so telling. However, the emotions of the people involved in these historical
incidents create an impact and compel the audience to act based on the dictates of
conscientiousness and nobility.

As the title suggests, chapter III is implicative that familial setups affect
ameliorations of society. A healthy family nurtures respectable citizens who in turn
promote societal well being. The three plays of Pollock---Generations, Blood Relations
and Doc revolve around issues of home and identity. They project that human welfare is
largely dependent on the peace and calm of a normal family life. When in an abnormal
family an individual’s peace is disturbed then it reverberates and destroys societal
betterment. This forms the crux of these plays. Pollock’s assertion that complexities in
families invariably lead to communal disintegration can be comprehended through the
lives of the characters involved in these plays. The themes discussed are connotative of the importance of stability in the basic setup of a society (i.e.) family.

Generation gap is two faceted in that it affords benefits as well as disturbances on society based on its differing perspectives. In both conditions, however, Pollock relates to the sensitivities of the people highlighting the pressing issues of concern. In Generations, the crisis of the water supply clearly indicates the differences in the perceptions of the three generations in the Nurlins’ family. Young Eddy’s attitude towards his family homestead glaringly projects that compromises are not possible where priorities are concerned. Alternatively there is bonding too, Old Eddy and David mark that similarities abound in their love for the prairies. Ms Lizzie Borden’s revolutionary attitude does not require any explanation. It strongly lays down that resoluteness is the founding stone for emotional and economical independence. Pollock’s dexterity in diverting the audience’s sympathy towards Lizzie, irrespective of her crime, is amazing.

Doc rampanty documents that reconciliation between father and daughter has been made possible in the case of Catherine only because of her confrontation with him. The meeting helps remove cobwebs of doubt and shows the path to connect with her inner self as well as to patch things with her father. Thus, it is seen how generation gap can have a rippling effect on societal issues and it stands proven that it promotes the cause of creating awareness amidst people.

Women’s liberation is the next theme that suggests the importance of women’s status in society. There can be no progress in a society which impedes women-emancipation. Pollock’s women characters in these three plays are strong and uphold that absence of this establishment directly deflect principles of refinement. Bonnie of Generations, champions for the cause of self-preservation. She creates a consciousness that the joy derived from being able to do things that are close to one’s heart remains
unmatched. Margaret’s stand that there is pleasure in sacrifice for family cannot be
overruled either. Social togetherness is propelled in both cases, what needs to be
understood is that each individual has different aspirations and these should not be stifled
by male chauvinism. Lizzie Borden’s transformation in Blood Relations is an amazing
journey. This relates that dangers are imminent when individual preferences are ridiculed.
The seriousness of the issue can be comprehended by the drastic step that is said to have
been taken in order to free her from the fetters that had cuffed her.

Bob and Catherine promote the cause of the female gender in Doc. One is able to
perceive in Bob, the sorrow of denial and in Catherine, the triumph of an exultant spirit.
Pollock is able to cite the necessity of projecting women oriented issues in relation to
society by presenting a contrast in Bob and Catherine. Pollock celebrates the emancipated
female self. Her plays raise important feminists issues to endorse that women’s
empowerment creates a conscientiousness that is socially implicative suggesting that a
change should be adopted where necessary, to promote the prosperity of women.

Revenge is another theme that reiterates the differences between self-
complacency and acrimony in relation to society. One is possessed by the urge to seek
revenge when he is frustrated, the degree and extent of his turmoil defines his actions. In
such a scenario, it is seen that this quotient is capable of accelerating a social
conscientiousness that seeks to bring in the sprightliness that is so essential for life.

The “Alternative action” suggested in Generations is an example that peace is
dissipated when aggressive actions result. One is able to understand that in most cases
exercise of revenge does not bring satisfaction or contentment to the propeller of these
actions as was initially intended. Instead a deep remorse sets in and destroys the mental
peace of the dissipater. David is a case in point. On the other hand the entire sacrifice of
Alfred fetches him contentment. This evidently advices the rejection of the desires to seek
revenge if one seeks to live a moral life. Lizzie’s instability and extreme self-respect force her to undertake a brutal act which is more a consequential attribute to safeguard her interests rather than revenge. The instance of Lizzie evokes the consciousness that there is an urgent need for preserving human rights to enable people to live sociably.

The bitterness in Bob of *Doc* makes it excruciatingly difficult for her to live a contended life. Her decision to seek revenge finds expression in killing the self which in its weakness had curtailed her self-expression. Catherine projects another facet to the revenge motif because although she sets out to confront her father for all his misgivings, in the end reconciliation sets in. Catherine overcomes the urge to retaliate and basks in positive overtones by letting the revenge motif consume itself. Thus, the element of truth that depicts the degeneration of human nobility is projected in the revenge motif which is more destructive than constructive.

Affinity to persons and materialistic objects cements relationships and promotes commendable actions. But, when this emotion becomes an excessive obsession, it threatens man’s very existence by breeding malice and discontentment. In *Generations* where affinity to the prairie land rules, the power exuded by affinity is evidenced. Old Eddy’s tie with the land and David’s love for his homestead extol that an affinity can create positive energies in man and persuade him to act towards social welfare. However, in *Blood Relations* the case of Lizzie’s affinity concedes a strong and dark undercurrent. Its capacity to infect heinous thoughts and exact illicit results proclaims its heady quality. Pollock’s intent, here, is on the situational element and not on morality. This is exactly the reason for weaving into the Lizzie-story an element of doubt. Lizzie’s brutality is not confirmed so the audience’s sympathies come to lie with Lizzie.

In *Doc*, Catherine’s attachment to her father and family helps her to seek out solutions and emerge free of scathes. Eventually Catherine is brought to reconcile.
However, this would not have been possible but for her bond with her dad. Thus the quality, in its varying degrees is as much the cause for arousing pity as for creating overwhelms amidst the audience. Whatever be the case, it indeed arouses the consciousness of the spectator to acknowledge its power by swaying the minds of people.

The last theme, guilt, goes to prove that a guilty conscience impedes self-improvement and that it is also ironically capable of instilling a change for the better. In both cases guilt emerges the purger which cleanses society by creating a conscientiousness to combat the wrongs done. Alfred’s guilt in not following the dictates of his heart resolves itself in his empathy to his own son, Young Eddy. David’s stand in resolving to remain a farmer hinders the onset of guilt and tightens his grip over his love for his family homestead. Guilt strikes a chord, through the emotions of the characters’ behaviour with the audience because people are able to relate to the situations described in the play. Lizzie’s guilt has elicited various responses from people who have read or witnessed *Blood Relations*. However Pollock’s version is intriguing as it shrouds Lizzie’s fault by remaining ambiguous. Pollock’s involvement of everyone associated with the crime to feel guilty and her citation that everyone involved should take responsibility for creating such a compelling situation jolts the audience into realising the moral seriousness of such issues.

Catherine as Katie (in *Doc*) is engulfed by guilt, holding herself responsible for her parents’ failure in marriage. Although the adult Catherine continues to carry this wound within her; catastrophe is averted in her decision to disassociate herself from the guilty conscience. The Doc’s guilt in neglecting his family is removed in considering the higher cause of his commitment to society through his binding duty.

Pollock’s family plays discussed above, are therefore connotative of delineating that family as the basic set up of society, is responsible for moulding respectful citizens.
People are free to form independent opinions and act according to their convictions. It is Pollock’s endeavour to influence the theatre-goers and make them act with moral consciousness so as to form a Utopian society.

Melancholic apprehensions and societal imperfections that dominate OT and WSC highlight the need for betterment and form the focal point in the chapter entitled ‘Somber Musings’. Pollock involves the reader/audience in real life situations and through the day-to-day activities of the common man encourages them to consider the concepts projected with seriousness and involvement. Pollock’s is primarily concerned with stimulating the revolutionary senses of the people in order to preserve public concern. Each of these has the foreboding mist of bleakness shrouding them. Each play culminates after raising questions pertaining to the nature of truth (OT) and the cause for the future of humanity (WSC). OT’s idealistic commitment to social justice and WSC concern for the individual’s welfare in a society make both plays revolve around the pivot of existential issues and uphold the need for a rightful change. These plays project that peace is destroyed where conscientiousness is absent.

Pollock’s notion that creating awareness would usher an element of moral seriousness finds expression through the theme of freedom. This is the feature which man enjoys the most during his life time. Freedom of choice is the sustaining factor of liveliness in life, the curbing of which onsets dangerous results. OT being a hostage taking play highlights the importance of this concept through the prisoner Tommy Paul, the negotiator Ev Chalmers and the re-hab officer Dede Walker. The play votes that the independent streak present in every man be respected. In crystallising man’s inherent need to stay unfettered, it focuses that man should live a lawful life. Likewise in WSC the central issue --- free choice rests squarely on the fact that the right to choose at free will has direct bearings on an individual’s make up. Johnny Farley and Mr. Big champion the
cause of free choice. Although their routes to achieve this end are entirely different, each
denotes that moral overtones are to be necessarily adopted. The absence of this would
steer the actions of man in the wrong direction of deterioration. Freedom has to be used
with caution and forethought because societal well being rests heavily on the extent of an
individual’s exercise of freedom.

The depiction of the atrocities of the times is another route that Pollock takes to
further the importance of societal upkeep. As a responsible writer with a purposive
message, Pollock instigates the reader audience to be duty bound and responsible. Dede
Walker’s dejection, Everett Chalmers’ disillusionment, Tommy Paul’s frustration relate to
the corrupt functioning of the maximum security prison in OT. In WSC Johnny Farley’s
repugnance to the collieries, Will’s fate and Mama Farley’s alarm relate the atrocities of
coal mining in the 1920’s. Both plays explicitly document Pollock’s concern for the
afflicted Desjardins’ death which requires a probe; Tommy Paul needs counselling; Mr.
Big’s bootlegging and illegal lifting of the prohibition has to be checked; and the general
working conditions in the mines have to be improved. In all these factors injustices have
been perpetrated. Pollock’s intention of highlighting a few facets of the prevalent
atrocities pertaining to the times ascertains that these threaten the smooth functioning of a
society. The atrocious incidents project the need for judicious reasoning which alone can
pave the way for living an honourable life.

The next theme revolves around the susceptibility of human nature to develop
complications in relationships. Complication and conflicts thrive in a world peopled with
heterogeneity and threaten communal living. Lack of empathy for fellow human beings
can be cited as the main reason for this discord. Pollock projects a genuine concern in her
plays and these accomplish the importance of moral issues in society. In OT subjective
views rule the functioning of the prison, there is no smothering of justice in any of the
prison activities and therefore there arises a cause for concern on humanitarian issues.

Dede Walker and Frank Soholuk have divided opinions, so do Walker and Tommy Paul. Lena Benz and Ev Chalmers also have different views on negotiating. The government officials too have discrepancies in their opinions.

In WSC Mr. Big’s outlook is totally different from Leah’s and Bill the Brit’s. Johnny’s priorities too differ from that of most others in Blairmore. Mama George and Mrs. Farley are poles apart in their behaviour and convictions. Thus it becomes clear that complications revolve around people’s attitudes. These are petty concerns yet these have the power to ignite serious issues. Relief is sure to occur only if the causative factors are targeted so that society is benefited at large.

Analyzing concepts projected in these two plays works towards reforming society. Social ideas are propagated when human impulses and motivations are dissected. Analysis thus becomes an important process in evolving good changes. The formative influence of incarcerations in OT and social concepts of bootlegging and coal mining in WSC reveal that the morality of an issue needs to be weighed before its implementation. Both plays relate Pollock’s reputation as a social, political and historical playwright. Ev Chalmers’ stand in negotiating a deal smothered with justice can be highly commended as do the intentions of Dede Walker. Chalmers’ monologue bespeaks his deep sense of commitment and responsibility. In WSC, Dolly’s philosophy that the present should not be considered in isolation and that it should always be linked to the past holds a lot of weight age. Especially because it depicts that only when past deeds are prudently analysed, peace can prevail. Analysing thus serves to make people ponder over the consequences of their actions. Ev Chalmers, Mr. Big, Mrs. Farley, and Dolly serve to sow a grain of conscientiousness in the multitudes which is indeed the first step towards progress in a society.
Social responsibility forms the last theme that reiterates the unison of the writer’s responsibility along with the readers’ interpretation. Socially responsible writers produce equally responsible citizens. The multiple responses evoked by the writer extol the extent of his social responsibility. So it becomes necessary that a writer conditions his work to suit the requirements of his times. *OT* pulsates with the cause of social responsiveness by depicting that its contents are not fictitious concoctions but have occurred in the past. Pollock’s optimism in achieving commendable results is substantially evident in the play. Ev Chalmers epitomizes the need for the onset of positive changes. In him, one can perceive the role of every commoner in upholding justice and eradicating the dehumanizing traits prevalent in modern societies.

*WSC* brings to light the social issues of prohibition and temperance that were predominant of its times. The grim situation of the miners was then combated by the solace of the beer parlour and the escapism provided by the values of the church. In drawing people’s attention to these, Pollock wants to project that conditioning is essential to repress the proliferation of immoral and illegal activities. Where social welfare is concerned no stone should be left unturned, seems to be the playwright’s dictum in order to usher in humanitarian principles. Focusing and reflecting on societal issues will always remain trendy as the nobility in man gains refinement with the progression of time. Thus Pollock’s thematic preoccupations indefinitely suggest moral changes. Her works are ruled by this objective and at the end of a Pollock play the spectators undoubtedly emerge sensitized. This is indeed a good beginning for welcoming good reforms in society.

Brian Brennen in “The Prairie Provinces” concedes that “Pollock to a great extent, epitomizes the western spirit of pioneering determination that one finds in theatre as in other aspects of prairie life” (164). He comments that her switch over from being an actress to becoming a playwright was “because she felt there were stories to be told about
Canada’s history and nobody was dramatizing them”. He relates that her national success helped further her cause of providing an opportunity for other emerging writers to develop an association with major professional theatre in southern Alberta.

Cynthia Zimmerman likewise lavishes her praise on Pollock for her habit of writing plays based on historical subjects. “The choice of a historical subject”, according to her, “can be seen as part of a nationalist wish to re-discover and re-present our shared past” (The Making 65). She proceeds to quote Robert Kroetsch who in his “Essay, Open Letter” had endorsed that Pollock does not simply repeat what was found documented but creates, modifies and augments (The Making 65). Zimmerman strongly endorses that “from the start, Pollock shows herself to be a writer strongly committed to social comment” and, as the success of her plays demonstrates, society is able to accept her “way of saying the world should be different” (The Making 68) and probably she is right.

Pollock is deeply concerned with the angle of vision conceived in understanding an issue. She says in an interview recorded in “The Work: Conversations with English-Canadian Playwrights”:

I feel that good work should transcend whatever you’re basing it on…. As I was doing research for Walsh, I had to admit that everything is so highly subjective, that the newspapers, for example, are full of lies. I read diaries of the day from commissioners who were traveling in the States drawing up the Sioux treaties that would place them in different places on the same day even though there were other accounts that put them together.

You quickly begin to realize how relative truth is. (119)

It is Pollock’s view that as a Canadian, a commoner should share a character’s doom in a play based on a historical fact (Whittaker 139). Likewise the spectator needs to
relate to Walsh and Hopkinson, so that they can refrain from repeating the atrocities committed. The strength of her plays’ appeal has been proven by numerous productions and their merits acknowledged in the form of government recognitions in awards.

Pollock’s sense of self incorporates a certain degree of self-worth in her as well as in her characters. Her passion towards self-preservation expresses itself in her independent streak wherein she struggles to endorse that one needs to take control of one’s life in a positive way. She perseveres to endorse its importance through Bob Catherine and Lizzie. The inherent need of man to manifest his individuality thus remains a prime focus in her plays if people are able to exert their individualities, and ascertain their self-worth, they would definitely live fulfilling lives. When this happens, society remains benefited. When people suffer psychological disorders they wallow in self-pity and this invariably leads to instability. In this unhealthy feeling, anti-social elements are cocooned. So it will definitely bring in good motives if one is enabled to live life based on moral dictums nurtured to fulfill the soul. “From a deep, personal core come Sharon Pollock’s sustained preoccupation with justice, authority, betrayal, self-sacrifice, the marginalised, the silenced, and the high price of both surrender and resistance. These are personal issues which have a wide application” states Zimmerman (“Anatomising” 3).

A Pollock play does not rely on the portrayal of happiness or romance instead it banks on propelling right attitudes towards manifesting idealism. “For Pollock, writing the play is a kind of quest … alive to the exertions of individual conscience, alert to the change of moral meaning, and raising questions rather than giving answers, Pollock’s plays are always about something important” (Zimmerman “Anatomising” 11-12).

Pollock has affirmed that her efforts in drawing upon historical events were towards expanding her own consciousness as well as the audiences’. Her concern for society is no more evident than in her statement --- “when a society no longer has those
kinds of people who realize what it is they’re doing and still do it willingly, that society is doomed” (Wallace 117). As far as her feminist attitude is concerned, Pollock is wary of commenting. In an interview given in 1981, she says that she does not know if it would be good for her to have polarized ideas about women. “Women are people” she rightfully declares (Wallace 118). If this verdict is accepted in society then there would not arise an occasion for quelling inequalities and its ensuing encumbrances. Apparently, her perspectives had changed since because when discussing feminism with Rita Much towards the close of the 1980’s Pollock declares that she considers it important to be regarded as a feminist playwright. Her stand is that a woman with any sense of justice cannot but be a feminist. The truth of this concept is easy to comprehend. It is disheartening to learn that her artistic perceptions and choices had been considered to have been dictated by her femaleness. However, her vigour and ability to “power dress” (Rudakoff 214) which is to wear the female equivalent of a man’s three-piece suit (a symbol of authority in society) in order to exert her authority is highly appreciable.

The following dialogue from her interview with Rita Much culminates any argument pertaining to Pollock’s employment of theatre as a weapon to wipe society of its ills:

RM. Do you still believe that theatre can be an instrument of social reform?

SP. Oh yes. Of course, nothing happens overnight. But I believe that if it’s not a critical eye that’s being brought to bear on the subject, it’s a wank-off, that you’re not doing what you should do. (211)

Pollock’s opinion on theatre as discussed in an interview with Sherrill Grace in 2002 dismisses theatre as an anachronism and relates that its importance lies in its “live-ness” and “now”:
Theatre isn’t a piece of tape, or film, or a little bunch of dots being electronically shipped through the air. It is a living, human action, and our participation in a specific theatre event over a finite period of time, in a concrete external and infinite external space --- the experience made up of like and unlike on many levels, with all of us together --- constitutes theatre’s inherent value (32).

Here, she also speaks of the importance of homogeneity among the audience. “It’s the emerging communal connection of spectacle and totality of theatre that’s valuable”, she says endorsing that numbers “reveal the legitimacy of a, or the, theatre’s claim to a role in society’s unfolding” (32).

Pollock has been successful in carefully manoeuvring the impact and appeal of the theatre not only to enthral but also invigorate and empower the audience to react in positive tones to her plays which act as catalysts. Their values and meaning are certainly not lost on the audience; they bask in the miraculous nature of the “now” of the theatre.

The thread of social conscientiousness thus bears bright hues and intricately patterns the fabric of a Pollock play, lending richness to the tapestry. Just as a tapestry without any pattern becomes ordinary, Pollock’s plays too would have been relegated to mediocrity but for the suffusion of socially relevant themes. The themes culled out and discussed in the various chapters of the dissertation help to acknowledge that Sharon Pollock’s plays are clearly laced with deep concern for humanity. Her interviews also substantiate these views. Chetan Bhagat reverberates with concern for society in his Revolution 2020 stating through Raghav that every individual should do his bit for improving its standards: “We all have to do our bit. For change we need a revolution. A
real revolution can only happen when people ask themselves --- what is my sacrifice?”
(Bhagat 264)

It stands established that Pollock has done her bit towards society’s uplift. It is now left to the reader to pose the question to himself and consider the seriousness of his role in improving the condition of society and thereby bettering the cause of humanity. When a change begins to set in an individual it accumulates an accelerating motion and comes to include groups and societies to encompass the entire world. Such is the power of conscientiousness.

Scope for further study:

Sharon Pollock’s passion for theatre is in-exhaustive and therefore lends itself for multiple interpretations. Ambiguous truth and complex realities dominate her plays. These could be expanded in further studies. Moreover, this dissertation’s focus is mainly on her published stage plays. Radio and Television writing is another genre which offers plenty of scope to the modern researcher, considering the reach of the FM bands in India. Multitasking, which has become the trend of the day, would in turn, help establish the policies of the writer. Pollock’s last three plays--- Moving Pictures, End Dream and Angel’s Trumpet could be definitely considered for study. In these plays lives of individual women have been focused therefore a feministic interpretation would lend a new dimension. On the other hand Pollock’s contemporaries like David Freeman, Linda Griffiths, Margaret Hollingsworth, and George F. Walker could also be researched. Another prominent area would be a comparative study between Judith Thompson and Sharon Pollock as both playwrights unite in their exuberant exploration of social and emotional issues in a variety of dramatic styles.
References


