BLOOD RELATIONS
by Sharon Pollock
Directed by Jennette White
March 21 to April 6
Frederic Wood Theatre
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Blood Relations : a Theatre at UBC companion guide /

A Companion Guide to

BLOOD RELATIONS

by Sharon Pollock

Directed by Jennette White

March 21 to April 6
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Greetings from the Head

Director’s Notes

I first read Blood Relations in a Canadian theatre history course during my undergraduate degree. I was intrigued by the play because even though more than one hundred years had passed, the story line – a small town spinster accused of killing her father and stepmother who, although acquitted, becomes a pariah of her community – continues to this day to be a mystery that captures the imaginations of all who hear or read about it. The play, however, extends beyond the classic ‘murder mystery’ and in Sharon Pollock’s masterful hands the story becomes an investigation of the purity of emotion and motivation in any kind of extreme action, which gives you insight into very clouded thoughts of your own, emotions you feel but can’t handle. You gain insight because someone has gone the whole way” (Kerr). In her book Making Theatre: A Life of Sharon Pollock, Sherrill Grace quotes Pollock as saying that Blood Relations is one of her most personal plays. Pollock, the intelligent daughter of a ‘scion of her community’ was ‘abandoned’ by her mother who, early on, was emotionally absent due to alcoholism and eventually wholly absent due to suicide. Pollock then married young, only to find herself ensnared in a relationship with an abusive man. I believe the reason this play stays current is because we all know of someone, or indeed we have experienced ourselves, the kind of emotional turmoil Lizzie feels as she has to live ‘within the mirror’, reflecting only what the world wishes to see and little by little losing any sense of self. Pollock uses the audience to lead the audience on a voyeuristic journey, breaking through that mirror in order to gain access to the fractured psyche of the accused and in turn, to encourage us to delve deeply into our own consciousness.

I am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to explore this piece of theatre under the gentle and skillful guidance of Stephen Mally. I am wholeheartedly indebted to the extremely talented actors, designers, faculty and staff of this department without whom this production would not exist. I am obliged to Sherrill Grace for generously sharing her time and knowledge regarding the play and Ms. Pollock. I consider these past two years at UBC to be one of the greatest gifts I have ever received in my life. Thank you all for joining us this evening.

Robert Gardiner
Professor and Acting Head
Department of Theatre and Film
The University of British Columbia

Excerpt from: Making Theatre: A Life of Sharon Pollock

From the chapter “Murder She Said: Creating Blood Relations” pp. 184-185. Reprinted with permission from the author and publisher, Talonbooks.

III: THE MIRROR TALK OF BLOOD RELATIONS

Over the past twenty-five years, from its publication to the present, there have been many scholarly interpretations of Blood Relations. Like the differing productions, these interpretations demonstrate one thing above all others: this play sustains multiple readings and will survive any theoretical approach applied to it. During the 1980s and 1990s a more than a dozen major studies appeared in which some scholars argued for contextual, thematic, feminist, Freudian or Lacanian readings, while others stressed the play’s metaphorical examination of history, truth, and identity, analyzed for its clever manipulation of narrative, explored its episodic father/daughter relationship or, in one instance, shifted the episodic reading from the Bordens to the Chalmers (Pollock’s family) to suggest that the playwright was dramatizing her personal struggle with gender and her family’s failure to provide positive role models for female identity. As different as they are, all these readings make interesting points about the play and help me to better understand why it is so haunting and powerful in performance. Like production styles, critical theories change with the times, what is fashionable in one decade may well be passé in another. But if a work of art is good, it will rise above such fashions by saying something important about the human condition and saying it well, regardless of how it is interpreted. Blood Relations is such a work.

On certain things, the scholars agree: the play, whether read or watched, is about the nature of truth, reality, personal identity, and memory, and it asks how we are able to know what happened in the past, despite the apparent irreconcilability of facts. It is also, unmistakably, about what Rosalind Kerr aptly called “the excluded daughter’s revenge” (2007). Whatever else it may be, Blood Relations is Lizzie’s story, and in telling it Sharon was constrained by the historical record: that Miss Libeth Andrew Borden was a real person who lived in Fall River and had a sister called Emma; that her father and stepmother were hacked to death; and that Lizzie was charged with their murders, but acquitted. What’s more, no approach to the play can overlook its intricate structure. Regardless of interpretive emphasis, the double role-playing and the time scheme presented through the play-within-the-play, what Sharon calls the “dream thesis” is central to any consideration of the play’s meaning. Once Miss Lizzie and the Actress begin their game of role exchange and shift from the present into the memories, reconstruction, re-telling and re-emanating of life in that house on Second Street in August 1892, readers or spectators are obliged to ask themselves, do we now know what may be, did we ever know who they really are? The play’s focus on why we are so anxious to know, and what such insistent probing of the past can possibly tell us about the present or about who we are as women and as human beings.

I have borrowed the term “mirror talk” from Susanna Igan, and I give prominence to this term here because it embraces theatre and performance. The core of Egan’s concept is elegantly simple. She maintains that storytelling is central to the shaping and communicating of identity, and she goes on to say that it must be intersubjective if it is to work. In other words, a story must be heard and acknowledged, as well as told, if it is to give meaning to human experience. Therefore, it takes at least two for a story to exist and this pair must enjoy a high degree of mutual recognition of their similarities and differences if their communication is to be effective. Inevitably then, such a relationship will be grounded in a dialogue that might start something like this:

Lizzie: Lizzie.
What?
... Did you?
Did I what?
You never tell me anything.
I tell you everything.
Oh yes, I tell you my most personal things about myself, my thoughts, my dreams, my—
But never that one thing. ... (Blood Relations, Collected Works, 1, 345)

However, Egan’s mirror talk is more than dialogue. Her mirror metaphor reminds us that such talking exists within a context of looking, which immediately invokes, for me, a stage on which characters speak, interact, and watch each other. To the best of my knowledge, Sharon has never described herself as a biographer, but in my reading of her work, the dream thesis of the play is that we know ourselves by imagining and telling stories about who we are, what we have done, who enacts her own story, and who apparently murders Mr. and Mrs. Borden. Autobiography takes over biography.

In my reading of Blood Relations, the dream thesis of the play is that we know ourselves by imagining and telling stories about who we are, what we have
experienced, and therefore, what we do. However, for the autobiographical story to produce meaning or be effective, the autobiographer must have a sympathetic, participating listener, another person who, as a mirror self, collaborates in the story-telling; this listener, validates what is being told by giving him – or herself to the storyteller and sharing in, re-telling, re-performing the narrative, by, in effect, playing biographer to the autobiographer. If one partner to this mirror talk paints the background, the other creates the figures in that ground, and the figure/ground relationship is intimate, mutually supportive, indivisible. The more traumatic the memories in the autobiographical story, the greater the need for a shared landscape of memory through which the narrative can find its legitimizing context and make sense. So, for example, when Lizzy’s father tells her to talk sensibly (“Lizzie, you talk foolish!” 166), he is denying her story; he cannot hear or recognize any narrative landscape for what she is struggling to say. By contrast the Actress can hear the story and can see the psychological sense of Lizzy’s life. To capture this complex understanding of identity, or what Eakin calls “making selves,” Sharon employs a memory-mirror (a play-within-a-memory-play) form with a subtle yet strong through-line of visual imagery that braids metaphors of mirrors with images of masks and eyes.

This imagery is most concentrated in the carousel speech, which marks the mid-point and fulcrum of the play and provides the most intense moment of mirror talk. It is here that we are able to see the horror of a petrified existence, where an individual’s sense of self is denied and thus destroyed, because for the dreamer trapped in that nightmare, there is no one to acknowledge “you.” By telling the Actress/Lizzy this dream story, Miss Lizzy/Bridget gives expression to the pain of that self-less condition and by being seen and heard, and through the Actress’s own horror, acknowledged. Miss Lizzy releases herself from its obliterating void. She gives the horror and the release to the Actress, who can act upon what she has seen and heard when she goes on to play out her story of Lizzy Borden in 1892. However, mirror talk, within the memory play is only one side of the mirror. On the other side, in 1901, Miss Lizzy and the Actress are still partners, secret sharers; they are still collaborating in the autobiographical, with a further significant addition: Emma. The 1901 mirror is a three-way glass, one of those mirrors with a central panel and two side panels that includes Emma, the third, living player in the 1901 frame narrative. Just as the Actress resembles Lizzie, and as Lizzie says, sister Emma, so Lizzy takes after Emma, who stands in for the lost and the murdered mothers. Emma cannot be ignored because she has been there all along in Lizzy’s life, watching, encouraging, questioning, and provoking, in fact, raising Lizzy. Instead of being displaced by the Actress in her sister’s affection and the mirror story, Emma has been forced to look into the mirror and recognize her role in the narrative landscape. When Blood Relations ends, these three interrelated women are all on stage, all connected by the story, all mirroring each other, but the relations do not stop there. With the final words, gestures, and looking from the stage, the audience is seen and forced to see itself; we too are figures in the landscape.

Sherrill Grace
Professor of English
The University of British Columbia

Sharon Pollock

Biography and Career Achievements
1936 Born Mary Sharon Clamer in Fredericton, New Brunswick.
1971 Writes first play, A Compulsory Option, and wins the Alberta Culture playwriting competition. The premiere showing is produced by the New Play Centre in Vancouver (now Playwrights Theatre Centre).
1976 Writes play, My Name is Lizzie. The premiere showing is produced at Douglas College in Surrey, BC.
1977-79 Serves as Playwright in Residence at Alberta Theatre Projects, Calgary
1977-80 Leads Playwrights Colony at Raiff Centre for the Arts.
1980 Rewrites and remakes play, My Name is Lizzie, as Blood Relations, which becomes one of her most produced and awarded plays.
1985 Wins Governor General’s Award for Drama for Blood Relations.
1986-82 Serves as Playwright in Residence at the National Arts Centre, Ottawa.
1986 Wins Governor General’s Literary Award for Drama for play, Dec. The main character “E” is based on her biological father, real-life physician and MLA Everett Clamhers.
1986 UBC Theatre produces Blood Relations in the Frederic Wood Theatre, directed by Charles Siegel.
1987 Awarded Honorary Degree by the University of New Brunswick.
1999 Awarded the Harry and Martha Cohen Award for contributions to Calgary Theatre.
2004 Awarded Honorary Degree by the University of Calgary.
2006 Featured as one of the artists in Theatre 100: Celebrating 100 Theatre Practitioners Over 100 Years, a book published by Alberta Playwrights Network.
2012 Appointed Officer of the Order of Canada, by His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston; a gathering of theatre scholars and professionals celebrate Pollock’s 75th birthday with Sharon Pollock: First Woman of Canadian Theatre, at the University of Calgary from March 28-April 2, 2012.
2013 Theatre at UBC produces, for the second time, Blood Relations.

To this day, the playwright remains active in her own writing and within the Canadian theatre community.

A Selected Production History of Blood Relations
This is UBC’s second production of Blood Relations. The first one was 27 years ago, shortly after the play had won the first Governor General’s Award for English Language Drama in 1981. Blood Relations had had extensive productions across the country through the 1980s: at the National Arts Centre, Theatre Calgary and Tarragon Theatre in 1981; in Montreal and St. Johns in 1982; Vancouver at the Arts Club in 1989 as well as Victoria, and in New York City. In 1986 it was produced in Australia and England; the next year a French translation Liens de sang was produced in Quebec City. The play was then also produced in Japan in 1987; in New Brunswick in 1988 and at the Grand Theatre in London in 1989 (Grace 194). The most recent major production was at the Shaw Festival in 2005, which, according to Leonard Connolly, is considered a key production for the company: “Blood Relations sold nearly 26,000 tickets… And for the first time at the Shaw Festival the story was being told not just by a woman in a play, but in a play by a woman, directed by a woman.”

A Note on this Text
This is the premiere of a recent revision of the play, with slight changes to the endings of Act One and Two (Wasserman 271).

Works Cited:

www.canadiantheatre.com
www.playwrightsguild.ca
www.sharonpollock.ca
In 1920, fourteen years after her association with Lizzie Borden ended, O’Neil wrote an essay titled “The Unloved Woman on the Stage” for Theatre Magazine. In it, she explains her approach to performing “the woman crucified by the unseen, the conventional traditions.” Her perception of these women characters may have been informed by her relationship with Lizzie Borden:

> In the course of events that engulf the heart of any woman who is an alert rebel of her sex (and what modern woman is not), there are all sorts of difficulties that no one understands but herself... [S]ome day the storm that has been brewing in her silent, patient soul, bursts, uproots the commonplace things in her life, and leaves a barren waste about her – but – only for a time. (516)

Although O’Neil was always careful not to brand herself as a “New Woman” who wanted the vote (Jones 88), in her essay she articulates the oppression of familial life for women as a “domestic convenience, which has held so many unloved women in the biting chains of their imprisoned souls” (516).

O’Neil married at the age of 42 to her former British costar, Alfred Hickman, whom she called, “the dearest best of pals and collaborators” (Johnson 100). She eventually worked in vaudeville and when she died in 1965, her association with Lizzie Borden was not mentioned in her obituary (Cavenaugh 303), although now, the rumor of a possible homosexual relationship between the two women is the most notable aspect of O’Neil’s career.

Works Cited:


**BLOOD RELATIONS**

by Sharon Pollock

Directed by Jennette White

CAST

Georgia Beatty
Emma Borden
Mercedes de la Zenda
Actress/Lizzie

Joel Garner
Harry
Kenton Klassen
Andrew Borden

Matt Reznik
Dr. Patrick

PRODUCTION

Shelby Bushell
Stage Manager

Diane Chu, Nolida Hutton, Amelia Ross
Assistant Stage Managers

Cathy Tagnak Rexford
Dramaturge

Zickey Zhao
Lighting Operator

Kate DeLorme
Sound Operator

Danielle Dar Juan
Media Operator

Austin Wang, Yilin Yan
Properties Running Crew

Mert Alatan, Helena Chen, Shota Ebi, Hanaka Ebi, Jimmy Feng
Set Running Crew

Michelle B. Milton, Nandy Ononbat
Dressers

Kiara Lawson, Helena Chen
Makeup Assistants

Gabrielle Holt, Nisreen Noorizadeh-Kollou
Set Design Assistants

Courtney Shields
Miss Lizzie/Bridget

Naomi Vogt
Abby Borden

Dianne Chu, John Dickinson, Jimmy Feng, Patrick Fouchard, Andres Gilbert, Liyan Liu, Renee Liu, Hibiki Morishita, Zickey Zhao
Lighting Crew

Lorraine West
Scenic Artist

Mert Alatan, Annahis Basmadjian, Hanaka Ebi, Keenan Johnston, Molly Lai, Alex Mitchell, Nandivijaya Ononbat, Diana Sepulveda Navarre, Daniel Tessy
Scenic Painters

Lynn Burton
Head of Props

Erik Mei, Alex Mitchell, Hibiki Morishita, Kiki Ohira, Elliott Squire, Austin Wang
Props Builders

Kirsten McGhie
Head of Costumes

Stephanie Kong
Lead Stitcher

Gabrielle Holt
Milliner/Stitcher

Nicole Baistow, Laura Fukimoto, Kiki Ohira, Jeffrey Tittiger
Stitchers

FACULTY ADVISORS

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Selena Couture, Eury Chang
Companion Guide Editors

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Arts Club Theatre
Vancouver Opera Props
UBC School of Music Opera Ensemble

Jennifer Austin, Olivia Bogoualow, Joylyn Secunda, Harvey Loeffler Vanderwoude
Children’s Chant Voice Recording

Patrons should be aware that herbal cigarettes and a pipe will be used as props during tonight’s performance.
Clayton Brown – Prop Master / Scale Designer

Clayton is a second year BFA student who has previously played a technical role in the production teams, designers, directors, stage managers, and cast members that have brought these shows and Allied Relations to life. Thank you for supporting live theatre.

Shelley Bushell – Stage Manager

Shelley is in her fifty fourth double major studying Theatre Design and Production and English Literature. Favorite stage management credits include Theatre at UBC’s The Duchess AKA Wallis Simpson, A Night in Marrakesh and Much Ado About Nothing. In her free time Shelley enjoys spending time with her horse, her two cats, and her family.

John S. Dickenson – Original / Music and Violin

John is a fourth year BFA student in the Design and Production Program. He has been studying music since the age of 6, but has only recently turned his skills to composing for theatre. Most recent credits include his composition work for Blues Brothers UBC, his student orchestral composition work for his article of theatre, and his songwriting for the band he is currently part of.

Joel Granet – Harry

Joel is in his final year of the BFA Acting Program. He would like to thank Jamie and the cast and crew of Blood Relations for the fun, but also for the incredible guidance and hard work of the mentors at UBC these past two years; it has been a time of self discovery and growth for him as a performer. Joel would like to thank the department and theatre faculty for their unconditional support and for inspiring him to follow his dreams.

Cathy Taggatt Rayford – Drummer

Cathy is an Alaskan-born, organic-food-cookin’, music-loving, music appreciator from Anchorage. She would also like to thank her fellow classmates and faculty for making those past three years so much fun at UBC. SWAT says thank you just as well, and I love that.

Georgia Beaty – Executive Director

Georgia is extremely grateful to the cast, crew, friends, and family for supporting her throughout the past two years; it has been a time of self discovery and growth for her. Georgia would like to thank the department and theatre faculty for their unconditional support and for inspiring her to follow her dreams.

John Klassen – Assistant Director

Keton is truly happy to work with such a marvelous group during his last year in the BFA Design Program. Past design credits include Fiddler on the Roof at UBC, musicals, and student theatre productions. Past stage credits include assistant stage manager for the play Much Ado About Nothing as well as his first year adult novel, The Corpse, a Crime Story, due to be published in 2017. She is grateful for Jermont, Tom, and the amazing opportunity to be a part of this production.

Matt Rzewik – Dr. Patrick

This is Kerto’s final show with Theatre at UBC. Portraying E.C. White in The Pillowman was a wonderful experience. Kerto would like to extend a special thank you to the cast, crew and theatre community for their unconditional support and for inspiring him to follow his dreams.

Naomi Vogt – Abby Borden

Naomi is thrilled to finish her intermediate year of the BFA Acting Program as part of the Blood Relations cast. Her favourite theatre credits include: Macbeth (UBC), The Play of Jove (UBC), Growlithe (Music Theatre), Head of the Class (Kingston Musical Theatre), and Sweeney Todd (Theatre at UBC). Naomi thanks every one of the amazing actors who were a part of this production.

Elliott Squires – Sound Designer

Elliott is delighted to have worked with such a marvelous group during his last year in the BFA Design Program. Past sound design credits include Our Country’s Good (UBC Player’s Club), Much Ado About Nothing and Bluey by the Sea (United Downtown Theatre). He would like to thank the cast, crew, and faculty for their unconditional support and for inspiring him to follow his dreams.

Sean Zechner – Lighting Designer

Scott Zechner – Sound Design

Scott is in his fourth year of the BFA Design and Production Program and has truly enjoyed working on what he hopes is a new musical sound design. Previous design sounds include sound for The Duchess AKA Wallis Simpson and Two MERCHANTS, Lighting for Kinsey in Flux and the Russian Bacchus (Theatre at UBC), as well as Technical Direction for this year’s UBC Players Club Festival Dionysia. Next up for him is Lighting Design for the musical Anastasia (Eppendorf).

Visit the Blood Relations show site to see our designers’ sketches, sound clips and other behind the scenes features: http://www.theatre.ubc.ca/blood_relations/index.html

From the UBC Archives

From Director Charles Segal’s “A Note On The Play” in the 1986 program:

Playwright Sharon Pollock has taken these pieces of the life of Lizzie Borden and fashioned them into a highly dramatic play. By starting ten years after the murders, she is able to set different time frame realities reverberating in a way that keeps building the theatrical energy of the piece. It is sophisticated theatre. On one level, the play presents a convincing solution to the “unsolved” mystery. At the same time, the play examines the destructiveness of a society that insists on locking women into powerless positions. Perhaps most powerfully, it is the story of one woman trying to resolve the burden of her own personal guilt (2).

From Jerry Wiesnamer’s “A Note on the Author” in the 1986 program:

For fifteen years, in a career that has brought her to the forefront of Canadian theatre, Pollock has consistently focused her dramatic lens on the evils and women in the name of Necessity, the betrayers they walk in order to preserve the status quo, and the resulting carnage. Using multiple levels of chronology and perspective she examines the lives of those victimized by the Realpolitik of families or government or those, like Lizzie Borden, who finally refuse to be victims... [Blood Relations] is the play that epitomizes the passionate, vividly theatrical “creative criticism” which is Sharon Pollock’s distinctive gift to the Canadian stage (6).

www.elliottsquire.com
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Directed by Stephen Heatley
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By Jon Jory (adapted from the novel by Jane Austen)
Directed by Lois Anderson
Frederic Wood Theatre
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The Seagull
By Anton Chekhov, Translated by Peter Gill
Directed by Kathleen Duborg
Telus Studio Theatre
January 23 to February 8, 2014

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by Annabel Soutar
Co-produced with the
PuSh International Performing Arts Festival
Frederic Wood Theatre
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matinées Friday Jan. 24 and Saturday, Jan. 25

Ubu Roi
By Alfred Jarry, Translated by Barbara Wright
Directed by Ryan Gladstone
Frederic Wood Theatre
March 20 to April 5, 2014