Ordinary Lives: Extraordinary Narratives.
The Transformation of Character and Theme in the Fiction of Carol Shields.

A Thesis

presented to the

Department of English

Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts

by

Rebecca O'Neill ©

March 1997

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I acknowledge with sadness that my parents,

for whom I will be forever young, are not able to read this.

I dedicate this work to them.

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Abstract

The primary objective of this thesis is to examine the ways in which the ordinary lives that Carol Shields describes in her fiction are transformed into extraordinary narratives. I will use three of Shields' novels as anchor texts—The Stone Diaries Happenstance and Mary Swann—in the sense that I will focus closely on these novels in my close textual analysis and draw from them my arguments about Shields fiction. Yet, the ideas and arguments presented here have not been based on these novels alone as the fuller context of Shields' work —her other novels Small Ceremonies and Various Miracles as well as her poetry and short stories — have informed my opinions, as has my wider critical reading. Also, I have been assisted greatly by the opportunity to meet and interview Shields herself in Winnipeg during February 1996.

In order to be able to meet my primary objective successfully, I have divided discussion into four chapters. In the first I will consider the ways in which Shields' fiction is underscored by visual politics which challenge power relations in her texts and necessitate the inclusion of photographs, letters and other graphics, as part of the narratives. These visual components disturb the narrative and provide visual counter-narratives without destroying the original voice so multiple layers are formed. The effect of these visual disturbances is to bring the dynamics of reading into focus as the reader begins to "read" the narrative thread presented in the visual inclusions as well as the narrative threads that are presented as written text.

The challenges to traditional power relations that I identify that Shields' makes in her fiction are continued in the second chapter. Here there will be a concentration on Shields' narrative constructs and an attempt to come to an understanding of the exact nature of her works' narratological features as Shields experiments with new voices and new ways of telling. I will attempt to identify the exact voices that can be seen to exist in the polyphony of voices that her novels create and sustain.

The third chapter will identify the gender dynamics at work in Shields' fiction through the ways in which she depicts relationships between men and women, the dynamics of same sex friendships and also the ways in which familial relationships are affected by gender . Also, I will examine the ways in which Shields foregrounds a parallel male and female experience in an attempt to draw the sexes together on common ground through shared experience rather than forcing them apart with the threat of irreconcilable differences.

The final chapter will examine in close detail the way in which Shields' narratives can be seen to explode generic expectation by presenting a collage of disparate parts drawn from many disciplines, such as, art, psychology, medicine, literature and (auto) biography. This chapter primarily concentrates on (auto) biography as Shields makes huge leaps forward in manipulating this recognisable form for the benefit of ordinary voices that have been silenced for too long. Also, (auto) biography is Shields' favourite theme in her work and she returns to it frequently.

Ultimately, Shields' fiction aims to take the stigma away from the ordinary and commonplace aspects of life and bring a new respect and understanding to them. This thesis attempts to outline the ways in which she achieves this goal and is able to transform ordinary lives into extraordinary narratives.

Introduction

"Who isn't ordinary?
I always say, we all are, or none of us is." (Shields, Personal Interview 6)

This thesis is concerned with understanding the ways in which the ordinary lives that Carol Shields describes are transformed into extraordinary narratives. The term 'ordinary' needs some underpinning as it will be referred to throughout the whole thesis and, as the above quote demonstrates, it is a term that Shields uses. Though the term appears wildly unspecific, it has been frequently used in various responses to Shields' fiction. I use the term in this thesis in a positive sense, as the quote above indicates, to suggest a common experience between people rather than to concentrate on the terms frequent, yet, detrimental association with mundanity and valueless experience.

Critics have been quick to recognise the ordinariness of Shields' subject matter, yet few have had much succinct success at defining exactly what the essence of her ordinariness is. Generally, however, the ordinariness is rightly viewed as a positive aspect in her work which forms a strength in the fiction. This opinion is seen in Chris Johnson's appraisal of her plays. He feels there is a strong correlation between the extent to which the audience can self-identify[1] with the portrayal and articulation of ordinariness, and the ease with which they can accept her literary innovations: "In performance, the plays thrive on a strong sense of familiarity; an audience of 'ordinary people' owns the material in a way that encourages them to accept the absence of a linear plot as well as quirky leaps in style and scale" (Johnson 161).

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[1] self identify : my suggestion here is that the audience does not just recognise the ordinariness of what is going on but forms an intimate understanding of the situation by drawing from their own personal experience.

Further, Abby Werlock acknowledges the vast array of ordinary characters and situations that Shields' fiction incorporates. Werlock feels it is Shields' sensitivity towards her fictional creations that makes them successful: "Almost immediately Carol Shields' style commands our attention and invites our admiration for her fresh and original imagery and metaphor, her wry humour, her refusal to descend into pathos and her consistent respect for individual human beings, the 'ordinary' as well as the intellectual person" (Werlock 133). Werlock recognises, too, that Shields' respect also takes her work into areas of hardship and pain: "Her works contain plenty of examples of misunderstanding, bigotry, misogyny. But they also contain reaffirming moments when we suddenly see our commonality" (Werlock 140). I will attempt to bring a more cohesive understanding of the ordinariness in Shields' work and how Shields seeks to find universal truths which break down divisions between her characters as, regardless of their individual situations, they are able to come to similar understandings of their own experiences.

In a provocative contrast to those critics who approve of Shields' work with the ordinary is Barbara Amiel, whose attitudes towards Shields' characters, and indeed her whole fictional landscape, are scathing. Though Amiel herself is perhaps more of a social commentator than a literary critic, I feel her reaction is of value her in pointing up the challenge that Shields is mounting in her use of ordinariness in her fiction. Amiel feels that Shields makes an error in presenting such ordinary discourses so prominently in her fiction. The result, for Amiel, is that there is an unbalancing of the overall work. Amiel feels that there is a miscalculation in which Shields mistakes "the commonplace perceptions of uninteresting people for a perception of the human condition itself" (qtd. in Williamson 108). Clearly, Amiel makes an immense value judgement about the validity of the ordinary voice, point of view and way of life. Amiel's concern for a more accurate balance in texts extends to her wider, perhaps phobic fear for the future of fiction. She sees contemporary literature in a perilous position, threatened by the expression of the commonplace and the familiar: ". . . ordinary people will be the undoing of contemporary literature. . . " (qtd. in Williamson 108).

Shields takes for her subject none other than what has surrounded her, from domesticity to the insularity of academia, to the angst of loneliness. The ordinariness that I seek to define is one that suggests a tone of low-key familiarity and the absence of high drama. What may seem conventionally dull and uninteresting is given a valuable place in Shields' fiction. This foregrounding of ordinary life alters the power dynamic that is popularly used to evaluate credibility, as it has none of the trappings of high culture. Thus, that Shields chooses to write about a more ordinary set of characters whose lives may seem too dull for attention ,has the effect of giving an authentic quality to her fictional sketches of ordinary situations. Due to the scarcity of recent narratives concerned with issues of life in an ordinary context, Shields' work takes an original and confrontational stance, articulating that which has been overlooked, undervalued and ridiculed. Though this stance may have much to recommend it as a feminist examination, in the sense that it is seeking to retrieve those voices which have been overlooked and unheard, Shields' fictional agenda is not bound solely by a feminist remit.

This thesis is not suggesting that every reader will be able to, or even want to, identify with the protagonists that Shields creates. It has to be acknowledged, also, that a part of Shields' ordinariness consists of her choice of "safe" characters who are not overtly controversial or radical. Yet, it is her fictional attention to these potentially faceless millions, as individuals, that charges some of the transformation processes at work. What will be suggested is that Shields re-evaluates the ordinary sphere of life and does not ignore or sensationalise it. Rather, Shields draws a credible representation of the ordinary lives with which she is concerned. Much of her work endorses this re-evaluation, from the canonisation of a northern Ontario poet in Mary Swann, to the development of a housewife's quilting skill in Happenstance. The poems and quilts of these two ordinary women, though both very different in form, are not dismissed, but are seen as central representations of ordinary voice and creativity. There are many other textual examples in which Shields directly addresses the fundamental issue of the credibility of an ordinary voice which will be examined in full.

I have coined the term "multi-versioning" to reflect the complex construction of Shields' extraordinary narratives. The term is intended to describe the result of Shields' at fictional reality, in which she approaches single fictional occurrences from multiple perspectives, without prioritising the various accounts that occur. The reader can be presented with the differing interpretations of three or four characters of one single occurrence. The single perspective is presented alongside several others which, I believe, creates a denser image of reality. I will argue that it is this aspect of multi-versioning which is pivotal in transforming the singular ordinary narrative threads into extraordinary narratives. In short, the term is designed to describe the fictional endeavour to represent the possible complexities of life and its communication on many levels at once.

The epitaph in The Stone Diaries is taken from "The Grandmother Cycle" by Judith Downing and may be seen to invoke something of Shields' own endeavour to transform ordinary characters and themes into extraordinary narratives. The woman in the epitaph is never quite able to represent herself or articulate herself adequately and yet, due to the various shades and shadows of light her life takes on monumental significance:

> nothing she did
> or said
>
> was quite
> what she meant
>
> but her life
> could still be called a monument
>
> shaped in a slant
> of available light. . .

Metaphorically then, this study will be focusing on the different slants on ordinary life that are provided in Shields' novels and will examine the varying shades of light that can provide alternative meaning and context in the creation of new fictional monuments.

Chapter One

Tricks with the Eyes: The Visual Politics of Carol Shields.

> those tricks that artists use in visual media, for example . . . use to
> enchant the eye, to seduce by encouraging the flat plane of the canvas
> to run off with a third dimension. (Schnitzer 28)

Shields' visual politics are one of the ways in which she transforms her ordinary characters and themes into extraordinary narratives. In this chapter, I will provide a detailed account of the tricks that can be seen to make up the visual politics of Carol Shields. My discussion will concentrate on the visual, defined as that which interrupts the eye of the reader by presenting visual challenges to pages of similar shaped text. I will identify that which creates a visual disturbance in this smoothness and causes the reader to pause and contemplate an image rather than just taking in words wholesale. The visual is constructed for the reader either with words arranged differently, or with images such as photographs or pictures. My title for this chapter coincides rhetorically with an article written by Deborah Schnitzer in Prairie Fire called "Tricks: Artful Photographs and Letters in Carol Shield's The Stone Diaries and Anita Brookner's Hotel du Lac." There will be reference made to this article in this chapter and also reference to several interviews with Carol Shields, including my own.

For the purposes of this chapter, a standard definition of a novel will be invoked. This hypothetical novel is one which systematically follows the fictional guidelines as demonstrated by the realist genre. Specifically, this hypothetical novel is a text whose success depends entirely on the reader to suspend his/her disbelief. Thus the reader is led, virtually unquestioningly, through the pages of story and event which are bound together by a trustworthy narrator. In interview with Majorie Anderson, Shields describes the effect that this type of writing novel has on her: "I know it was a kind of novel that I just crawled into and happily stayed as long as I could" (Shields, Interview 145). What is important here, is to establish the visual interruptions to this kind of relaxed and unselfconscious reading and to identify the new visual dynamic which creates disturbance to the reader's eye and mind.

The opening of The Stone Diaries creates a specific visual disturbance which blurs the genre divisions between fiction and biography. The reader is certain that he/she is encountering fiction, yet the inclusion of an extensive family tree (a visual interruption) challenges this. Visually, the time scale brings the action flush with the lived times of the reader. The family tree implies an historical novel with a scientific accuracy of long-standing, a plotting of real lives, deaths and relationships. Later, in the novel numerous photographs challenge the reader's eye also. The reader is not transported to a land of fantasy [2] with elaborate word descriptions of landscape or character, but is given more tangible visual evidences of reality. The photographs, clearly visual, connect the factual family tree with images of the people involved. The images represent real events that are now in the past but continue to exist as photographs. Liz Stanley notes the medium of photography means that when a person looks at a photograph an historical truth is communicated: ". . . the appeal of photographs . . . is that they provide us with a history made visible (seemingly so), an almost tangible autobiography" (51). It is important to note the warning, then, that what is presented in a photographic image does not necessarily function as a one-dimensional recording of fact but is something far more problematic. Linda Hutcheon and Susan Sontag, in their works, have emphasised the fallibility of photographs in providing an incontrovertible truth, as the onlooker unconsciously transcribes their own narrative onto the image and, as such obliterates any notion of a factual truth.

---

[2] *fantasy*: where the reader must create for him/herself the landscape of the text.

There is importance, then, in the prominent positioning of the family tree before the novel begins and the photographs are important, too, not least because the photographic image itself holds a privileged position in contemporary thinking. Photographs have the power to "multi-dimension" (forwards and backwards) the frozen moment, creating, at least, a three-dimensional moment. By using these visual disturbances, Shields' attempts to blur the dividing lines between genres and acknowledges that these devices are "gesturing towards biography" (Shields, Personal Interview 18). Thus the photographs and the family tree function as evidence of an historical reality, as the following quote suggests, yet, it is only a construction of history: "Shields' photographs masquerade as fact in the fiction, a masquerade we repeatedly confer with during our experience of the story." (Schnitzer 29). The use of the photographs is effective at bridging the gap between fact and fiction; some readers have been so determined to connect the random photographs with reality that they have imagined them to be photographs of Shields and her family. Significantly, she is not there. It is merely a trick of the eye. In an interview with Joan Thomas, Shields notes her intentions for these photographs:

> I wanted them to be random photographs, and not very good photographs, like the kind you find in the bottom of a drawer. Everyone wants to know where they came from. . . .The editors found some in antique shops, and I found some in a postcard market in Paris. Some of them are from our family album; everyone thinks they are me, but I'm not in any of them. (Shields, Golden 59)

Deborah Schnitzer has done an interesting analysis of the first photograph in the novel, comparing the visual image with the descriptions that the narrative provides. She identifies a mismatch between the physical descriptions of Mercy and Cuyler in the text and the photograph of them. Thus the narrative is held up to scrutiny by the photographic image, and includes a challenge to narratorial bias. Schnitzer is able to conclude that "this photograph is and is not 'Cuyler and Mercy, 1902'" (Schnitzer 30). What the photograph becomes, then, is a reference point that does not directly validate the written narrative provided in any way, but provides a visual counter-narrative. Clearly, each reader is challenged by the tricks of photographic images and yet still searches for a truth in them. Thus, I feel that the response that Schnitzer claimed for herself can be generalized to include the majority of readers. The reader's eye continually moves back and forth between the image and the narrative in an attempt to understand the offset information. In this way the reader has to "return to the 1902 photograph whose meaning is continually readjusted " (Schnitzer 33). When Stanley discussed the visual effect of photographs, she involved the looker directly in the photograph. As the reader tries to make sense of the image, she believes, that he/she actually bring it to life: "The seeing eye is always a living eye, a living I. When the seeing eye gazes on photographs with which it has a direct subject-relation, its gaze infuses the photograph and everything therein with life . . ." (Stanley 53).

The opening of Mary Swann has a significant visual disturbance and again one of the effects is to blur the generic expectations of fiction. The pre-text structurally endorses Mary Swann as a real poet, using a verse of hers as an epigraph:

> The rivers of this country

And the waters of my body
Grow invisible.

This creates a visual paradox which challenges notions of authenticity as this poem of introduction is offered by one of the fictional creations in the novel. The result is that the reader is forced to contemplate that which, by definition, cannot be reconciled, which is that Shields is both the writer of the epigraph and the narrative. The visual construction of the epigraph distances the real writer (Shields) from her own verses and pushes her fictional poet (Mary Swann) into a central position.

Perhaps it is Happenstance, though, that creates the most immediately striking visual disturbance. The novel has a dual opening as the text itself is divided into two separate narrative lines, 'The Wife's Story' and 'The Husband's Story'. Each 'end' [3] of the book is a full beginning with identical frontpapers which offer no indication to the reader about which part to read first. The novel, then, paradoxically ends twice at its physical centre. The visual effect of two separate narratives joined by the same spine is that the reader is jolted out of his/her easy position of consumer and has to make a conscious decision about where to start reading. The reader must choose which story to start reading first, which will clearly colour the reception of the second story and as the choice is between a man's story and a woman's story the decision is problematised even further. This initial physical/visual appearance of the novel is of vital importance as it points up both the effects of Shields' visual politics, which is to force the reader to become more active.

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[3] Clearly, the physical end of the book is not an end, as the physical termination of reading occurs at the centre of the book and the covers are both beginnings rather than one being a beginning and the other an end.

The visual disturbances that Shields creates are not just at the openings of her novels but are carried throughout them, too. In The Stone Diaries, there is the use of a letter form which is invoked in the early chapters with quoted phrases at first appearing as part of the text's more traditional narrative form. The quote below demonstrates how the letters are incorporated into the existing narrative flow:

> "'My dear Mr. Goodwill,' Clarentine Flett wrote in her large, loopy, uneducated hand, ' I thank you for your message, and I am writing at once to assure you that Daisy, as I have taken to calling her, is well looked after and in excellent health. . . .'" (TSD 49/50)

In later chapters Shields begins to use letters in fuller ways. The letters, rather than being included in the main narrative, begin to present a fuller narrative which runs simultaneously with the traditional narrative and is not embedded within the other narrative:

> My dear Mr. Goodwill,
>
> Your monthly letter is always welcome, and I thank you most warmly for your Express Money Order, which is much appreciated . . . .
>
> With kind regards,
>
> Clarentine Flett. (TSD 51)

The reader's eye has become accustomed to letters by first being introduced to extracts and then the reader, begins, with some accuracy, to follow this visually constructed narrative thread of letters alongside the more traditional narrative. Eventually, whole letters replace the narrative norm. So the narrative is entirely made up of the visual representation of letters which are created in a reduced type size with a different font.

There are many strong examples of this type of visual disturbance in Chapter 6 of The Stone Diaries. Here the letters are full and formally presented, including dates, addresses and sign offs which demonstrate a tone of authenticity. The visual effect of these is to break the previous narrative pattern. The communicating voice is now given over to the various characters through their letters and vital information is communicated through this letter form in the absence of any narrative commentary or interpretation. There is no voice in the text that interprets or evaluates the information on behalf of the reader and no assistance given to the reader in understanding their significance. For example, the reader discovers the news, through one of Fraidy's letters to Daisy, that her father has died "all this so soon after your dad dying" (TSD 201). This information is not contextualised in a series of events, rather, the information is contextualised within a letter, between two friends who have been through the experience. There is no attempt, at this point in the narrative, to re-live the events for the reader. This more visual narrative form indicates to the reader that they are to follow the letters to gain a visual understanding of interweaving lives over a period of time.

A good example of the development that is possible though this narrative form is the representation of Daisy's life after the receipt of her posthumous letter from Barker. This letter, though not chronologically presented, functions as a gateway, or an opening in the text, for her writing voice. Her involvement in the gardening column begins as a few words that are provided for the reader after the death of her husband: "Just to let you know your *maiden flight*, as you term it, will be *landing* next Saturday in the Sports and Home section" (TSD

204). Letters go on to include the column correspondence that Daisy conducts as Mrs Green Thumb, contextualised with other forms of correspondence that she conducts. Barker's collection has been rejected for donation, as it is not appropriate or even interesting to any of the libraries. This, then, is the final failure of Barker to communicate his knowledge or even his affection. The reader stays in touch with the development of Daisy's writing life by actually interacting with these letters. The reader sees a growth in her writing confidence and the development of her own voice through her new identity as 'Mrs Green Thumb'. The loss of the column and the return to regular narrative patterns, then, can be connected to a loss of voice and identity for Daisy.

It is not only Daisy's growth that is charted as other letters are included, too. There is the growing independence of Alice as she is away at university. The reader can feel her maturing through her letters home and coming to terms with the death of her father: "Just to let you know I'm feeling a whole lot better and I really appreciate you coming. I think you are right, that I was feeling down because of Dad..." (TSD 215). Also, geographical transitions are chronicled, such as the marriage of Beans and also the marriage of Alice, who moves to England, after which her letters are marked from there. The relationship between Daisy and the editor is developed, for the reader, through the increasingly affectionate sign-offs between them, rather than in more traditional narrative discourse.

The visual family tree seen at the outset of the novel, is again made three-dimensional through these letters as the reader follows the characters' lives at a pace alongside them. All of the information that the reader gets about the lives of these characters is through these visually presented letters. What is interesting in this visual presentation is that it acknowledges gaps and missing information that would be considered vital in more traditional forms. The narrative is shrunk in physical size and presented as sheets of notepaper. This emphasises the empty margins and the notepaper breaks which are testimony to the wider spheres of the characters' lives that cannot be represented in letters. This visual letter form does not pretend to include exhaustive information as it overtly acknowledges that there can be no real replica of reality. Yet, Shields is able to construct a fictional reality that reflects a sense of both having all the facts whilst simultaneously knowing that is impossible, with a visual narrative form.

Another important visual impact on the text of The Stone Diaries is the reportage form which includes extracts quoted from the newspaper which combines with a conversational form which includes reported conversations placed into the narrative. An example of this is seen at the beginning of Chapter 3 which is quoted below. There are a collection of separate sentence fragments which serve to communicate the intended marriage of Daisy to Harold A Hoad:

> **Marriage, 1927**
>
> MRS. JOSEPH FRANZMAN entertained at luncheon yesterday in honour of Miss Daisy Goodwill of Bloomington. Covers were laid for ten.
>
> Mrs. Otis Cline received at tea this afternoon in honor of Miss Daisy Goodwill, a June bride-elect. Miss Goodwill is a graduate of Tudor Hall and of Long College for women.

> Mrs. Alfred Wylie entertained at a kitchen shower Thursday afternoon in honor of Miss Daisy Goodwill, a June bride-to-be. The rooms were prettily decorated with wisteria, bells and streamers. (TSD 79-80)

This, even re-presented here, provides an alternative visual pattern which demonstrates the existence of multi-perspectives. The three comments provide independent pieces of information which do not impinge upon the other. The effect of presenting them in this way is to increase the reader's understanding of the implications of this marriage. Indeed, Shields, in a unique epistemological interview[4] with Joan Thomas, commented on her love of the "...fizz and spontaneity of a conversation" (Shields, Epistolary 122) and the visual form of narration is an attempt to represent such conversational energy. There is also a collection of comments that are presented in the same visually significant way, about Daisy's second marriage:

> "The Prime Minister of the Dominion, himself a bachelor, said, on hearing of the marriage between Barker Flett and Daisy Goodwill: 'Marriage is the highest calling, and after that parenthood and after that the management of a nation.'
>
> The Minister of Agriculture exclaimed to his wife upon reading the marriage announcement in the newspaper: 'Good God, Flett's got himself married. And I always thought the bloke was queer as a bent kipper.'

---

[4] The Thomas interview was conducted by letter over two months.

> Mrs. Donaldson, Barker Flett's housekeeper, said, bafflingly: 'Out of the frying pan, into the fire.'" (TSD 155)[5]

The way in which things are placed on the page is as important in communicating with the reader as the things that are written, which is an important part of Shields' visual politics. The multi-versioning of the narrative appears clearly through the existence of more than one version of events. The visual letter form and the conversational form function in similar ways to the photograph in that they are a visual challenge to the traditional narrative and the reader's eye. Visually, they form layers of information that do not escort the reader to a land of supposed reality but rather represent a complexity of experience and viewpoints and give testimony to individual incidences that occur without providing a unified narrative line.

Another arena of visual challenge is seen in Mary Swann, and the construction of the whole text and its chapter breakdowns is vital to understanding the visual politics at work in Shields' fiction. These politics are about disarming the reader with various points of view which are highlighted by the visual layout and together form the wider picture. Each of the large sections is titled simply with the name of the character and is sub-divided in slightly different ways. There are two very good chapters for demonstrating the tricks with titles. These are "Rose Hindmarch" and "Frederic Cruzzi." The Rose Hindmarch section is sub-divided into titled sub-chapters. Some of the sub-chapter titles imply a level of fantasy, such as "Rose's Hats," or immediacy, "Here Comes Rose Now," or perhaps suggest a caption to a photographic image. There are others that virtually direct the reader, not just by disturbing the main title, but through the authoritarian tone, such as "Some Words of Orientation." Other sections take the reader inside Rose's head, with "Drifting Thoughts of Rose Hindmarch" and also " Rose Hindmarch is visited by the November Blues" (MS 123-171). The level of intimacy here is significant as the visual device is constructed to provoke the readers' attention so the information he/she read is coloured by the visually striking sub-titles.

---

[5] These three statements form one whole continuous quotation The visual layout is important.

In the Frederic Cruzzi section, Shields returns to the letter form as well as titled sub-chapters. What is particularly significant about these visual disturbances is their complexity. These titles relate things that are unwritten: "Frederic Cruzzi: His (Unwritten) one sentence Autobiography" (182). The reader reads something that is visually highlighted as it stands out from the text, yet it is referred to as unwritten. Indeed, the reader is told that one sentence will be enough to encompass his whole autobiography. In the larger section of Frederic Cruzzi there are similar visual anomalies. For example, "Frederic Cruzzi: His Short Untranscribed History of the Peregrine Press: 1956-1976," troubles the reader as it *is* transcribed as it is printed on the page. Equally as disturbing is the "Unwritten Account of the Fifteenth of December, 1965," which again troubles the notion of existence. When these two chapters, with their complexity of sub-divisions are compared to the far more simplistic chronological numbers that Shields uses to order Happenstance, a heightened awareness of the visual disturbances.

One of the largest and most complex devices of visual disturbance is the re-structuring / re-presenting of the poems of Mary Swann throughout the novel. Fictionally, the reader sees the re-writing of the poems by Frederic and his wife after the originals have been destroyed. Then the group re-writes them again in the final scenes of the screenplay, after all the papers and books have been stolen. However, the reader not only sees these two, but is implicated in a third re-construction of Mary Swann's poems placed "within" the text. As Clara Thomas notes in her article, "Reassembling Fragments," of the 250 poems that are acknowledged to have existed in the original manuscript, 17 are actually reproduced and visually reconstructed with the involvement of the reader. Godard has drawn out the implications of these reconstructions. The act of reading becomes the highly political act of reconstructing a woman's life and work, based on questionable information: "Readers too are complicit in this reconstruction: we are all detectives here" (61). The poems, then, in this third re-construction, disturb the narrative as they too break the momentum with their own force. The quote below demonstrates this by including the parts of the narrative that the poem visually interrupts:

> One of Mary Swann's poems, one of those published by Frederic Cruzzi after her death, and one that is a puzzle to scholars goes:
>
> Feet on the winter floor
> Beat flowers to blackness
> Making a corridor
> Named helplessness
>
> Rose Hindmarch has visited the Swann farmhouse twice. (MS 161)

The verse is placed within, but apart from, the other narrative. This gives credibility to the poem's being real and means that on numerous occasions, the narrative of Mary Swann is directed by the dead poet herself through the visual reconstruction of her work.

Within Mary Swann there is much use of italics which attracts the reading eye to the physicality of words, and this has a visual significance. The reader interacts with the communicative form that he/she is using. Shields includes fictional characters interacting with words and phrases; for example; "*Sally forth*, the phrase fills up my mouth like a bubble of foam. I'm attentive to such phrases. Needful of them, I should say" (MS 12). Also " 'A Swannain Urgency' was how I put it in my first article on Mary. Pompous phrase! I could kick myself when I think about it" (MS 19). The reader becomes involved, through the visual stimulation in the form of italic type face, in a similar process of deciphering words and phrases and questioning their authenticity. This is not just confined to Sarah Maloney, the feminist scholar but is seen with Morton, too. Firstly, he examines his dislike of the italicised word: "The nameless disease. An Autumnal temperament. Constitutional melancholy. *Ennui. Angst* is close, the word I'd use it if weren't such a cheap scrubbing brush of a word" (MS 35). Secondly, he considers the inappropracy of the italicised word; " The word *crepuscular* pops into my head, then disintegrates, too queenly a word for a patchy night like tonight" (MS 36). For Shields, there is a strong symbolic component in words which she connects with her own personal experience of learning to read:

> For me, learning to read was the central mystical experience of my life. . . .Just realising that those symbols meant something and that I could be part of it was like an act of magic. (Shields, Personal Interview 7)

The final chapter of Mary Swann, "The Swann Symposium," entirely explodes any notion of visual conformity within the novel. In a most overt way this visual arrangement draws attention to its own construction, which is both diametrically and generically opposed to the preceding chapters. The visual screenplay form draws the reader into a highly constructed form of narrative, with stage directions and notes from the editor. The screenplay is a very effective way of emphasising the construction of a reality and the interaction of person, voice and place in a visual way. There is irony here though as the visual element can only be gestured towards by the screenplay. The screenplay form emphasises the idea that each individual chapter (with the exception of the final one) has been concerned with the individual unique perspective of the same chunk of time.

The Symposium itself is a wonderful example of visual disturbance and generic blurring. It is presented as a film script, which merges the central language concerns, as this form of printed word directly invokes its spoken, articulate cousins and dictates the physical process of acting as well. There is the further dimension of stage direction which functions in a similar way to the chapter headings, in that there is an introduction of an alternative to the dominant narrative pattern. Specifically, more narrative power than usual is placed in more than one place at a time. The quote below demonstrates the varying and multitudinous tensions in the narrative that the reader has to negotiate in the screenplay chapter:

> *The Swann Symposium* is a film lasting approximately 120 minutes. The main characters, Sarah Maloney, Morton Jimroy, Rose Hindmarch, and Frederic Cruzzi are fictional creations as is the tragic Mrs Swann, *poete naive* of rural Ontario. The film may be described (for distribution purposes) as a thriller. A subtext focuses on the more subtle thefts and acts of cannibalism that tempt and mystify the main characters. The director hopes to remain unobtrusive throughout, allowing the dialogue and visual effects (and not private passions) to carry the weight of the narrative. (MS 231)

The filmic effects serve to accentuate this visual leading of the reader's eye which is refracted even further when the hypothetical actions of other possible directors are contemplated as part of the narrative: "Another sort of director, distrustful of his or her audience might employ a flashback..." (MS 259). Also, there is an explosion of the subtleties of generic distinction by exposing generic: "Because the employment of the curtain cord, a staple in crime films, is intended here to be an ironic, self referential nod in the direction of the genre . . ." (MS 308).

Clearly this part of the novel demands the reader undertake a most complex system of twists and turns as this is presented as a screenplay that is focused on the film-seeing audience: "The look between them is shrewd and culpable—and ambiguous enough to puzzle the sort of reflective movie goers who like to dissect the variables of a story over a cup of coffee on the way home from their local cinemas" (MS 310). She also uses this final part of the novel to pinpoint the highly constructed nature of the characters and transport them, not only to an academic conference setting but also to a film set. No longer is the reader predisposed to enjoy a close relationship with the characters but now he/she expects them to have an entirely different role as actors. It is fitting, then, that stage directions indicate this shift to the reader:

> The faces of the actors have been subtly transformed. They are seen in a ceremonial act of reconstruction, perhaps even of creation. There need be no suggestion that any of them will become less selfish in the future, less cranky, less consumed with thoughts of tenure and academic glory but each of them has for the moment at least, transcended personal concerns. (MS 311)

The screenplay is entirely appropriate for Shields' visual endeavour and it also consolidates other themes too. She continues to blur generic boundaries and uses poetry, prose and drama for her narrative. The dramatic element is important as she has always been concerned with the animation of words. As a child, she loved hearing stories, actually hearing the words brought to life with voice: ". . . that combination of drama and narrative was something I loved" (Shields, Interview Interview 8). These personal insights go some way to colour our understanding of the complexity and multi-dimensioned aspect of language that Shields uses.

The visual disturbance that is created by the dual beginning of Happenstance discussed earlier, is continued in many ways throughout the novel. For example, chapter twenty is an inclusion of the actual interview that the reader has observed Brenda give to the journalist for "The Art Scene" while she is away in Philadelphia. Shields alters the type face and layout to replicate the page of the journal as it would actually be read and, in doing so, breaks the previous narrative pattern and shape:

> **Chapter Twenty**
>
> **THE ART SCENE by Hal Rago**
>
> **CHICAGO WOMAN SEES**
> **PIONEER CRAFT AS ART FORM**
>
> Attractive Brenda Bowman hails from the American Midwest, but she is a long way from being your stereotype image of a rural, cornbelt quiltmaker. Ms Bowman is an urbanite to the core, a Chicagoan by birth, a quiltmaker by profession. (H 145)

This visual effect, demonstrated above, is staggering and the reasons for the disturbance become clear. There is a shift out of the narrative, in which we are alongside Brenda in her domestic role, into the creative sphere where she is talented and independent. As Brenda is not the speaking voice at this point, the reader's eye must be informed of this. Importantly, the published interview is a huge achievement for Brenda as her work is being publicly recognised.

The interruption of the narrative occurs several times in Brenda's story with the inclusion of a verse of 'Scarborough Fair' and also with a copy of Brenda's business card:

Brenda Bowman

HANDMADE QUILTS
ORIGINAL AND ADAPTED

576 North Franklin Blvd. Elm Park, Ill.

Clearly, as demonstrated above, this interuptive phenomena is hugely effective as the sudden, non-introduced appearance of visual graphics creates a new dynamic. Here then, the reader visually interacts with a physical manifestation of Brenda's talent: not a quilt, but her business card, which endorses her skill in the public and not the domestic sphere.

There are disturbances, too, in Jack's narrative. A sentence from Jack's intended book is included which is presented as his typewritten text and not part of his own story. Again, a separate typeface and spacing visually signal this change to the reader. Also, below is a replica of a note left by Rob when he visits Bernie's daughter at the hospital:

Gone with Bernie K. to Charleston. Back around 7. Sue K.

> phoned, wants you to phone her back at hospital 366 4556.
>
> Mrs. Carpenter phoned and said Mr. Carpenter would live.
>
> Rob (H 105)

Clearly there is a visual suggestion being made about the texture and shape of individual voice. In the disturbance of a line, paragraph or page, Shields alters the visual dynamic to incorporate other forms of narrative.

It is important, however, that the inclusion of the visual forms, such as Rob's note or Brenda's business card, is not to cause us to disregard other narrative patterns but to indicate a more complex arrangement of voices. The narrative shape is one that functions on multiple levels. There is a clearly demonstrated interest in the construction and the form that narrative takes. In the interview I conducted, Shields spoke extensively of her methods of writing which she conceives as highly visual:

> I always know how many chapters there are going to be. . . .It is like lining up all these little boxes, and I don't know what's going to go in the little boxes but I know the shape of the train, as it were. (Shields Personal Interview 12)

The visual politics seen to be working in the fiction of Shields tie in with postmodern approaches to narratology which will be taken up in chapter two. However, the major effect of her visual politics is that the power balance within the text is altered and asserts a challenge to notions of authenticity and voice. Her work, and specifically her visual devices, avoid reductive classification and strive to blur genre distinctions. Shields is open about the way in which she manipulates generic associations in her work but is certain that she is not governed by them, feeling that the story must be allowed to tell itself. She has spoken at length, in many interview situations, about the opportunities that postmodernist thought has created for narrative forms. Though this chapter has identified many aspects of her work that can be associated with postmodernism, Shields has concerns about some of the writing:

> And there's a great deal of bad writing done by people who call themselves postmodernists—careless writing, thoughtless writing. I also think that it's rather elitist and that worries me, too. . . .But it gets you off the ground. It can even take you around some sharper corners that you didn't even know existed. It gives you permission to let the story go in curious angles. To imagine unimaginable possibilities. (Shields, Personal Interview 44-45)

In conclusion, the visual politics at work in Shields' fiction can be seen to force the reader, through visual disturbance, to take a more active role in his/her reading process. Secondly, the effect of these visual components is to disturb traditional narrative forms and blur the distinction between genres. Finally, Shields' ordinary stories are transformed into multi-dimensional narratives narratives that form a new visual landscape. Shields' fiction has a textured surface with shadows and shapes that do not blend into a singular plane, but form multiple representations of ordinary existence, which viewed simultaneously, provide a dense fictional reality.

Chapter Two

Who Speaks Now? Eclectic Narrative Constructs in the Fiction of Carol Shields.

> I love to set up a narrative problem and work my way through it. The solutions—or partial solutions anyway—have a way of opening up fresh questions. There is real joy in this. (Shields, Flying 43)

> There's a sort of post modern box-within-a-box, within-the-box. I mean I'm writing the novel and I'm writing her life, and I'm writing her knowledge of her life—so that's one. But its also looking at her life. . . (Shields, Golden 58)

This chapter will build on the ideas established in chapter one of this study, and consider how the narrating position that Shields takes, in addition to her visual politics, transforms her stories of ordinary lives into extraordinary narratives. Shields creates an alternative, multi-voiced narrative pattern which dramatically shifts the power balance in her texts away from a singular discourse. This enables her to deal with the kind of narrative complexities she referred to above. The effect of her multi-versioned narratives is both to undermine the traditional role of the narrator and to create a more complex fictional landscape. One of the major theoretical frameworks referred to throughout this chapter will be Bakhtin's work on heteroglossia and the significance that its premise of multiple levels in language and communicative patterns has for understanding and interpreting Shields work.

Bakhtin has identified the complexity of language and of words themselves, feeling that language can simultaneously communicate more than one meaning. In his extensive work on the novel, he identified numerous voices that have to be acknowledged as existing within a text and saw the novel as a zone of complex political interrelating that is endemic to language itself. The novel is a literary space which can manipulate the complexity of language and its interrelations. As such, Bakhtin worked on identifying various voices that can exist in a text, which represent different positions and opinions. He connected these differing discourses with the differing social and political situations that gave rise to a particular view or idea. Thus, as McHale understands Bakhtin, ". . . the novel mimes . . . social discourses, the vehicles of social experience" (165). Bakhtin, to continue, was concerned with understanding the complexities and forces within language. The novel for him was a form that represented the clash of ideas and a representation of the co-existence of ideas which he felt regularly formed a hierarchy within a text. Thus, the novel ". . . denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language—that is that it refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic center of the ideological universe" (qtd. in McHale 162).

For McHale, postmodern fiction is highly self-conscious and is the realisation of Bakhtin's theoretical ideas on language, voice and power. The subject matter and stance that postmodernist fiction espouses directly challenges previous notions and expectations of fiction which formed an essential part of Bakhtin's own ideology.

Both Bakhtin's work and McHale's extrapolation form a useful methodology in this chapter for examining the alternative narrative constructs that Shields creates. In all of Shields' fiction, there is a concentration on the establishment and the appropriation of voice, and the many voices that are integral to an accurate representation of an event. The existence of conflicting narrative voices is an aspect that has been denied in the grand narrative form that has previously dominated fiction. It is that notion of a single, authoritative voice, which provides the reader with all the information deemed necessary, that is being undermined and sidestepped in Shields' work.

"Totalizing narrative representation has also, of course, been considered by some critics as the defining characteristic of the novel as a genre" (Hutcheon, Politics 63). Although this observation, made by Hutcheon, may appear to be counter to the ideas of Bakhtin, it is useful to consider in the context of this chapter. What is of importance is initially the term itself. "Totalizing" refers to the way in which a narrative is constructed in order to reflect a chronological certainty. However, the certainty is an evasion of truth/reality, as there can be no such certainty. "Totalizing" has been coined by current postmodern literary theory as a way of describing texts in which power structures are unidentified; as such, the writing is non-reflexive and it remains unaware of its own existence as a constructed version of events. The narrative strategies that exist in Shields' work do not follow these prescriptive notions of narrative order but have aspects of heteroglossia that Bakhtin identified in his ideology. Shields' (mis) use of previously respected genres, such as biography, indicates a postmodern stance. Biography is exposed almost as a highly developed factual nonsense and her fictional biographers struggle to legitimate their editing decisions against the forces of authenticity and honesty. Biography, as a written form, only has credibility if the reader is made overtly aware of the selection process that forms its basis. Again, with reference to Hutcheon, we can see how Shields' narratives are challenging, as she rejects the traditional chronology of events: "To challenge the impulse to totalize is to contest the whole notion of *continuity*" (Hutcheon, Politics 66). Shields, then, is asserting her challenge to the notions of totality as she gives narrating power to fragments and thought processes that are not filtered or evaluated. She allows many characters to comment on a single event and as an integral part of her discourse, she highlights the processes of construction involved in writing. Indeed, Godard has stated: "...the text invites answers to the questions it raises, producing its reader as an active participant in the construction of meaning" (Godard 46). Shields' narrative constructs, then, have an effect on the reader, as there is a relocation of the traditionally passive reader to a place of active engagement with the text. Thus there is a challenging interface between the text and the reader which is one of the primary narratological features of Shields' fiction.

The impact of feminist thinking on narratology cannot be underestimated. Feminist literary theory demands shifts in point of view, to privilege the previously unspoken discourses that have been silenced by misogyny. In this system, women and their unique discourses are undervalued and consequently, their impact on narrative forms is reduced. Shields' attempt to re-establish narrative forms is particularly important. She develops her narrative pattern from many of the undervalued forms of documentation that Hutcheon lists, such as: "journals, letters, confessions, biographies, autobiographies, self portraits..." (Hutcheon, Politics 160). Evidently, then, Shields' novels privileges that which has previously been undervalued. The Stone Diaries, for example, weaves its discourses out of letters and journal entries and itself constitutes several closely linked life narratives, perhaps the most complete being that of Daisy Goodwill-Flett. Also important in this novel are the imaginative processes through which the characters form their own life stories and identities. Shields herself described Daisy's life-narrative in an interview with Joan Thomas:

> She's not writing it. She's thinking it, in exactly the same way we all think our own life. We carry this construct that is our own life. But no, she doesn't actually put pen to paper or anything like that. She's building it, and she's building it out of the scraps of what she knows and what she imagines. (58)

Mary Swann too, links directly to these undervalued forms as the novel brings into direct focus the narrative constructs of biography and stories that people believe about their own lives. The novel follows the academic canonisation of a lesser known Northern Ontario poet, Mary Swann. Within this narrative are the stories of four characters involved in the construction of the fifth and most important character, Mary Swann, the poet herself. The whole narrative involves the confessions made to the reader about their involvement with Mary Swann, which are kept away from the other characters. Through this, the reader becomes implicated in the process of reconstruction. The process of canonisation is a sham, as the manuscript of the poet has been irrevocably lost in its original form. As Frederic Cruzzi recalls in confidence to the reader, the events of the fateful night:

> Lakes of blue ink flowed between the lines, blotting out entire phrases. . .they conferred over every blot, then guessed, then invented. . . .At

> one point, Hilde supplying the missing lines and even the greater part of
> a missing stanza. (MS 223)

Happenstance too, allows the two very ordinary characters enough fictional space to speak their own version of events with their own voices. The two characters do not have to fight for space in the same narrative, but are cleverly presented alongside the other.

To return to Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, then, five major voices can be identified in an overview of Shields' work. These represent some of her work's overall themes as they represent a particular outlook in the wider discourse of the text. These voices emerge individually but blend together at different points in the text, though none is given a permanent prominence. The result of this is a complementary one, in which the individual voices/discourses gain depth through both the contrasts and the similarities that are revealed. To identify these voices, then, is to consider Shields' work as a continuum of ideas rather than isolated pieces of writing.

Firstly, there is a narrative voice which exists, even though Shields' work does much to undermine the reader's reliance on such a voice. The narrating voice forms a starting point from which other voices can be identified. The narrative voice does not remain constant throughout her novels, but fluctuates in prominence and form. It is a voice that belongs to numerous characters, who all are given an opportunity to speak their own version of events. For example, the letters in The Stone Diaries take narrative control for large sections at a time. They are not all written by one person, or indeed, to one person. They are a collection of letters written by a group of characters involved in the particular time period of a given chapter.

The narrating voice then, in The Stone Diaries, is a polyphony of voices rather than a single monotone.

In Happenstance, the narrative voice is not as fractured as there is a sharp focus on the essence of voice. The novel physically splits two separate discourses which then reflect in and contrast with each other. What is exploited by the narrative voice is the space between the reader and the text. The narrative voice is a voice which appeals from within the text directly to the reader. The effect is that there is always a textual awareness of the reader. By offering new modes of communication, Shields places certain expectations on the reader, who has to re-negotiate his/her reading process, as it is often brought into focus. For example, in The Stone Diaries, the narrator speaks directly to the reader in a conversational tone, wary of repeating particular nuances of the story: "Have I said that Clarentine Flett deserted her husband Magnus, in the year 1905?" (TSD 47).

There is a personal voice that can be identified in the texts, where the private introspections of her characters are articulated. Collectively, the angst of characters such as the elderly Daisy, the aspiring Sarah, or the anxious Jack form a singular voice within the heteroglossia. There is a particular social/political situation that is being reflected in this discourse. Perhaps it is the contemporary concern for psychological welfare, as modern life is shown to make demands on the human spirit that require much private contemplation and evaluation.

A very active creative voice can easily be recognised as many characters are involved in various acts of creation. Again, these characters merge to represent a distinct discourse in the texts. There is a drive to express the self creatively and to discover unexplored depths through quilt-making, writing and picture-making. The development and continuing expression of creative energy is presented in overwhelmingly positive ways, although Shields is careful to document too, the pain that her characters undergo as a result of self-expression. This textual voice is closely contrasted with what can be termed an intellectual voice. This is a familiar voice through which Shields documents the often ruthless institutional pressures made in the academic sphere. The conference setting appears many times to represent the convergence of intellect. Indeed, Clara Thomas felt that Shields' fictional depiction of the academic world was sharp and incisive: "The various symposium sessions hilariously parody every academic conference in the world" (203).

Finally, there is a domestic voice which can be located in all of Shields' work. Though hugely under-represented in literature, the domestic sphere is, for everyone, an integral aspect of existence. As Shields has stated in an interview with Harvey De Roo: "Perhaps domesticity is ubiquitous and its essential nature is the reason it is missing from so much of our literature. . . Domesticity is like breathing. It goes on and on " (Shields, Flying 44). However, it is only contemporaneously that this female-dominated sphere is becoming acknowledged and represented in writing and it is this that Shields gives voice to in her works.

One of the exact narrative challenges that Shields directs is the existence of these multiple voices within her texts. This practice of multi-versioning is a phenomenon that, as Hutcheon points out, has a particular significance. There is a different power dynamic at work in texts that allow several discourses to coexist, rather than asserting a single voice of righteousness. Hutcheon cites this difference as an author's conscious rejection of one of the previous rules of narrative: "The refusal to integrate fragments is a refusal of the closure and telos which narrative usually demands" (Hutcheon, Poetics 121). Shields is constructing narratives that challenge previous literary doctrine.

In Happenstance Shields locates several women at a conference in Philadelphia coming face to face with new forms of, and possibilities for, narrative. In the workshop on narrative quiltmaking, a connection is made between the quilted images and the stories they represent in the bringing together of different fabrics and shapes to create images which are changed with use and repairs. There is an acknowledgement that a story is in essence a changing, growing force that cannot simply be one way only. Thus, for the makers of pictorial quilts, at the conference, the sequencing of images and the stitches and patterns that connect these images are vital. In the same way, the written narrative has events, transitions and relationships that are being constructed. Here, the reader learns, alongside those in the quilting workshop, of new possibilities for reading, writing and creating. For example, "'The thing is' Dorothea Thomas went on, 'I used to think that stories only had the one ending. But then, this last year or so, I got to thinking that that's not right. The fact is most stories have three or four endings, maybe even more" (H 143). Indeed, in interview Shields has stated her own affection for the possibilities of multiple endings: "I like endings that veer off in strange directions, rising rather than falling, or endings that make sudden leaps into the future or the past, bringing about quite a different quality of oxygen altogether" (Shields, Flying 49). Through the discourses in the workshop Shields sharpens her narrative endeavour, which is to acknowledge the complexities, contradictions and challenges of story-telling.

Shields often uses ordinary and familiar subjects and situations in her work. Her narratives however, do not become mundane as Shields has a new agenda for these subjects.

She aims to elevate the status of these ordinary situations by investigating them in different ways. She invokes genres such as biography, documentary and romance but does not use the generic rules and regulations that generally apply to them. Shields uses these aspects of different genres and works them into different shapes which correspond with her own agenda. For example, through the structure of The Stone Diaries, she wanted to suggest a flashback to nineteenth century forms which she could then re-work into a new place:

> I wanted my chapter titles to be the chapter titles of old nineteenth century biography, but I wanted them, in my case, to be slightly askew so that the chapter "Love" for example, isn't quite about love, the one on marriage isn't quite about marriage, so that they are just slightly off. (Shields, Personal Interview 18)

It is not a nostalgic voyage that she wants her readers to experience as they read; rather, she wants them to glimpse the suggestion of other generic forms while noticing that the agenda is different. In an interview with Joan Thomas, explained:

> In some ways I see this [The Stone Diaries]as the antithesis of the nineteenth century novel, where characters search to find themselves—and she [Daisy] doesn't find herself. This is the modern stance. You don't always find yourself. (Shields, Golden 60)

The effective challenge to the grand narrative surrounds the (dis) placement of the traditional narrator. Within the heteroglossia that Shields establishes, one of the voices that can be heard is that of the traditional narrator who is challenged within the texts, both by other voices in the text and by the very construction of the text itself, which allows the other voices to exist. The opening of The Stone Diaries is an excellent example of how Shields manipulates the telling. The narrative position here is a unique one, as the reader discovers that the speaker is describing her own birth. Shields acknowledges that this is impossible but knows that many of her readers will be able to relate to this reconstruction through their own imaginings: "I realise you can't see your own birth, but most of us have an image of our own birth that we build up out of other people's recollections and so on . . ." (Shields, Golden 58) After this event the narrator goes on to describe with conviction the early lives of both her mother and father, including their meeting and their marriage. However, the narrator is clearly of a different time and there is no attempt to disguise this. The story is told from her own point of view and she speaks it with her own voice. The high level of self disclosure which makes the narrator's voice authentic, is continually kept at the forefront, with references such as "There is nothing ugly about this scene, whatever you may think, nothing unnatural, that is, so why am I unable to look at it calmly?" (TSD 23).

This highly subjective and emotionally overlaid discourse not only has the responsibility of opening The Stone Diaries but also introduces the reader to two of the major characters of the novel. Traditionally, this opening responsibility relied on the skills of a single narrator who is objective and informed. Yet here, Daisy could not be more subjective about the events she describes, as she is so closely and painfully bound to them. Further, the reader is exposed to the variables and inflexes of this narrator's language, which includes turns of phrase and side tracking that Daisy speaks, such as, "this is a particular fancy of mine" (TSD 26). Daisy openly acknowledges, here, the narrative constructions in her tale and makes no effort to provide the reader with a truth other than her own reality.

There are examples of direct interchanges between the varying voices in the novel and the role occupied by a traditional narrator. There is a voice of caution that can be identified which breaks into the discourse, to remind the reader that the narrator is fallible. After Daisy has spoken at length about her childhood and early marriage, the voice questions, not only the validity of her story but her sanity:

> Maybe now is the time to tell you that Daisy Goodwill has a little trouble with getting things straight; with the truth that is. . . .Well, a childhood is what anyone wants to remember of it. It leaves behind no fossils, except perhaps in fiction. Which is why you want to take Daisy's representation of events with a grain of salt, a bushel of salt. . . .You will have already realised that no person in this world could possibly be as insensitive, as cruel as her mother in law. . . .Furthermore, she imposes the voice of the future on the events of the past, causing all manner of distortion. She takes great jumps in time leaving out important matters. (TSD 148)

Here the voice of caution, which momentarily takes over the narrating position, engages in direct challenge to the validity of Daisy's story. Perhaps this cautionary voice is indeed the voice of the grand narrative, as it speaks to the reader in an attempt to re-establish the need for chronology. The voice urges the reader to distrust Daisy's style of narration. Simultaneously then, this voice of concern highlights the dexterity of the narrator who is being undercut. Daisy has not provided a traditional chronology but has realistically represented a truth of lived experience, which is that a sense of the past and the imagined future converge in a foreground and help to create the present moment being described.

There are dense narrative clashes that occur between the voices in Shields' work which challenge versions of events in the form of authoritative questioning rather than just accepting their validity. However, in complex narrative manoeuvres, the voice that questions, at times undermines the validity of its own story. The text can become heavy with confusion between the voices and the levels of narration themselves: "(Does Grandma Flett actually say this last aloud? She's not sure. She's lost track of what's real and what isn't and so, at this age, have I)" (TSD 329). This is a very challenging position for the reader to be in, who is left, mid-novel with no narrating voice that he/she can trust, as the above quotes shows a narrator challenging the words of a character and also then undermining their own validity. The whole narrative, at this point, questions the central idioms of even trying to tell a story. However, this convergence of challenging voices serves to dislocate the reader's reliance on narrative truths and to obliterate the notion of a narratorial authority.

In The Stone Diaries, there is a challenge to the reader to accept less codified ways of telling, as Shields calls for an appreciation of new forms of voice that are not sanctioned in formal narrative patterns. For example, though there have been serious questions regarding the validity of Daisy's story, it remains Daisy's story. The reader is left with no choice but to acknowledge her narrative, no matter how uncomfortable he/she might feel about doing this, as her narrative voice is exclusive: "Still hers is the only account there is, written on thin air, written with imagination's invisible ink" (TSD 149). The reader must accept a narrative voice that does not adhere to the traditional values of reliability and insight, associated with a narrator. Daisy is telling her own story and this involves more than one form of information, such as dreams and gossip, as well as the numerous events of her life that are confirmed in other characters' testimonies. The reader is kept on his/her metaphorical toes and prevented from falling into the trap of simply accepting what is presented. There is often a challenging voice that emerges to awaken any readers that may have fallen into this trap: "No, none of this is true. Old Mrs Flett is dreaming again" (TSD 341). The dislocation that the reader feels can at times be disorientating, yet, Shields makes her point strongly, that eclectic narrative constructs are a viable way of fictionally representing a genuine discourse. What is needed is for the reader to be more agile and open in his/her reading process to appreciate the delicate layers of narrative that are being constructed to create an overall depiction which has certainty and honesty.

Voice is clearly a central issue for Cuyler, Daisy's father, whose life is characterised by periods of expression and articulation. One of the most important narrations of Cuyler's life is the one that he makes in order to reclaim his daughter on their train trip to America which is located specifically "between Winnipeg, Manitoba and Bloomington, Indiana" (TSD 86). The reader has identified Cuyler's creative voice in the text, but, he loses this along with his carving skill. Daisy informs the reader that his speech at her graduation was awkward and caused her a large degree of embarrassment and she is anxious about the speech he will give at her wedding: "Daisy's own eyes fill up in response, but she sighs knowing that her father is about to deliver one of his sonorous and empty speeches" (TSD 115). The way in which Cuyler's skills are presented demonstrates one of the narrative patterns in Shields' work. She presents alternative views on a single event through allowing various characters the space to speak. The result is a complex account being narrated which does not necessarily have a traditional cohesive feel, as there is no sense of agreement between the accounts presented. This alternative way of narrating in no way attempts to be an exhaustive representation of reality, but establishes a multi-versioned complexity which acknowledges and gives credibility to different views. In this way, Cuyler's own pride and love of speaking is not invalidated by his daughter's embarrassment. In this narrative pattern, the gaps and pieces of lost information also become part of the narrative process itself, as the reader begins to understand the multiple discourses that are possible.

Brian McHale identifies a "collage of disparate genres and registers" (McHale 169) in connection to heteroglossia that applies to the narrative aspects of Shields' work. It is clear that Shields disregards convention and takes a more eclectic approach to narrative, as she forms them from disparate materials drawn from diverse fields. In interview with Harvey De Roo, Shields said that she was "...indifferent to the boundaries between literary forms" (Harvey, Flying 38). Mickey Pearlman endorses this idea that Shields' narrative constructs are eclectic in, Canadian Women Writing Fiction, where he stated that: ". . . her [Shields'] art consists of taking fragments so that we understand that they are part of an individual life, that all life is made up of such scenes" (138). In addition and support, Abby Werlock, in "Canadian Identity and Women's Voices," has described Shields' approach as "a humanist approach, which blurs both national boundaries and in post modern fashion, the lines separating literary genres" (126).

What is essential to extrapolate about Shields' eclectic narrative constructs is the way in which the challenges are articulated as part of the narrative itself. Thus, there is no air of mystery that shrouds her texts and their orientation. One of the most important aspects of her novel, Mary Swann, is the way in which the mystery itself becomes farce or parody, as the characters seek the perpetrator of the theft of the Swann papers. What the novel documents is the construction of art and its fictional, fabricated factuality. As such, Shields' work is part of a postmodern orientation that seeks to shed direct light on the politics of reading and writing. If we consider Hutcheon's definition of the externalised aspect of postmodernist writing, we can clearly see Shields' work within it: "The art's [fiction] interrogation of the values underlying our cultural practices, however, is always overt, always on the surface, not hidden in the depths to be unearthed by the discerning (deconstructing) critic" (Hutcheon, Poetics 192). Shields has stated in an interview with De Roo that: "I like to approach stories from multiple perspectives, hidden perspectives . . . my 'slant' involves angles of perspective, voice and layered perception . . . " (Shields, Flying 49). Thus there is a determination in Shields' work to include different versions to compile her fiction.

"What feminist theory has shown is that strategies of writing and reading are forms of cultural resistance. They work to turn dominant discourses inside out and challenge theory in its own terms" (Godard 45). As Godard states, both the reader and the writer become fully responsible, under feminist literary theory, for the wider implications of their actions. No longer can the writer exist in an intellectual void being moved by muses nor can the reader recline in a position of passivity, waiting for the mystery of plot to be unfurled before him/her. Both have important roles to play in the wider sphere, where new voices can be heard and the established canon overturned. Feminism stands in as a totem for revisionists—those with new information to look at what has gone before with new vision and set in place an altered representation that is true to these new insights. I feel strongly that Shields' work moves in this direction and that her narrative constructs are vital to this new vision.

Shields herself has stated in interview with De Roo that: "...in a sense all my books have been about retrieval from the past" (Shields, Flying 43). This is very interesting as it places a certain emphasis on the reclamation of experience from a realm that has not presented that experience credibly. In terms of narrative, too, a significance remains as there has been a conscious effort on the part of the writer to re-establish events that may have been misappropriated elsewhere. In short, there is an attempt in Shields' work to present what has not yet been presented adequately, to reclaim past events and experiences and attempt to do fictional justice to them. Contemporaneously, the historical event is one that has become the focus of a wide range of critical attention as new ideas about fact and fiction are formed. Historical fact then, is often a misnomer as history is now subject to the same scrutiny as the most fictitious piece of writing. Postmodernist stances have enabled readers and writers to identify the presence of power structures and political forces, both outside and inside the texts, that govern the images portrayed within it. Thus, all writing is formed within a political framework that has an influence on the narrative that is produced. History is then, a narrative that is constructed from the same aspects as fiction but it goes under a differently preferred label. Shields has stated her attempt to articulate past events and this reflects her involvement in the attempt to appropriate a differing range of voices in ways that have not been sanctioned previously.

McHale has coined the phrase "radical heteroglossia," which allows a connection to be made between Shields' eclectic narrative patterns and her Canadian existence as the term describes a relationship of multiple voices existing in awareness of the others; "Radical heteroglossia emerges in cultures which embrace several languages, cosmopolitan cultures in which the various national languages are mutually aware of the other" (McHale 171). McHale attributes the occurrence of cultural heterglossia to bi/multicultural existence and this is why it is significant when considering Shields' work. Politically, Canada is a bilingual country and distinct cultural divergences occur within each province, demonstrating the existence of many forms of expression within differing value systems. Contemporary Canadian literature is involved in a search for Canadian voice and all of its varying voices may be seen to reflect the contemporary realism of the country. That is to say, the multitude of voices that exist within Canada need to be acknowledged and allowed to thrive alongside each other, rather than one or two seeking a dominance over the others. The struggles for voice that are regional and fought out politically, socially and economically in Canada are mirrored in the complex multiple voice relations in its fiction. Finally, by acknowledging the array of Canadian voices which comprise a national choir there is a move away from old, phallocentric ideas of truth and reality towards an acceptance of new challenging perspectives within literature and its power to document contemporary reality.

Chapter Three

There are Other Relationships Besides Cause and Effect:
The Gender (Less) Polemic.

> The real trouble with this world tends to settle on the misalignment between men and women—that's my opinion, my humble opinion, as I long ago learnt to say. But how we love to brush these injustices aside. Our want is to put up with things, with the notion that men behave in one way and women in another. . .(TSD 121)

In this chapter, I will examine the central tenets of Shields' gender (less) polemic which oscillates around the belief that men and women have a common experience of life and that it is only their modes of expression that differ. I have coined the term 'gender (less) polemic' to describe Sheilds' fictional focus on the interaction between men and women. Her work seems to suggest that, though gender is important when considering human interaction, it is does not provide enough information about the fullness of human interaction. Shields, controversially, rejects gender as a justification for differences and misunderstandings between the sexes and her polemic is about discovering the more tangible ways of relating and experiencing that men and women have. The sentiments articulated in the opening quote above, by one of the narrating voices in The Stone Diaries, reinforce this idea of a gender (less) polemic. In Happenstance, there is detailed focus on the domestic space and the gendered politics that dominate there. Brenda creates a drama of her morning routines which begin with her gliding down the staircase. Her dramatisation of these mundane events functions to displace the boredom of repetition: "The descent down the broad, uncarpeted stairs has something of ceremony about it, it has gone on so long" (H 1). There is the suggestion that these domestic rituals have been formed over many years of married life. Over her married life, a gap has emerged between who she feels she really is inside and how she might be perceived outwardly. Her fear is that she will be seen as a woman who has nothing to do or say and it is likely that the domestic work she does do is chronically undervalued: "She likes to think of herself as a busy person" (H 1). It is not surprising that she experiences joy when she considers that domestic routines will soon be behind her as the conference in Philadelphia offers her the chance to do something that is recognised as worthwhile.

The extent to which she struggles with her excitement about the conference is childlike to some extent and emphasises her depravity. Yet "...when she murmurs the word 'Philadelphia' into the rising coffee fumes, she feels engorged with anticipation, a rich, pink strangeness jiggling round her heart that interferes with her concentration" (H 3). Her own interests and independence are not nurtured in the domestic environment and her success in Philadelphia offers the first public recognition of her own talent and independent existence: "In recent days she has felt impelled to disguise her excitement, to affect calm. A hand on her shoulder seems to warn her to be careful, to practise sanity and steadiness" (H 3). The image of the kitchen message board functions as an apt metaphor for Brenda's life, at this point in the novel. In secret, Brenda clears a space in the papers and cards for her flight details: "And there, snugged cleanly in the corner—she has cleared a small area around it—is her flight schedule. It looks purposeful and bright, winning from the welter of other items its small claim to priority"

(H 2). The extent to which Brenda is just the doer of domestic tasks, is seen in the division of the morning newspaper and she begins to question this: "Should she perhaps resent the fact that he always helps himself to the front section of the *Trib* and, like a potentate, hands round to the others, the lesser sections. . . .Brenda herself tends to get stuck most mornings with the business section" (H 6).

The connection between women and domestic chores is seen in The Stone Diaries. Mercy is valued for her household skills at the orphanage which she leaves after her marriage to Cuyler. In contrast to Brenda, Mercy actively enjoys the organisation of her household, unlike other aspects of marriage, such as sex. The domestic arrangements are an outlet for Mercy's own skills and function as a form of order and control that she can assert in her own life. A domestic etiquette is something that Daisy, too, takes refuge in during her marriage to Barker: "The tablecloth is checked cotton, blue and white. The mother's place is set at one end and the father's at the other; this is a family that tends to adhere to conventional routines and practices" (TSD 158). There is an over-riding suggestion then that much of women's potential is distracted by the demands of household duties.

If Shields suggests that women are shackled, then her male characters are victims too. Social/sexual conventions control Barker, who feels locked within codes which he is unable to break: "Decades of parched silence have made him a voyeur in his own life, and even now he watches himself critically: paterfamilias, a man greeting his family at the end of the working day, gazing into the faces of his children and beyond them to the screened porch where the supper table is set" (TSD 161). In later life, both Daisy and Barker express their dissatisfaction with these domestic codes. Daisy accuses the events of her married life of being fraudulent:

"The debris of her married life rains down around her, the anniversaries, pregnancies, vacations, meals, illnesses, and recoveries, crowding out the dramatic. . . " (TSD 191). Barker's letter expresses hope that his children will not suffer the same fate that he hopes they can experience love in a real and acknowledged way.

Sarah Maloney states that "Dailiness, to be sure has its hard deposits of ennui, but it is also, as Mary Swann suggests, redemptive" (MS 22). As this quote demonstrates, in Mary Swann, there are manifestations of the poet's approval of the domestic environment. Sarah, in an attempt to relax and recover from exhaustion, finds a release in basic domestic tasks: "There are rewards in cleaning things—everyone should know this—the corners of rooms, dresser drawers, and such" (MS 22). There is the connection made again between the completion of domestic tasks and the creation of a feeling of well being and control. Yet, the fate of Mary Swann, murdered by her husband, gives warnings about the domestic scene. Her exile on the farm provides both the seeds for her poetry, which is inspired by her surroundings and also the root of her destruction as she is isolated and vulnerable. Indeed, Clarentine Flett too has to escape the domestic scene of her marriage, in search of fulfilment and acknowledgement of herself as a woman.

Integral to the gender (less) polemic in Shields' work, are the relationships that are formed in the domestic sphere. In Mary Swann, she focuses on the relationship between Sarah Maloney and her mother. Sarah clearly values her mother, feeling as though her life is enriched by her:

> You might say I am a professional daughter, or at least I am a serious hobbyist. . . .My mother and I talk and talk . . . and here sit I, the luckiest of women,

> brimming with home-cooked food and my mother's steady, unfocused love. (MS 33)

Sarah identifies maternal attachments that bind women to their mothers in a way that is not replicated between fathers and sons: " Women can never quite escape their mothers' cosmic pull. . . " (MS 47). There is also the close connection of creativity between Brenda and her deceased mother.

The image of Mrs Bowman's sewing machine as a living person—"Its sound was sweet and rhythmic, almost human" (H 26)—informs our understanding of Brenda's workroom, which also takes in an existence of its own. There is a suggestion that Brenda has inherited her creative impulse directly from her mother and though this connection is not stated explicitly it can feasibly be made, based on Brenda's descriptions of creative inspiration being rooted in memory:

> When working on a quilt she seldom looked out of the window, or anywhere else for that matter . . . the patterns seemed to come from some more simplified root of memory; sometimes they arrived as a pulsating rush as she was pulling weeds or shovelling snow off the front walk, but more often they appeared to her early in the morning before she opened her eyes, an entire design projected onto the interior screen of her eyelids. She could see the smallest details, the individual stitches. All the pieces were there, the colours and the shapes. . . .When she opened her eyes to the light, she always expected the image to dissolve, but it

> remained intact, printed on an imaginary wall or beating slowly at the back of her head. (H 16-17)

Maternal connections are also emphasised at the beginning of The Stone Diaries with the birth of Daisy and the novel then goes on the explore the emotional legacy that is left when maternal ties are severed by death.

Shields is not blind to the importance of paternal relationships. In Happenstance the reader learns of Jack as a child and understands the habits that form his regular visits to his parents in later years. Jack and his father spend time together, walking in Columbus park for example, and Shields, in turn examines Jack's paternal role. The growth of Jack's own daughter triggers a certain amount of parental sadness as he has to reconcile her growth with simultaneous passing of time for himself. Towards his son there is a huge amount of anger aroused by an adolescent resistance to authority: "Jack felt the room rock. For a fraction of a second—it couldn't have been more he was sure he was going to kill Rob" (H 59). Involvement with his son leads him to contemplate loss as the row shatters the familiar atmosphere and is hard for them all to reconcile: "What in God's name had happened, he asked himself. The bubble of gaiety that had contained the two of them a minute a ago—only a minute ago—where had it gone?" It is significant that Jack is unable to resolve the disharmony and is left feeling his own inadequacy yet, he silently lets the incident slip by: "He didn't mention the argument of the night before and neither did Jack. The whole uproar over the Spanish rice seemed shockingly absurd, shameful, trivial, the kind of meaningless explosion that occurs between very young children, the kind of thing best forgotten, especially today on this most glittering of mornings" (H 85).

Jack has to acknowledge a certain awkwardness with his children, unlike Brenda, who "was good with the children when they were sick, positive and brisk, a swift and willing creator . . . " (H 121). There is a contrast between how he feels about his children and then how he behaves around them. He sees their direct connection to him and his integral role in their life and at this stage wants to keep them protected from the harsher realities in life, but cannot communicate this care effectively: "He felt panic, a shortness of breath, a sharp pain that was not his but belonged to his son. Couldn't he, with a doubling of his will keep his son safe a little longer? There must be a way if only he had the imagination to find it" (H 126).

Brenda, too, has to acknowledge her children's growth in her relationship with them: "Rob, or Robbie as she still sometimes thinks of him, is after all her firstborn child, and his lowered eyes (sulkiness) and dark, curling hair still make her heart seize with love" (H 5). Indeed, much of her time out of the domestic sphere is characterised by what she thinks of her children. When she speaks to them on the telephone she finds a connection with them, and not her husband, that she does not want to let go: "Oh, she loved them, loved them. For a minute she kept her hand on the receiver, unwilling to lose the connection of love between herself and her two children" (H 180).

Pivotal to the shape of Shields' fiction is this familial/domestic centre, which seems an "ordinary" focus in modern times. However, she gives attention to the fracturing of familial relationships, such as orphanhood and charts the effect of parental loss. Mercy experiences a loneliness that is a result of having no family with which to contextualise her own life: "She knows only that she stands apart from any coherent history, separated from the ordinary consolation of blood ties, and covered over and over again these last two years by Cuyler

Goodwill's immense ardour" (TSD 7). Bereavement, for Shields, is not something that the individual 'gets over' but forms an integral feature of the survivor's life. Throughout their lives, her orphans return to feelings of abandonment that they connect directly with living through their loss of connection. As a child, Daisy began to assimilate the differences that her orphanhood meant, in relation to those around her:

> This had to do with the vacuum she sensed, suddenly, in the middle of her life, and it took weeks in that dim room, weeks of heavy blankets, and the image of that upside down tree in her chest to inform her of what it was. What she lacked was a kernel of authenticity, that precious interior ore that everyone around her seemed to possess. (TSD 76)

Later in the text, the black housekeeper connects Daisy's breakdown with the loss of her mother: "Poor thing, poor lost thing. Never a mother to call her own, and now, from the looks of it—though who could tell such things, who can read the future? No little ones of her own to rock and sing to" (TSD 9). Even at birth, the interpretation of Daisy's first moments are sensitive to the huge impact of orphanhood: "My mouth is open, a wrinkled ring of thread, already seeking, demanding, and perhaps knowing at some unconscious level that the filament of matter that we struggle to catch hold of at birth is going to be out of reach for me" (H 39).

The surrogate maternal role that Clarentine Flett takes on is given much praise: "We are bound forever to those who care for us in our early years. Their loss cannot be compensated. Our ties to them are unbreakable" (TSD 189). Yet, in later life Daisy finds the loss of her biological connection difficult to resolve: ". . . a kind of rancor underlies her existence . . . the recognition that she belongs to no one" (TSD 281). This loss is examined in full as are the physical manifestations of grief, triggered by the absence of her mother's wedding ring:

> Tonight, lying under a light blanket and awaiting the return of her husband, a man named Barker Flett, she feels the loss of that ring, the loss, in fact, of any connection in the world. . . .She is shivering all over as if suddenly struck by some infection. She has had these gusts of grief before. The illness that she suffers is orphanhood . . . and here she lies, stranded, genderless, ageless, alone. (H 189)

Whilst living in Florida, Daisy is distressed while thinking about her deceased father and father in law. Yet, these thoughts provide at least a tangible contact, even only in thought and memory, with her own lineage. She "thinks about her departed fathers. That's as far as she goes: she just thinks about them, concentrates on them, dwells on them..." (TSD 267). There is no lasting comfort, as these memories remind her of her absolute isolation from familial contact:

> The odd thing about the pictures that fly into Daisy Goodwill's head is that she is always alone. There are voices that reach her from a distance; there are shadows and suggestions—but she is still alone. . . .This is what breaks her heart. What she can't bear. Even now 80 years old. (TSD 339)

The younger generations of The Stone Diaries, too, are troubled by the attempt to find a lineage and a place of contact that is supported by blood lines. Victoria, with no father ever known to her, begins to realise her own fate: "If anyone should be on a father quest, it should be Victoria..." (TSD 269). The loss of a father also comes to haunt Brenda Bowman. She realises that her childhood unresolved grief is forcing its way into her later life: "Why lately, was she making such a point of telling people, especially strangers, about this, her lack of a father ?" (H 72).

The (un) expression of female sexuality is another tenet of Shields' gendered polemic. Below, Clarentine Flett outlines her life on the prairies:

> She is a woman whose desires stand at the bottom of a cracked pitcher, waiting. Even now, hanging out the wash she is faint with longing, but for what? Embrace me she says to the dripping sheets and pillowslips, hold me, but she says it dully without hope. Her washtub is empty now, an old wooden vessel sitting there on a piece of outcropping rock. (TSD 15)

This image of a washtub forms an appropriate metaphor for the (un)expression of female sexuality as Clarentine realises that her youth has gone and she is still craving a loving relationship. This examination of sexuality functions as another layer in Shields' depiction of ordinary life. A collage of information traces the (un) developing of Brenda's sexual expression. Though not presented chronologically, there is the delicate description of the loss of her virginity. This event is not assumed by the text, as she is a married woman, but it is included, relative to the importance it has for Brenda:

> It hurt terribly. He had been guilt stricken at the pain he inflicted upon her—but not guilt stricken enough to stop. 'Bite my shoulder,' he whispered to her in the darkness that night. She hadn't wanted to; she

> shrank from pain. She didn't want to hurt him; but she felt it was only polite to do as he requested. The circle of teeth marks on his upper arm lasted the whole of their honeymoon. (H 155)

Sex is experienced by Brenda as a mixture of pain, obligation and endurance. The romantic notions of sex and marriage that she shared with her friends at the Institute are shattered when she physically interacts with the man she has married. Shields exposes the naive state in which Brenda enters marriage: "The state of marriage was secret and safe, a circle of charmed light beyond the horizon . . . " (H 107). This is demonstrated again in Brenda's shock when she sees her husband's genitals: "She hadn't banked on his body, especially its darker, hidden areas where the skin was coarse, folded, reddened, covered with hairs. It took getting used to" (MS 155).

The reader follows the growth in the sexual relationship from the honeymoon when Brenda "imagined years of aching and soreness ahead of her" (H 155) to her middle age. In later life, there is no expression of genuine sexual passion for the other, but simply a scenario that is acted out; yet, the implications for Brenda are immense as during sex she becomes a silent, transparent object:

> It was an old game of theirs: he the pursuer, the flatterer, the one with all the lines, some of which were both true and untrue. And she: silent shy pretending reluctance, pretending to be preoccupied, and then finally allowing herself to be won. There were other games, other scenes, some sharper and more savage, but this was the one that they returned to

> again and again. . . . she felt herself grow opaque and speechless, making small gasping sounds as his tongue circled her nipples. (H 25)

The established sexual pattern is shattered, or at least challenged, by the event of the conference. The sex they have on the morning she leaves is altered as there is a role reversal as Brenda leaves the domestic routine to go where her skills are respected in a publicly acclaimed sphere. Her anticipated attendance at the conference disrupts Brenda's rituals and in actuality allows her to follow new directions in her life. Her sexual expression, which has begun to come alive through her quilts, is further articulated at the conference, in the loving arms of Barry. She is able to make connections and discoveries between her own experience and wider social patterns: "Now for the first time she felt she had stepped into faithlessness. So this was it! Not sex at all but novelty, risk, possibility" (H 97). This new exposition then leads Brenda to other new acknowledgements of the way in which she has begun, perhaps like Clarentine Flett, to recognise sexually stimulating experiences, outside of her relationship with Jack: "Then she remembered her desire earlier to reach out and touch the knee of the man on the plane" (H 73).

The charting of Brenda's sexual expression is enhanced by Shields' inclusion of Jack's point of view, in his story. With this inclusion it becomes impossible to dismiss Jack as insensitive to his wife's needs and accuse him of thwarting her sexual expression. The inclusion of his story gives details of a previous relationship and the reader is able to understand how sexually passive Jack has been. Jack's sexual fantasies and desires are also exposed and it is here we see that Jack is no enemy to Brenda. Though he may not be sexually expressive or provocative, all of his sexual desires focus on Brenda and their established love making:

> his sexual fantasies invariably circled around Brenda, his wife; and always they were played out in the safety of familiar surroundings, the house in Elm Park, the blue and white bedroom with the pictures of the children on the dresser. . . .Even he was somewhat astonished and saddened; either he had no imagination at all or he was possessed of a dull nature, doggedly monogamous and domestic. (H 159)

Through both perspectives of Jack and Brenda, the reader builds up a fuller picture of their developing sexual expression. As Brenda, through her quiltmaking, begins to recognise her sexual confinement, Jack also realises that something that was once part of his sexuality has been sanitised and silenced in his marriage. During sex with an ex-lover, he had been able to hear a voice in his head that pushed him towards an experiencing edge. This is a voice that he shied away from and he comments, rather tellingly: "After he married Brenda the voice went away. It disappeared without a trace. He hadn't thought of it in years. Nor had he ever told Brenda about it; he wouldn't know how to tell her" (H 160). This demonstrates the extent to which Jack and Brenda have become the victims of not only their sexual inexpression but also their inadequate communicative patterns. As a result, they are sexual strangers to each other. It is not that Jack is a dogmatic male oppressor but rather both Brenda and Jack have become victims of the same forces and pressures. The social, professional and class codes have taught them both to believe in the hollow myth of non-expression, both verbally and sexually. This then is the essence of Shields' gender(less) polemic.

Insights into the development of male sexuality are seen in The Stone Diaries through the discoveries made by Cuyler. After a childhood devoid of any closeness or affection, his physical contact with Mercy alters his life entirely:

> He was changed. The tidal motion of sexual longing filled him to the brim, so that the very substance of his body seemed altered. . . .All day at the quarry, breathing in clouds of mineral dust, my father thinks of his Mercy, the creases and secrets of her body, her fleshy globes and clefts, her hair, her scent . . . as though, deprived all his life of flesh, he will now never get enough. (TSD 34)

His daily existence now includes hard physical labour and the joy of sexual/physical exploration and ecstasy. A completely new realm of existence opens up as sex and physical contact become features of his life and simultaneously, he enjoys the expression of sexual love. Cuyler's sexual enlightening encompasses much more than the physical act alone as he learns a language and an expressive pattern, through sexual contact, which has been dormant.

In a sensitive way, Shields presents information about sexual impulses that are difficult to reconcile. The feelings Barker expresses towards Daisy, as a child, are highly sexual and the reader is unsure about the exact implications as the text is tense with suggestion and the power of Barker's blocked sexual expression being directed at a child.

> He is also disturbed by the presence of an 11 year old Daisy Goodwill in his household, the bold unselfconscious movement of her body, her bare arms in her summer dresses, the unnatural yearning he experienced recently when he entered

> her darkened sick room and observed the sweetness of her form beneath the sheet. (TSD 68)

Similarly, Barker's visits to prostitutes are chronicled alongside the descriptions of him as a respected professor. Barker is forced back and forth between a desire for sexual connection with another and a fierce rejection of passionate and uncontrollable sexual urges. These opposites fight within him: "Even when he is in Montreal on one of his visits, lying in the arms of women into whose bodies he has discharged his passion, he longs for the simplicity of a narrow bed and a lacerating loneliness. This is what he has to fight against—wildness, chaos" (TSD 141). These details of Barker's sexuality are even more difficult to reconcile when his marriage to Daisy is announced. Barker, a man who was sexually aroused by a sleeping child of twelve years, will now marry her when she is twenty-one. The sex that is later described between them is inexpressive and functional and in reality Daisy learns about sex from women's magazines and, like Brenda in Happenstance, comes to understand the pattern of sexual demands that are made by her husband. In the quote below, Daisy is able to plot the routine of the evening which includes routine sex, in which she has learnt to become a detached object:

> Her husband will be home in an hour or so, having in his usual way taken a taxi from the train station. He will remove his trousers in the dark bedroom . . . he will lie down on top of her, being careful not to put too much weight on her frame ('gentleman always supports himself on his elbows'). His eyes will be shut, and his warm penis will be produced and directed inside her, and then there will be a few minutes of rhythmic rocking. (TSD 191)

Shields is intent on doing a fictional justice to relationships between the sexes including the complexities of male friendships. Indeed, most of The Husband's Story is dominated by the challenges to the long-standing friendship between Jack and Bernie. Shields works hard to prevent the dismissal of male friendships and describes the regular Friday lunches, with skill:

> But on the other hand, the Fridays, at their best had given him some of the most profoundly happy moments of his life. . . .On good days the antiphonic reverberations heightened like sex his sense of being alive in the world ... He felt strange pricklings at the backs of his hands and a pressure in his chest of something being satisfied and answered. (H 54-55)

There is no tokenism, only a genuine attempt to grasp the complexities of Jack's response to existing within a nourishing relationship and when Bernie seeks comfort, Jack discovers a deep affection for him: "Jack, arranging the blanket over the sleeping form, felt a shock of love" (H 47).

Brenda is able to maintain lively friendships in a way that Jack cannot understand. He "felt amazement at the way she managed to carry her friends like floating troops in and out of the openings of her life." (H 47). In clear contrast to Jack and Bernie are Brenda and Hap Lewis. The Lewis's marriage seems to explode the very traditional roles that the marriage between Jack and Brenda endorse. Hap, for example, paints the house and is also able to complete the more traditional feminine role, as she made: "lemon layer-cakes to present to her new neighbours on the block" (H 10). However, the two women do not compete with each other and the energy that powers Harp's lifestyle is admirable to Brenda. The two share deeply and this is evident when Brenda shows Hap, "The Second Coming":

> Over the slanting expanse of the quilt, Brenda regarded Hap fondly, gratefully. She felt her throat grow warm with tears . . . Brenda had the dizzying sensation of something biblical happening: two women at the well, gathering light in a net. Neither of them spoke, and the silence seemed to Brenda to be unbreakable and dipped into their earlier memories of happiness. (H 19)

In addition, there are the three friends in The Stone Diaries—Daisy, Fraidy and Beans—whose lifelong friendship is charted in the novel: "Sometimes Daisy thinks that she and Fraidy and Beans are like one person sitting around in the same body, breathing in the same wafts of air and coming out with the same Larry thoughts" (TSD 107). After Daisy's unsuccessful first marriage the young women are able to remember their girlhood, and they "rekindled their old laughter—which came slowly at first . . . but it was heavenly when it finally ran free, their wild girlish hooting. It lifted the heaviness right off Daisy's heart—or rather her stomach, for it is here in her middle abdomen that she's stored her shock and grief" (TSD 125). Even in the nursing home, this female ease with companionship asserts itself. Daisy, who has now outlived her close friends, makes new companions and is able to share laughter with them: "they're always on the cusp of laughter" (TSD 318).

Psychological breakdown is another vital part in Shields' gender interplay, as both male and female characters are seen to be vulnerable to external forces. Brenda's breakdown is the result of many complex factors and she "was never able to unwind completely the complicated strands of that winter's despair" (H 184). Jack, too, loses his way as the regular pattern of his existence does not fit with new demands. During the week he spends without Brenda, he feels alone and is unable even to talk to his parents. Triggered by the shock of Bernie's tears and his own violent response to Rob, Jack realises how out of control he has been. Jack's nervousness is extreme when he has to see Dr Middleton: "For some reason he was trembling slightly; high on his left cheek, just beneath the eye, a nerve twittered. His throat rasped with dryness" (H 112). Though Jack desperately tries to rationalise his reactions, it becomes clearer to the reader that Jack is undergoing a huge and dramatic psychological upheaval. The secretary offers him a credible explanation: "Men . . . are under a lot of pressure these days. In their work. It never lets up, it's a jungle. My husband Bradley, he's had his rough times" (H 114). Like Brenda, Jack eventually gains a new position of understanding. He becomes aware of how tentative his grip on the future is, as he resists change: ". . . he had lost faith; but had undergone a gradual and incomprehensible mending of spirit. It could happen again he saw. And again" (H 193).

Jack feels Brenda's breakdown was caused by the lack of a father in her younger life and the death of her mother. Brenda, however, defies this explanation: "Of course! Of course. How like him to think that was the problem: her shock at her mother's sudden death and her anger at the doctor who might have prevented it. Her withdrawal, her dullness, her easy daily tears and compulsive shopping—all this he laid at the blameless door of her mother's death" (H 182). As a result, a gap grows between Jack and Brenda based on their different understanding of the same events. Jack perceives Brenda, during her breakdown, as childlike, and not rational, as she loses her perspective on reality and moreover, on the things that matter. Her quilting is encouraged but it is clear that he has no real respect for her work but seeing it merely as an acceptable form of therapy, acceptable to the perameter of his public and academic life. He cannot reconcile what she does with her hands with his lofty criteria for judging the important things in life. All she does, according to him is just to create more "things" (H 30). Indeed, many years after this apparent breakdown, Jack is still unable to appreciate Brenda's creative skill, a fact which demonstrates how the distance between them continues.

Perhaps one of the most difficult female characters for feminist scholars to read is Sarah Maloney. Mary Swann opens with this character experiencing writer's block and physical exhaustion. After the success of her Ph.D. best-seller thesis, "The Female Prism" her academic standing is certain and she is destined to become an eminent Swann scholar. Yet, she is filled with doubts and insecurities and finds solace in her own company and the simplest of tasks. She questions the central tenets of feminist thought and doctrine and challenges its relevance in her life. When the novel concludes, this character is married and pregnant and able to resolve the more strident qualities of her earlier self. It is this resolution that frustrates feminist thinkers, as it can so easily represent compromise endorsing a traditional domesticity.

Shields does not claim to be writing a treatise or a handbook for the feminist in the nineties, but attributes the outward collapse of Sarah's persona to the huge demands that academic life places on the individual. Shields allows Sarah to be ordinary and follow intrinsic human needs for support and rest. The quote below shows Sarah as an exhausted character who seeks solace in her own home and who wants to keep the outside world away:

> "'You're not coming from arrogance sweetie, your're coming from naked need." Ping! My brain shuddered purple. I was revealed, uncloaked, and as soon as possible I crept back to my ginger-cookie house on the south

> side, and made up my mind about one thing: that as long as I lived I would stay in this house . . . (MS 21)

Shields draws a parallel between Sarah and Morton, who are faced with the rigours of scholasticism and this forms an example of Shields moving past gender in her examination of relationships. Shields' gender (less) polemic is able to unite the experiences of Sarah and Morton on a shared continuum. Significantly, both Sarah and Morton are both suffering from the same pressures and though their crises are triggered and articulated differently, they are essentially the same. The angst of loneliness and the demands of academia are seen within both of them, regardless of their gender. Morton is sceptical of his internal processing and clings to institutions for salvation: " Like many an introvert, Jimroy distrusts the queasy interior world of the psyche, but has enormous faith in the mechanics of the exterior world of governments and machinery and architecture and science—all these . . . are possessed of good intentions" (MS 77). Sarah herself seeks solace in the inner world of her psyche and wants to hide away from the institutions that push her too hard.

One of the major ways in which this continuum between men and women is established is through the space that characters occupy to work and to create. One of the most stunning examples of the Woolfsian decree for private space is Brenda's workroom. Brenda transforms an underused room in her house into a centre of activity, energy and vibrancy. Jack felt the room "had become . . . the radiant core of a house that now felt timidly underfurnished and strangely formal" (H 30). The space had previously had no specific use or identity in the house but now is Brenda's room of comfort and creativity: "Brenda's quilt room—sometimes she called it her work room—was in the Southwest corner of the house. Only 4 years ago it had been the guest room. . . " (H 12).

Brenda's room, including its furnishings and atmosphere, contrasts sharply with Jack's study. Even as its title suggests, Jack's space is a more formalised and serious space. There is the social and gendered expectation that a male, particularly an academic, should have an office, an official space for serious work, within the home. Brenda's room comes from a creative urge, as there is no room in the house that was expected to be hers, for herself, the woman's room. Traditionally, the kitchen has been the domain of women and, indeed, Brenda is attached to kitchen space, enjoying the morning there before the rest of her family awake. It is important, though, that Brenda's creative life is separate from the domestic centre of the kitchen but is still within the domestic boundary of the home.

Jack notes that during Brenda's week-long absence in Philadelphia, his wife's workroom has been the only place in the house that he has not been. This demonstrates that the space is entirely Brenda's and also shows how little Jack understands of her quilting, although the reader suspects that the silver fish might represent change:

> What, he wondered did Brenda think about as she sat in this room, hour after hour, sewing? Those hours existed and must mean something. He ran his fingers over the stitching. A thought slipped into his head, a silver fish, in and out, too quick to grasp . . . (H 192)

At the conference there is further working out of this issue of male or female ownership of creative space. Women's space in the conference setting is taken over by men as the pursuits of the masculine business world are viewed as more important and worthwhile than that of the female creator: "It seems that this hotel has proven itself no different from any other male-dominated commercial institution" (H 59) is the claim made during one of the opening speeches.

In Happenstance there is a good example of parallel experiences between Jack and Brenda. They had both been walking through Lincoln Park in their early married days and they both return to this incident as a pivotal moment in their relationship. The event crystallises the missed moment that they revisit, in order to decode the implications in their later lives. Jack sees in this incident his own process of distancing and recording, to the detriment of the lived, present moment. This distancing is part of Jacks way of protecting himself from the demands of emotional involvement in spontaneous existence. Brenda, however, wants to relive this episode but this time to express the original responses that were thwarted to fall in line with Jack:

> She had watched, excitedly at first, but then, too soon, had succumbed to Jack's watchful detachment. Now she wanted the scene replayed. She wanted to set down her handbag by the shadowy root of a tree and take off her shoes. She would step forward a little hesitantly. She imagined the moon touching her smooth cheeks . . . someone would call out her name in a low voice. (H 49-50)

Shields' gender (less) polemic is constructed with ordinary accounts of the explicit experiences of men and women. However, the importance of gender itself in these experiences is seen to be rationalised against a shared value system. The men and women she creates have diverse experiences but what Shields identifies is the degree of sharing. One of the manifestations of the sharing between men and women is the heavily symbolic journeys that her characters take. These journeys are mirrored, refracted and affirmed by the actions of their counterparts. There is an essential spirituality that is involved in the regular route that Cuyler takes home from the quarry:

> He is walking faster now. The Quarry Road takes him across flat, low-lying fields, marshy in spots, infertile, scrubby, the horizon suffocatingly low, pressing down on the roofs of rough barns and houses. . . .Now he has had a glimpse of Paradise and sees it everywhere. (TSD 36)

Through Cuyler's own movement, the landscape becomes coloured with his own spiritual feelings of contentment.

Similarly, Daisy is also in motion as she takes the train to Winnipeg, the landscape that rolls past her window forms landmarks in her spiritual quest for fulfilment. Integral to her journey is the life she has left behind: "over flat stumbled fields and through a series of sunlit villages—Garrison, East Selkirk. . . .her imagination soared. She saw that her old life was behind her, as cleanly cut off as though she had taken a knife to it" (TSD 48/9). This train journey is revisited later when Daisy and her father move to Indiana, as Cuyler's zone of vision is opened further than his previous boundaries of Stonewall and Tyndall: "The world's landscape, as glimpsed by the train window was larger than he had imagined and more densely compacted" (TSD 87). The train motif is picked up again for Daisy with her journey back to Canada, years later. For her, the spiritual quest is articulated clearly: "I feel as if I am on my way home" (TSD 132). This anticipation reaches a spiritual crescendo: "It seemed to her that

June day, as the train slid over the Michigan state line and entered Canada, that she had arrived at a healing kingdom" (TSD 133).

These spiritual journeys, however, do not always find spiritual reconciliation. Mr Flett, after a huge journey from Manitoba to England begins a gruelling walk to the Orkney Islands. He is powered by thoughts of Clarentine, learning words of love from one of her hidden novels. Sadly, he is left as an old man uttering loving phrases he long ago committed to memory but never used. Shields is not suggesting a startling revolution or a moment of absolute clarified thought or awareness. There is, however, something enchanting about these ordinary characters navigating their own routes, sometimes in tandem, as the quote below suggests: "joined together by the dolorous stretched arms of Victoria Flett, the three of them exchanged one continent for another. . . .Each of them believed they lived on a fragile planet. Not one of them knew what the world was coming to" (TSD 288). The same expansion of vision that occurred for Cuyler is seen too for Sarah Maloney. As her walk progresses, so do her thoughts: "Every day I walk along the same route, past grimy shrubs and run down stores and apartment buildings and trees that become leafier as I approach Fifty-Seventh street. . . .About this time I start to feel a small but measurable buzzing in the brain that makes my legs move along in double time" (MS 23).

Perhaps the best example of paralleled experience are the walks that Jack and Brenda take during their week apart. With the large snowfall, Jack is able to experience the cleansing of his threatening surroundings: " Amazing how the corrupt, old downtown sky could be so quickly transformed and widened" (H 126). With this wintry scene comes a new zest that he uses to direct his own movements through this new landscape, relying on his own energy, rather than cars or public transport. There is a physical/psychological expansion as the reader has the sense of Jack taking a huge breath of fresh air:

> It was the whiteness that made the idea of walking home seem possible. Snow and purity: a symbolism effortlessly grasped; snow was capable of making strange instant conversions. . . .It pleased Jack, and made him feel oddly safe, to think of this new namelessness, and the way in which the snow had obliterated geographical boundaries, stretching even beyond the city limits to bind this rusty downtown sprawl to the stillness of the forest preserves, small farms, villages, lakes. (H 156)

This is a highly charged walk, then, in which Jack begins to regain a sense of himself that has been thwarted by the pressure of academic failure, the weight of parental responsibly and the challenge of his stagnant relationship with Bernie receiving a torrent of freshwater tears.

There are strong links with this mighty walk and that which Brenda takes, with her creativity physically wrapped around her shoulders:

> striding along, or rather being borne forward on rails of blue oxygen, her boots kicking out from the brilliant folds, punching sharp prints in the wafery layers of snow. Ms Brenda Bowman of Elm Park Chicago, gliding along, leaving a streak of indelible colour on the whitened street and trailing behind her the still more vivid colours of—what? Strength, purpose, certainty. And a piercing apprehension of what she might have been or might still become. Her shadow, which she could not help but admire, preceded her down the sun-struck street. . . .Forty years of

> creeping, tiptoeing, of learning how to walk down a street like this. Forty years of preparing—a waste, a waste, but one that could be rectified, if only she could imagine how. There was something epic in her wide step, a matriarchal zest, impossibly old. She was reminded suddenly of The Winged Victory of Samothrace. (H 123)

In conclusion, Shields feels that the cause of her cool reception by some feminist critics, and indeed by some traditional reviewers, is directly the result of her gendered subject matter, knowing she is dismissed because of "the domesticity" (Shields, Personal Interview 24) of her work. The domestic is ordinary and commonplace and is traditionally associated with women as housewives and mothers; as such, it is dismissed by mainstream reviewers as too dull and ordinary for interest. Yet, Shields has stated her deep faith in the happenings that occur in the domestic arena: "I always knew that interesting things went on in kitchens, major things. . . .It's not that I love domestic work or drudgery, but I love domesticity" (Shields, Personal Interview 6). The gender polemic established in Shields' fiction is a challenge to pervasive notions. Though Shields acknowledges that patriarchal systems have undermined women's existence and undervalued their contribution, she refuses to cite men and women as existential enemies. She locates male and female experiences on a psychological and emotional continuum which acknowledges a direct inter-relation between the two worlds. Shields is certain that there are unique experiences but these are not realised in a vacuum and she is sceptical of genetic and biological explanations used to keep men and women in confusion about each other. In her work, men and women have a far more similar, than dissimilar experience of life and the differences that occur are due to intrinsically different language and expressive patterns to articulate their experience. When discussing Happenstance in interview, with De Roo, Shields makes this point clearly: "Brenda and Jack, whether talking about history or friendship, are remarkably alike, but their ideas are embedded in different language patterns. . . .The gulf between them is language and not belief . . ." (Shields, Flying 42). For the reader, the effect of the gender(less) polemic is to centralise what has become increasingly and perhaps dangerously stuck in a polarised position to one where there is a more sensitive understanding of male and female existence.

Chapter Four

The Nobility of (Auto) Biography[6]

> [T]o say that "Twelve years passed" is to deny that fact of biographical logic. . . .The recounting of a life is a cheat, of course; I admit the truth of this; even our own stories are obscenely distorted; it is a wonder really that we keep faith with the simple container of our existence. (TSD 28)

Biography, as the quote above suggests, is a provocative generic attempt to represent the reality of an individual life. As such, there is perhaps an unrealistic expectation placed on the biographer that his/her final narrative be an accurate and truthful record. This expectation places biography on the interface between fact and fiction; the demand for fact has within it an unacknowledged acceptance of fiction. Stanley has made this observation, stating "authorised facts are actually authorised fictions . . . " (129). In using biography, Shields is fully aware of the difficulties of this interface. In an interview with Thomas she said, ". . . suddenly you are asked this question, 'What is fiction, what's real and what isn't?" (Thomas Epistolary 59). Shields feels that the reader is responsible for evaluating the possibilities of truth in what he/she reads. Yet this chapter's opening quote, taken from The Stone Diaries, directly challenges the biographical objective, as it postulates that reality cannot be represented nor can truth be objectively presented.

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[6] "(Auto) Biography": this term is multi-dimensioned, by the use of brackets and functions as a phrase within this chapter to include both autobiography and biography wherever necessary.

These challenges to the acceptance of biographical fact are congruent with the postmodern challenge to the grand narrative. The reader is alerted to the impossibility of a single narrating voice providing exhaustive information. Even genres that are declared to be non-fiction, such as biography, have complex systems of power relations and limitations that defy the generic expectation of truth. The speaker of an (auto) biographic truth is involved in telling a story of his/her own presentation of facts. What is created is, at best, a politically constructed image based on a selection and ordering of preferred information fragments. Liz Stanley makes a distinction between "microscope" or "kaleidoscope" models of narration that is significant here. To accept the traditional view of (auto)biography is to accept a pseudo-scientific one-dimensional presentation of the proven reality of a person's life. To challenge that view, as Shields does, is to become aware of a depiction of an existence which is presented through different coloured lenses where shapes can emerge and disappear. As Stanley states:

> The conventional model of biography is one which can be likened to the effect of a "microscope": the more information about the subject you collect, the closer to "the truth"—the "whole picture" you get . . . a more appropriate and less scientific metaphor . . . is to see biography as a "kaleidoscope": each time you look, you see something rather different, composed certainly of the same elements, but in a new configuration. (Stanley 158)

Shields demonstrates an avid interest in biography; she states it "is my abiding interest, my life interest I suppose, when it comes down to it. Our perceptions of our lives and the arc of a life and when we tell our stories, how much do we create or erase?" (Shields, Personal

Interview 14). All of her novels link into a work-wide exploration of the processes undertaken in depicting reality in words. The reality version that she creates questions the validity of writing which has a truth base that is not challenged. In essence, then, she undermines the truth base that has become associated with biography which endorses biographic narratives as fact. The suggestion Shields makes throughout her work is that the position taken by the reader needs to be more assertive in order to uncover the deeper complexities of the stories being told and how they are constructed. As shown in previous chapters, then, Shields works on exposing the grey areas between boundaries and between definitions in which reality can be depicted.

There is a fascination with the figure of the biographer/storyteller and especially his/her accumulation of material and selection of facts which cannot ever be objective. What results from this is a reflection of the concerns and political endeavours of the biographer himself/herself and this is seen acutely in Mary Swann. In the first four sections Sarah, Morton, Rose and Frederic make Mary Swann into what each of them requires her to be. Thus, Sarah disregards the rhyming dictionary as it does not fit into her ideal of what a poet should be; Morton hankers for evidence of Mary's wider classical reading; Rose fabricates her friendship with Mary to elevate her own social status; and Frederic replaces Mary's own words with his own. In this way, Shields explodes the descriptors "biography" and "biographer". The person endeavouring to write with conviction about another's life achieves an exposition of his/her own concerns and the intended subject remains uncharted. Thus, in Shields' work, we face the tricky paradigm of the (un) truth of biographies. There is a call for the reader to accept these constructions, reflections and refractions as depictions of a reality, but not a presentation of truth. The biographical narratives become worthy of attention if they are not read in ignorance of the processes that construct them. Thus the reader who enters the reading process on a traditional quest for an incontrovertible truth and value system is exposed to a new way of understanding information.

The opening of The Stone Diaries is spoken by Daisy as she thinks/speaks out the story of her birth. Her narration has a feel of a spoken autobiography, yet her facts and information have been gained from people such as her father and Clarentine Flett to formulate an impression of her own birth which takes on the semblance of reality. However, though Shields is clear about how vague this reality is, she does not mean for the reader to dismiss it as an invalid account, but to accept its own constructions: "She [Daisy] is not writing it. She's thinking it . . . she doesn't actually put pen to paper or anything like that. She's building it and she's building it out of scraps of what she knows and what she imagines" (Shields, Golden 58).

What makes the opening section of The Stone Diaries important, is Shields' challenge to the notion that words can present an accurate record. Daisy's unique manner of collecting, ordering and presenting is a form of distortion, yet in any representation there will always be unknowns and mundanities that fall into obscurity or are to be assumed by the reader. The statement then shows the reader that he/she can trust some of her narration as factual, but not other parts. This is one of the several occasions in The Stone Diaries where Shields entirely dislocates trust in the narrator by exposing the obvious fabrication and story telling. Turns of phrase and figurative patterns disallow a traditional accuracy; thus twelve years do not pass as part of the narrative, and indeed the recording of Daisy's life cannot be considered as an accurate chronology but rather a collection of fragments drawn from various places, including imagination and gossip. However, Shields does not want this narrative to be dismissed, nor the processes the biographer undergoes to be disregarded. She suggests that the generic descriptors should be expanded to acknowledge that the collecting and assemblage of information and not incontrovertible facts is being presented.

Missing facts, then, should not offend the reader as they are an inevitable result of creating a narrative of someone's life. Below, in an interview with Joan Thomas, Shields states her intention for the construction of Daisy's story in The Stone Diaries:

> What I decided to do right from the beginning was to go into the life of this woman at approximately ten year cuts, and make a kind of still life of that. I knew that when I did that I would be losing moments like childbirth, which I think is probably the most dramatic moment of any woman's life, and her education, her sexual initiation—but I decided to miss those moments and go for other moments. (Shields, Golden 58)

What is important here is the openly stated agenda of selection based on segments of time, the effect of which is to omit some events and privilege others. The imagined texture of Daisy's possible self-story is able to acknowledge the importance of other factors that are unknown: "Her autobiography, if such a thing were imaginable, would be, if such a thing were ever to be written, an assemblage of dark voids and unbrigeable gaps" (TSD 76). Thus, it is impossible to account entirely for a person's existence without acknowledging, firstly, a selection and construction process, and, secondly, that there will always be gaps that evade articulation.

Carolyn Heilbrun in, Writing A Woman's Life , locates the biographical attempt to chronicle women's lives and experiences within a tradition of untruthfulness that maintains a phallocentric narrative pattern and has rendered women voiceless. Though autobiography as a genre may seem to provide an opportunity for women to chart their own lives and experiences, Heilbrun finds that this has not been possible: "Well into the twentieth century, it continued to be impossible for women to admit into their autobiographical narratives the claim of achievement, the admission of ambition, the recognition that accomplishment was neither luck nor the result of the efforts or generosity of others" (Heilbrun 24). It is exposed, then, that any existing autobiographical writing, containing the stories that women told of their own lives, has been formed under pervasive political demands. A reader of these texts needs to understand these tensions. Though the facts may be correct in these stories, the context is distorted, as women have been unable to chart the particulars of their lives.

The difficulties that Shields herself found when writing The Stone Diaries, is the result, Heilbrun would argue, of a lack of an existing structure to represent women's lives in words. Codified ways for men to express themselves autobiographically have evolved, such as following the quest motif and allowing that to form the narrative shape. However, Shields needed to find a way to articulate not only women's lives, but the lives of her ordinary characters, whose existence is not deemed worthy of acknowledgement.

Shields' use of narrative collage and multi-versioning is perhaps a response to the difficulties that Heilbrun outlines: "Despite the wonderful biographies we have had in recent years, there still exists little organised sense of what a woman's biography or autobiography should look like. Where should it begin?" (Heilbrun 27). Thus, the narrative structures that Shields creates in novels such as The Stone Diaries, involving the inclusion of multi versions and collating, are working toward a way of representing women's lives with some sensitivity. This sensitivity then centres around an acknowledgement and an attempt to represent the complexities and fullness of existence whilst simultaneously acknowledging that gaps will exist. Interestingly, this construction process is what is parodied in Mary Swann through the re-construction of the poet herself.

Yet another way in which Shields is challenging the previous tradition of (auto) biography is in the selection of some of her subject matter. For example, what has previously been excluded in a genuine account of women's lives is their physical experience as women. A striking and provocative example of the physical aspect in Shields' work is found at the opening of The Stone Diaries when Mercy dies during labour. The reader is initially shocked by Mercy's fear and ignorance of her own bodily functions and their implications: "Her monthly blood has only appeared twice in her life, springing out of the soft cushions of her genital flesh" (TSD 5). There is a description of a contraction: "What she feels is more like a shift in the floor of her chest, rising at first, and then an abrupt drip, a squeezing like an accordion held sideways . . . she breathes rapidly, blinking as the pain wraps a series of heavy bands around her abdomen" (TSD 4). Though later in the text this scene is revisited with warnings for the reader not to assume a scene of deprivation and ignorance, the essential point here remains the same, which is the explicit stating of women's physicality.

Shields draws another sensitive portrait of a women's gendered existence in Mary Swann. Rose has been released, through menopause, from the social obligation to be sexual: "at last she is allowed to live freely in an asexual twilight that almost flatters her" (MS 131). Shields then takes the reader alongside the fear and torment that her reoccurring bleeding causes. This experience is communicated in expressions and phrases that are associated with Rose's limited understanding of her physical self. Like Mercy's uncharted pregnancy, these are subjects which are perhaps ignored as insignificant or too explicit. The inclusion of such practical implications enhances the genuine and particularly ordinary portrait of Rose's menopause:

> On top of everything else there is the worry about her periods starting up again. It's exasperating the way they start and stop, stop and start. Only today, on a Saturday afternoon, she had to go down to the Red and White to buy a new box of pads. Naturally, Stan Fortas was at the cash register with his big hands gripping the box . . . just as though it was Rice Krispies she was buying and not sanitary pads which she required to staunch this new, thick dark-red outpouring. (MS 156)

A large proportion of Rose's section is coloured by the physical and emotional implications of her problematic menopause. It is this which concerns her and occupies her mind, and as such, it dominates her section of the narrative: "seditious blood is pouring out of her day after day, making her weaker and weaker so that she can hardly think—all this has interfered with her life and made her fully deficient in her own eyes . . . " (MS 166). The powerful distress Rose feels is charted very explicitly: "But early this morning she awoke to find a pool of blood between her legs. After eleven months—this! The odour and the stickiness brought tears to her eyes and, rinsing out the sheets in the bathtub, she gave way to a single sharp cry of anguish" (MS 145).

There is an accusation mounted against the male ownership of physical and medical information which leaves women such as Mercy and Rose in ignorance. Dr. Spears is unapproachable to Mercy and she cannot express her concerns to her husband either: "No, Mercy has not approached Dr. Spears, she would never speak to Dr. Spears of such a thing, she would speak to no one, not even her husband—especially not her husband" (TSD 5). She is too frightened to ask for help from these men who do not offer any sensitivity or concern. Cuyler finds her silence about her pregnancy hard to reconcile as he cannot believe that she was unable to speak to him and imagines that there must be another reason for her silence. In Mary Swann, another example of patriarchal inappropriateness is described between Rose and her doctor:

> "Just slip off your panties," he said in his crackling young man's voice, "just try and relax." As though anyone could relax with that rubber glove pushing away up inside her. She whimpered a little with the pain, a bleating sound that surprised her, but the rubber glove plunged even further, twisting and testing the helpless interior pulp of her body. . . .For a day afterward, her stomach churned with humiliation. She resolved never to go back. (MS 156)

The implications, then, of blocked access to information about the female body and its processes are immense. In the absence of accurate help and support, Rose is forced to consider her actual demise: ". . . but the blood secretly leaking from her body leaves her a future that is numbered in days now, not weeks. . . .By the first week in January there will be nothing left . . ." (MS 168). Lack of physical knowledge leaves these women in a perilous position and this continues for Daisy into her final days: "She lives now in the wide-open arena of pain, surrounded by row upon row of spectators . . . trying to remember a time when her body had been sealed and private" (TSD 310).

Perhaps one of the most atrocious incidences of male ownership and control of information is seen in The Stone Diaries after Daisy returns from her fateful honeymoon. The doctor internally examines Daisy and establishes that her hymen is still intact. This information about her physical state is then passed on "Man-to-man" (TSD 126) to Daisy's father. What is most vital to understand, however, is that Daisy is unaware that this information has been, firstly, obtained and, secondly, passed on to her father. The doctor also tells his wife and eventually Daisy's mother-in-law hears of the news and then viciously attacks her, claiming that she was "an unnatural woman of profound frigidity" (TSD 126). Female physicality and sexuality is abused and unexpressed as Daisy is still a virgin. It is with relief that we note Daisy can at least tell her friends about the real events of her wedding night.

Shields' examination of physicality offers not just damning insights into the medical/patriarchal world but attempts to document women's physical experience. In Happenstance, Shields includes Brenda's menstrual details, such as the unreliability of her period and pre-menstrual stress. There is no valorising, but aspects of women's experience, which are normally avoided, are documented: "Damn it, damn it. Brenda felt tired. She *was* tired. She was expecting her period; that always made the backs of her legs ache" (H 55). Brenda's articulated concern about her period carves new ground as it attempts to document her physical experience.

Phyliss Rose directly accuses biography of deception if matters of importance to women are omitted: "good books by any standards. . . are filled with invaluable information. Yet, full as they are . . . inevitably leave things out. That is why. . . biography which purports to be so fair and objective, is more deceptive than the most flagrantly partisan biography" (qtd. in

Heilbrun 30). Biographies can be of value if the reader is aware of the bias, subjectivity and gaps that are part of the essential fabrics of the finished product.

Heilbrun, below, postulates four ways that it is possible to write about a woman's life. It is clear, though, that Shields does not select a single approach to narrate her stories, but uses an amalgam of what Heilbrun offers and more:

> There are four ways to write a woman's life: the woman herself may tell it, in what she chooses to call an autobiography; she may tell it in what she chooses to call fiction; a biographer, woman or man, may write the woman's life in what is called a biography; or the woman may write her own life...unconsciously, and without recognising and naming the process. (Heilbrun 11)

Characters, specifically Daisy, speak/think their story in an attempt to chronicle or diary the events of their lives. The title, The Stone Diaries, suggests the solidity of stone as well as the fluidity of diary keeping. However, Cuyler, a stone mason by trade, encourages us to consider "how every piece of stone in the world has its own centre with something imprisoned in it" (TSD 90) thus, the real life-story can be trapped in a similar way. Indeed, one of the most powerful testimonies to a life is the stone tower that Cuyler builds to mark the grave of his first wife, Mercy. The stones are all carefully chosen and prepared, just as the biographer selects details and works on drafts. Cuyler works, in an attempt to resolve his grief, in a way similar to the possible motivations of an artist:

> He chooses the stones carefully, for he has formed an odd resolution which is to set them without mortar. Gravity must alone hold them in

> place, gravity and balance, each stone receptive to the shape of those it rests against and in keeping with the abstraction that has lately filled his head like a waking reverie, a dream structure made up of sorrow mingled with bewilderment. (TSD 58)

Importantly, this stone tower is not a single creation as there are other forces that carve their own narrative and alter the shape of the tower. There are the prairie elements, such as winter snows and summer heat and those that visit the tower are responsible for considerable erosion: "One of the young men has pocketed a small carved nugget, which he fingers as he walks along" (TSD 71).

Importantly too, these visitors not only alter the physical aspect of the tower but embellish the story of the tower's origin too: "The most knowledgeable person in the party will recount the history of the tower: a beautiful young wife dead of childbirth. A handsome young husband, stunned by grief . . . " (TSD 70-1). In this way, the stone diary is in the process of becoming, under more than one influence and Daisy, as an adult, appears to sense this reality of the tower's changing state:

> Where my mother's solitary gravestone once sat, now rises a hollow tower some thirty feet in height and still growing. The stones that constitute its fabric have been chosen for their effects on the overall design . . . more and more my father chooses to decorate the stone surfaces . . . patterns incised on this mineral form seem to evade the eye; you have to stand at a certain distance, and in a particular light, to make them out. This impediment is part of the charm for him. What he carves

> will remain half hidden, half exposed, and, as such will reflect the capriciousness of the revealed world. (TSD 64)

In Mary Swann, Shields presents four separate, though connected, episodes of people's lives. The point of convergence is their connection with the murdered woman, Mary Swann. It is the pursuit of this woman and her poetic truths that create the momentum of the novel. The reader follows the four as they become involved/implicated in the re-construction of Mary Swann. The reality of the murdered woman paradoxically becomes more distant and enigmatic as the processes of her re-construction becomes clearer. Her poetry fails to provide the incontrovertible proof that the four characters want, in order for their own personal idea of Mary Swann, to be validated. Each is convinced that they are close to the real woman, even though it is merely their own construction. Clearly, the woman is dead and her only testimony is the would-be poems and her notebook that still exist. Yet, the poems have been re-constructed by Frederic and his wife, published without any acknowledgement of this; and the notebook has been withheld and eventually everything is stolen. Thus, Mary Swann becomes the very private property of Sarah, Rose, Frederic and Morton and of course the reader him/herself. Clara Thomas agrees that there is a feeling of the characters trying to possess Mrs. Swann and also comments on the mobile position of the reader within the text, thus: "The fragments are enough to pull readers into the mystery and hold them there, willing fellow travellers among the assortment of characters who are all, in their own ways, striving to possess Mary Swann" (Thomas 200).

In The Stone Diaries, there is the expansion of the biographic role, to include non-animate entities. There is the historical charting of the development of the American city and the symbolic powerful role that stone has had in the building of cities: ". . . at this very point in history the remarkable profile of a great building is about to rise in the empire State of our nation—as noble a testimony to the powers of Salem limestone and to human ingenuity as any of us would have dreamed." (TSD 82). Though stone is associated with unmovabilty and solidness it is also characterised as having a life within it. As such, stone is involved in a process of change and growth. For example, the quarry's marks are seen to transform the landscape of Stonewall, not to destroy it: "The quarry is only a few years old . . . and already the landscape has been transformed so that the earth steps down in tiers like an open air arena . . . The stone itself, a dolomite limestone, is more beautiful and easier to handle than that which my father knew growing up in Stonewall, Manitoba" (TSD 25). Clearly, the stone itself is integral in the metaphor as it represents both years of existence, in the form of silt layers or fossils, and also modern marks of mining and quarrying.

Many of the characters are seen to have intrinsic relationships with rock itself, which forms an integral part of their self-story. Mr Flett, for example, takes a special collection of rocks with him as he leaves Canada: "He has his savings which are respectable . . . a few momentos of his 46 years in Canada: some stone specimens, Tyndall dolomites, beauties . . . " (TSD 96). These items symbolise the significance that rock has in his feeling of connection and there is the poignant association that Mercy has with stone itself. Her life has been fundamentally shaped by rock, as, in the absence of any other name, her own name has been derived from it: "She grew up, as cloistered as a nun in The Stonewall Orphans Home . . . out of an impulse for order or perhaps democratisation, all constituents lacking names of their own, that is to say, infants given over to the institutions' care by their unmarried mothers were called

Stone" (TSD 29). A talent for stone carving characterises the younger life of Cuyler, yet Daisy's wedding marks a watershed: "His gift for carving has left him. His sensibility has coarsened. He has become a successful business man, true enough, but he has grown out of touch with his craft . . . and deficient with the new mechanised tools of his trade" (TSD 114). These stone images, connected throughout with the life of Cuyler, are strong and reliable.

There is a suggestion, through Cuyler and other characters, that the written word and the vehicle of paper are inadequate for charting the events of their life; stone is more appropriate. The journal that Daisy keeps on her epic train trip, as an example of the written form, is not only too much effort to find when insight occurs, but it is lost and never found. Also, the papers—the written testimony for Maria's identity—are questionable: ". . . but who trusts official information, particularly when the papers themselves look phoney—overly crisp and too heavily fixed with seals and signatures" (TSD 127). Thus, the dichotomy of a stone diary becomes a more appropriate form of expression and recording of a person's life. Indeed, stone as metaphor and simile for the human situation is used throughout the novel. As Daisy expresses her feelings when she is near to death, Shields uses stone imagery again: "Stone is how she finally sees herself, her living cells replaced by the insentience of mineral decomposition" (TSD 358).

The ways in which Shields challenges the grand narrative and implements new modes of narration, discussed in chapter two, are important to her work with (auto) biography. In The Stone Diaries, for example, the whole of chapter 7 is dedicated to the possible causes of Daisy's breakdown. This provides a real representation of the event with numerous concerned parties offering differing opinions. Alice feels that, " She's been fired" (TSD 239); Fraidy feels that she was sexually repressed; Cousin Beverly has a theory of "nervous prostration..."(TSD 250); her son attributes intellectual boredom and her youngest daughter feels it is a raving hatred for Pinky Fullerton.

What is presented in the fractured narrative at this point reads like the pages of a biographer's notebook, including everything that people associated with Daisy, at this time, have to say about her. The novel, at this point reflects what Morton has been hearing during his visits to Frances, the sister of Mary Swann, and, indeed, to Rose and the other people in Nadeau. The various pieces of information that he collects will be fitted together with other ideas to form his biography. The connection between the biographer's notes and the various theories for Daisy's breakdown are swallowed up in the contribution of Daisy's own theory. Thus, we see Shields' shift from biography to autobiography with the provision of "Mrs.Flett's Theory." Within the narrative itself, the shock of this disclosure is articulated as follows: ". . . surely no one can expect Mrs Flett to come up with a theory about her own suffering"(TSD 263). This moment in the narrative is connected firmly with one which occurs in the equally fragmented final chapter, "Death," where Daisy articulates her own dying moments. Various notes of information are presented, such as the pieces of printed matter that a biographer may have to sift through, like medical records, a list of addresses and snippets of conversations. Yet, amongst these fragments, Daisy herself speaks/thinks her final phrase: "I'm still here, inside the (powdery, splintery) bones, ankles, the sockets of my eyes, shoulder, hip, teeth, I'm still here, oh, oh" (TSD 352).

The inclusion of biographical details is seen also when Cuyler finds his voice. The event is speculated about by several characters, including the one who is who is nominally, at this point, called a narrator:

> . . . he has shed such embarrassments as a snake sheds a skin. . . .He is an impressive figure in this community, respected, admired. But it is when he opens his mouth to speak that he becomes charismatic. That silver tongue, how was it acquired?. . . Cuyler Goodwill himself believes . . . that speech came to him during his brief two year marriage. . . .There in the sheeted width of their feather bed, his roughened male skin discovering the abundant soft flesh of his wife's body, enclosing it, entering it—that was the moment when the stone in his throat became dislodged . . . words gathered in his mouth then, words he hadn't known were part of his being. (TSD 84)

Daisy, as his daughter, expresses her own conclusion: "My own belief is that my father found his voice, found it truly and forever, in the rhetorical music of the King James scriptures. . . .Its narratives frankly puzzled him. . . .But scriptural rhythms entered his body directly . . . language spoke through him, and not—as is the usual case—the other way around" (TSD 85). Shields also includes theories that are not owned but exist as reportage offerings in the narrative: "Another theory holds that the man grew articulate as the result of the great crowds who travelled northward to see the tower he built to his wife's memory" (TSD 85).

Other histories are charted, such as the Jewish history— "the history (compiled by Skutari's Canadian grandson, and later published, McGill University Press, 1969)" (TSD 37).

This inclusion is clearly metafictive in the way the auto/biography/fiction points to another recorded historical/fiction, outstepping the bounds of its own constructed reality. However remote this extra text maybe, it is closely bound to the major characters in narrative as the old Jew was present at Daisy's birth.

Integral to Shields' examination/manipulation of (auto) biography is the challenge to the notion of truthful fact. Shields identifies many of her fictional biographers, involved in the subjective collection of details which can either fit, or not, with their own notion of their subject. This process is shown as particularly difficult for Morton Jimroy. He is involved in writing his third biography; the first on Ezra Pound led him to detest his subject, the second on Starman left him frustrated with Starman's shallow self absorption. In this third biography on Mary Swann, Morton tries to pin down the facts of Mary's life that will substantiate his idea of the murdered female poet/genius. Even though he cannot find anyone in Nadeau to substantiate his conviction that Swann has been influenced by Jane Austen, he intends to include these influences in his biography, whether they are substantiated or not. There is clear irony in this kind of determined selection of facts. In one of his letters to Sarah, he openly states his disdain for the popular misconception that biography is based on fabrication: "The oxygen of the biographer is not, as some people would think, speculation; it is the small careful proofs that he pins down and sits hard upon" (MS 49). This irony is visited repetitively as Morton works on the biography. For example, he is doubtful that the contents of Swann's diary will provide any useful information. Yet, the diary is traditionally the place for the recording of intimate thoughts and feelings, and of life events and relationships. These private writings are usually so subjective that they expose the inner thoughts of the writer. Morton has no hope for Mary's diary, and it is here that the reader is perhaps frustrated with his persistent efforts to construct his idea of the poet, rather than working with what he has found.

Shields plays with Morton on this interface between biographical authenticity and subjectivity. Morton's research is consistently unable to provide him with a successful fusion between what he articulates as Mary's ordinary existence and her poetry:

> During the past two years, Jimroy had conducted extensive interviews with the following people. . . .He has also spent a few intensely lonely and wasted days in the National Archives in Ottawa gathering nothing at all but a severe headache and an infection in his upper intestine. In the end he abandoned background research—it seemed to have little to do with Mary Swann. The problem was not to reconcile Swann with her background, but to separate her from it, as the poetry had done. (MS 106-7)

The reader is able to understand what is difficult for him to reconcile. It is the gap between the construction of Mary Swann in his head and the facts and information of her existence that he is finding. Through this, the reader is able to understand the impending disappointment for Morton as Mary will be unable to provide the sense of completion and fulfilment that he seeks. In a similar way to Pound and Starman, Swann will let him down, despite his wish to make this biography ease the painful wounds of the other two: "The hollowness rang loud. And it rang with a double echo for Jimroy, announcing not only deadness at the centre of life but disenchantment with surfaces. The discovery of emptiness affected him like the beginning of a long illness. Once again he seemed to be looking in a mirror" (MS 85).

The path of his work on Mary is leading him down the road to disappointment too: "The fact is, the poems and the life of Mary Swann do not meld, and Jimroy, one morning, working in the garden, spreads his hand-written notes in the December sunshine and begins to despair. . . .How is he to connect Mary Swann's biographical greyness with the achieved splendour of *Swann's Songs*" (MS 108). His intentions for his work do seem to be misguided. During his year as Distinguished Visitor, on Sabbatical from Winnipeg, he has to visit the university to speak and answer questions on literary biography. There is an episode through which he begins to dread the fate that Mary Swann has at the hands of academics: "It was just a matter of time before the theoreticians got to Mary Swann and tore her limb from limb in a grotesque parody of her bodily death. But he could not think about that now; now was not the time" (MS 81). Yet, he is unable, through his position of biography, to accept the reality that he and the biography he is working on are part of the same mechanism.

Morton Jimroy, the established renowned biographer is in a position of authority in the text. For example, his work on Pound "had been regarded and still was regarded as balanced, dispassionate scholarly and humane" (MS 85). As such his attitude towards Swann's female identity is fatal. He demonstrates exactly how women's existence has been obscured, in male attempts to document their lives:

> Even as recently as 30 years ago, women reached the menopause earlier, or so Jimroy has read, especially country women. Something to do with diet. He supposes he will have to deal with the biological considerations in his book, though the thought makes him tired and reawakens his ulcer. (MS 87)

Biography, as a generic form, is seen to make demands on its subjects as there are certain elements, such as the pivotal event in a person's life, that are demanded by the narrative form itself. It is the effect of these generic requirements that powers much of Morton's persistence in researching Mary's life and his feeling that he has not yet uncovered the key to her existence: "But what Jimroy yearns for even more than the notebook and the love poems is to be told the one central cathartic event in Mary Swann's life. It must exist. It is what a good biography demands, what a human life demands. But now, December, he had begun to lose faith in his old belief that the past is retrievable" (MS 111). These generic aspects lead Frederic Cruzzi to dismiss the form of (auto) biography apart from certain texts which he feels are worthy:

> The truth is that except for those of Orwell and Pritchett, autobiography is a form that offends him. The cosy cherishing of self is only part of the problem. There is the inevitable lack of perspective, not to mention hideous evasions, settling of scores, awesome precocity, and the appalling melted fat of rumination, barrels of it, boatloads. Most of the people in the world . . . could write their autobiographies in one line. (MS 181)

Paradoxically, this exclamation becomes part of the fabric of his own text as it includes "Frederic Cruzzi: His (Unwritten) One sentence Autobiography" (MS 182-3) which, ironically, is over a page long.

The backdrop of (auto)biography is crucially linked to Shields' agenda of ordinariness. She opens up a genre that has previously been the domain of only a small selection of men and women, to include the characters she creates, who are drawn from entirely different stock. As Stanley comments: ". . . those people 'important' enough to be subject to biography are infrequently women unless they are: infamous, glamorous . . . a, 'star' and/or the wives of famous men" (26). It can be seen that that within the theme of biography and its art, Shields draws together a new way of charting the complex lives of ordinary people. Her attention to ordinariness transforms daily events into facets of an extraordinary existence through the modes of telling. Though the life of Daisy Goodwill may not be one of particular stature worthy of attention, her story is the struggle for articulation of a lifetime's experience from a new place. From this new place comes the celebration and appreciation, including the gaps, of a lifespan and the enormity of ordinary experience.

In conclusion, Shields' work is making new demands on biography by becoming intimately aware of the falsifications that can exist within it. I feel her work refutes Stanley's comment that ". . . writing on biography is stuck in a timewarp, protected from and resistant to the winds of change. . . " (26). Shields is part of a metaphorical wind of change, exposing the highly subjective nature of biography and attempting to undermine the unworthy protected status biography has in "nineteenth century high positivism" (Stanley 126). Heilbrun states that: "Power is the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential . . . and the right to have one's part matter" (18) which forms the objectives of Shields' fictional transformations. The lives of ordinary people, such as Daisy and her father, Rose Hindmarch and The Bowmans, are treated in new and innovative ways through which their ordinary lives are transformed into extraordinary narratives.

Conclusion

"Representation may not be all, but it is certainly something."

(Stanley 51)

Shields explodes the pervasive notion that everyday activities and the domestic sphere can be disregarded as irrelevant and worthless. Shields' work focuses very strongly on ordinary people and their lives. Through her use of ordinariness she seeks a common ground and a shared experience rather than social stratification and exclusion, feeling that there are aspects of the human condition that are common to all. The reader neither gets swamped with drudgery nor offended by over sentimentalisation; rather, is presented with highly sensitive and effective writing.

The opening quote of this concluding chapter comes from Stanley's excellent work on the feminist implications of autobiography. She intimates that there are advances to be made in seeking accurate depictions of experiences in all forms of writing. Her hope is that the lives of women, and all of those silenced, may begin to be articulated and recorded in ways which allow them to be free to express the reality of their own existence. Though it may be felt that effective representations in fiction may not instigate radical social or political change or cause immediate shifts in attitude, representation is a very important tool in liberating ordinary people and their experiences from the shroud of silence. Fiction, in its attempt to represent characters and their lives accurately, offers the reader something that, for Shields, is priceless. She feels if the fictional representation is successful, it can open up a genuine connection between the reader and the text: "I think that is one reason we read fiction. We look for moments of truth that are never articulated, so we have that wonderful sense of 'A-Ha!' . . . for that moment of connection" (Shields, Personal Interview 14-5).

In chapter one, I identified a set of visual politics behind the vast array of visual information that Shields includes in her fiction. Visual disturbances include the stunning collection of photographs in The Stone Diaries, which invert the reader's instinctual need to verify the written word with any visual image that is presented near to it as they often provide oppositional information. The need to validate the written word through images is something which Shields acknowledges herself: " . . . when I read biography, I'm always flipping to the photo section again and again, checking the text against the image. . . " (Shields, Personal Interview 18). Thus, a major thrust of her visual dynamic is to make the reader more active in their reading process and also, to blur the generic lines that separate fiction from (auto) biography. There is the radical inversion of pages in Happenstance through which Shields achieves "perfect form" (Shields, Personal Interview 9) as she gives voice to both characters and provides the reader with a very accurate impression of their whole relationship. Frequent visual disturbances occur in Mary Swann as well, demonstrated, not least by the screenplay which forms the final, and very controversial segment of the novel as it challenges the expectation of fiction by introducing drama to conclude the piece. Shields, then, has cleverly constructed and activated a whole set of visual components in her work, through which she is able to expand the boundaries of her texts and the narrative possibilities of her stories.

This idea of Shields confronting generic divides is continued in the discussion in chapter two which examines Shields' liberating re-working of narratology. In challenge to conventional forms she creates a simultaneously multiple narrative pattern to articulate many points of view, without establishing a power dynamic of privilege. In Shields' effort to establish an accurate reflection of the complexity of story telling, she presents the reader with a collage of stories where the truth is not a static or unchallenged aspect, but rather, a complex collection of versions that sometimes verify each other and sometimes do not. The effect of Shields' narrative innovation is similar to that which Hutcheon outlines in her study of Canadian postmodernism. Hutcheon states that there can no longer be an expectation placed on the fictional text to provide one-dimensional answers and neat solutions to questions of reality, since the "[t]ruth has been replaced by truths, uncapitalized and in the plural" (Hutcheon, Canadian ix).

I realised that Shields' work addressed some of the issues raised by contemporary feminist thought, such as the domestic responsibility of women and the textual representation of women's lives. My textual analysis lead me to understand that Shields is shedding new light on such issues, through the interactions of her ordinary male and female characters. What is most significant is that Shields does not emphasise gender differences and encourage sexual antagonism, although these aspects of life are documented as real, but she places men and women on the same experiential continuum. Shields' work exposes integral connections and shared experiences between men and women. In so doing, Shields does not use gender difference as a divisive tool but wants the union of common experience to be valued. Thus, though these texts are clearly gendered, a gender (less) polemic is established, in which men and women are not existential enemies, but rather, that both are victims of the external pressures, such as socio-economic and political, which affect every adult in the modern urban environment.

In chapter four, there was an uncovering of one of Shields' life interests, which is (auto) biography, which has been evident throughout the thesis. Shields uses her interest to challenge generic expectations to the limit by seeking to validate the stories of ordinary lives, which have been traditionally under-valued. Shields challenges traditional notions of the genre by breaking down the generic divisions of (auto) biography to include the ordinary and the domestic, the mundane and the physical, in order to liberate her characters and themes from generic restrictions.

The overarching examination of this thesis has focused on the ordinary lives that are described in Shields' fiction. Through this examination I have established several key and characteristic aspects of Shields' work, which power the transformation process from ordinary into extraordinary, which is at the heart of all her work. Firstly, one of the major characteristics, which she has developed in all three of her published forms, is her figural interest in voice. Her short poem "Voices," from the Coming To Canada collection, demonstrates her attempt to articulate what has previously been silenced and this theme is revisited again throughout all of her work:

At the museum certain
          objects
acquire a voice

the round porcelain

humming, for instance,
of a Greek vase

or a Chinese lady's shoe
screaming

in a glass case. (1-9)

Shields has clearly recognised the need to re-orientate certain aspects of narrative to allow previously silenced voices to be heard and recorded. Shields refuses to accept more traditional hierarchies of narration in which characters and their dialogues become stratified in importance and value. Shields' work exposes the reader to a polyphony of new voices in the absence of authoritative interpretation or evaluation. The removal of interpretative layers in her work enables a high level of intimacy between reader and narrative in which the reader is not passive but becomes increasingly involved in the narrative work itself.

By using Bakhtin as a theoretical guide, I was able to recognise that Shields was creating fictional landscapes of voice. In these landscapes, characters such as the post-menopausal Rose and the sexually frustrated Barker Flett are able to articulate their own experience in a narrative framework which allows them both credibility and sensitivity. As Heilbrun has stated, "[p]ower is the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's past matter" (Heilbrun 18). Through activating such power, Shields' work with voice can be located within a wider process of re-orientation, through which new his(her)stories are being recorded.

A second characteristic aspect of Shields' work, which allows her to examine her subject matter with her own agenda and not one specified by others, is her persistent erosion of generic boundaries and classifications. Lorraine McMullen makes the ultimate claim for Shields' blurring of genre. As her professor during Shields' graduate work, she feels strongly that what Shields could not use in her academic work, she went on to use in her fiction. This is a good example of the way in which Shields refuses to be bound by generic classifications. Indeed, though Shields first considered the loss of primary texts and manuscripts when she researched Susanna Moodie for her Masters Degree, she was to revisit these themes and use them to form the shape of her novel, Mary Swann. The narrative impetus in this work is drawn from examining the possible motivations for theft and examining the wider implications of academic loss. In doing so, Shields has been able to straddle the divide between academic research and the writing of fiction.

In conclusion, Levenson's response to The Stone Diaries acknowledged the vastness of room for interpretation of the text, yet, he felt a need to locate an over-arching system of order to decide on a final understanding of the novel. He stated: "It is almost as if the author had supplied us with part of a jigsaw puzzle and then stood over us as we tried out the various other pieces to see what would fit where" (qtd. in Coming to Canada xv). However, I feel that there is much more freedom for the reader than this. It is certainly our job, as readers, to find places for the pieces to fit, yet, as to whether Shields stands over us, knowing where all the pieces *should* go, I am not so sure.

Finally, the work I have done in this thesis leads me to believe that Shields is not creating narratives of wooden shapes that fit together to mimic a jigsaw, but rather, that she is carving out a new fictional landscape in which old ideas of resolution are defunct. The various layers and pieces of independent information that her extraordinary narratives provide have multiple possibilities. The reader is discouraged from searching for an over-arching system of control within the narrative and encouraged to accept multiple stories in a new fictional landscape which reflects more readily the reality of ordinary human interaction and experience. It is this transformation of fictional landscape that makes Shields' ordinary narratives extraordinary.

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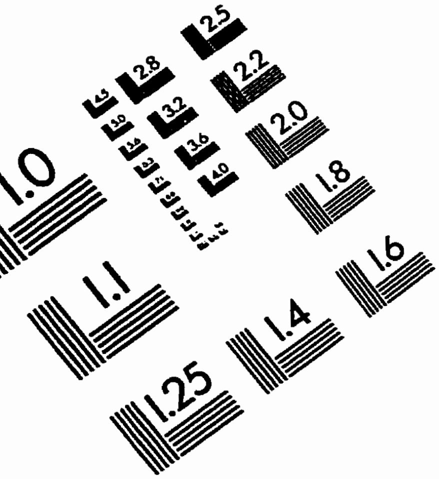
[7] As published in the U.K.

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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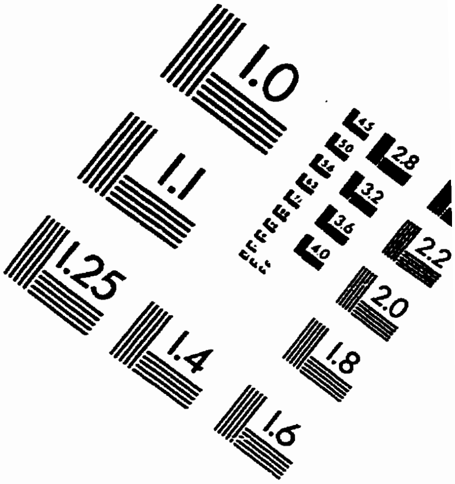

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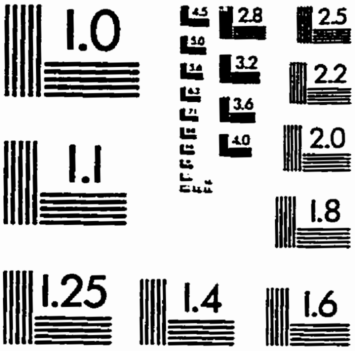

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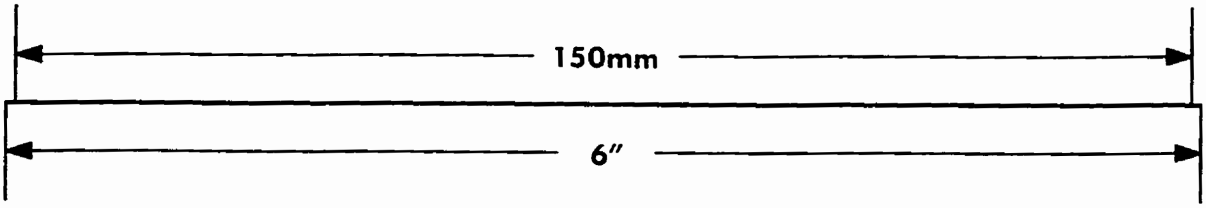

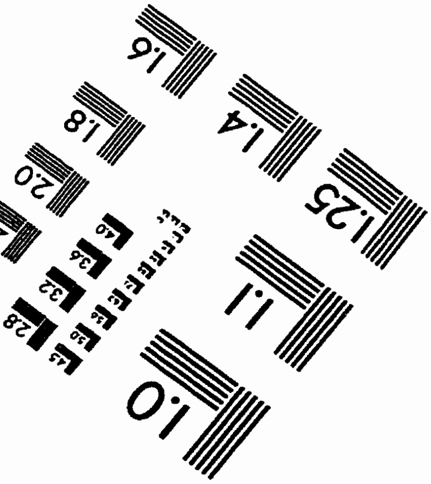

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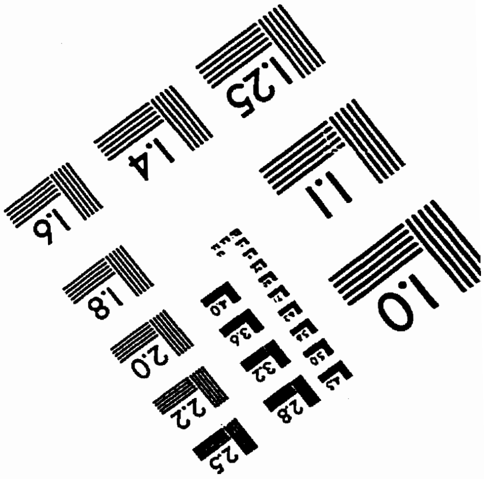

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APPLIED IMAGE . Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989

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