

CAROL ANN SHIELDS'S *THE STONE DIARIES* AS A MIMIC OF FEMININE QUEST

Thibursius M.G.#1 (19122214012002), S. Sudha Rani #2,

#Research Scholar, Guide Assistant Professor of English,

St.Mary's College (Autonomous), *Manonmaniam Sundaranar University*,

1. thibu.jude@gmail.com, 2.sudhasmc@gamil.com

ABSTRACT

Canadian Literature has focused on nationalistic and regional themes which is sociologically oriented and influenced by its socio oriented contexts. Carol Shields's works focus mainly on women issues which include the identification of women, the relationship between women and men as well as the close connection between nature and women. *The Stone Diaries* is no exception. It probes a story about a woman named Daisy Goodwill Flett who is not a sophisticated and self-conscious lady. She weaves her own life story as the woman should try to recover the place of exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. Daisy experiences herself as a mother, her subsequent work as a gardening columnist, the death of her husband Barker, a period of depression in Daisy's life, her later travels with her niece to pursue family history, her move to a retirement community, her old age illness and finally her death. Shields major principal in *The Stone Diaries* is feminism that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all aspects. A woman should resubmit herself as much as she can Particular ideas of herself should be elaborated by the logic of muscularity. This paper Carol Ann Shields's *The Stone Diaries* as a mimic of Feminine quest, analyzes the possible operation of feminine in language and to unveil the fact, that women are such good mimics.

KEY WORDS : Feminine, exploitation, discourse, Women, Postmodern

In Canadian Literature, writing began as an imitative colonial literature. It has developed steadily by its own national characteristics. It has also focused on nationalistic and regional themes which is sociologically oriented and influenced by its socio oriented context. After the huge immigration of New England in 1760 the puritans were wide spread in Canada. Later, American loyalists occupied during the revolution. Before European

contact and the confederation of Canada, indigenous people in North America have occupied the land and have maintained a rich diverse history of culture, identity, language, art and literature. The literature of Canada can be split into two major divisions English and French. In the journey of Canadian literature, the travel and exploration is rich in romance, but it rarely achieves literary excellence.

Carol Shields was born June 2, 1935, in Oak Park, Illinois, to middle-class parents, her father the owner of a candy store, her mother a teacher. Interested in writing during her teen years, Shields attended Hanover College in Indiana and spent a semester abroad at Exeter University in England where she met her future husband Don Shields. She graduated from Ottawa University in 1975. Thereafter she began working at first editing part time from home and also writing short stories. Material she had found while conducting research for her master's essay provided Shields with a plot for her first novel *Small Ceremonies* which was published in 1976. Next she wrote *The Box Garden* and *Happenstance* works that some criticized for being too domestic but which nonetheless identified Shields's chosen subject women at home with their families. With an established readership in Canada Shields gained both U.S. and British recognition with her 1987 publication of the novel *Mary Swann*. But far and away more successful was her 1994 novel, *The Stone Diaries*, which won awards in Great Britain and in North America. In the United States the novel won the 1995 Pulitzer Prize.

The Stone Diaries by Carol Shields is the story of an ordinary woman's life, enlighten in an eccentric combination of shifting and the third person's point of conviction. Daisy Goodwill Flett is both the narrator and the subject of her own life story. Which appraise and annotates the changing social and family scenes in North America during the twentieth century. *The Stone Diaries* probes itself as a blend of autobiography, biography and historical memoir and contains as much of family records and photographs.

One of the greatest works of Carol Shields is, *The Stone Diaries*. It tells about life of an ordinary unfortunate woman. Daisy Stone Goodwill. Her mother Mercy Stone who was an orphan lady was not much educated but skilled in household management. Her father was a stone mason who comes from a joyless family with limited schooling. They married in 1903 in Manitoba and two years later they were shocked on the unexpected birth of Daisy. Mercy Stone did not know that she was pregnant because as an orphan she was not much influenced about feminine problems. Since she was fat she could not realize that she was pregnant. Mercy died immediately after she gave birth to Daisy.

Clarentine, her neighbour adopted the baby and decided to abandon her husband. She went to Winnipeg to have a new life with her son Barker. Cuyler was in deep mourning remembering his wife who left him suddenly and gave him an unexpected baby. Because of that he built a monument upon her grave to remind him to Mercy. Daisy lived with Clarentine and Barker until she was 11 years old. After that her father claimed

her and took her with him to Bloomington, Indiana where he would be employed as a stone carver. Cuyler became a quite successful businessman and Daisy enjoyed her life with him.

When she was 22 years old, she was married to Harold Hoad, a young big drunkard from Indiana. Her relation with her mother-in-law was not quite good. Harold was killed in a fall from the room's window when they just arrived in Paris for honeymoon. Nine years after the tragedy she decided to go to Canada to visit her uncle Barker who she had not seen since her childhood. Daisy and Barker then married in 1936. Many speculations rose because of her marriage with Barker who was 22 years elder than her. They had three children named Alice, Warren and Joan. She spent her marriage life as a housewife, bringing up the children and looking after her garden. Her husband often went out the of country that she never knew what for it was and she also never asked. In April 1955 her father died and two months after her husband followed. A couple months later, she occupied the gardening column in Record Magazine.

During her work years she drowned herself in her duty that is writing articles and answering her fans mail. She lost her job after nine years writing for column. A man named Pinky Fulham took over it. Depression came to her life in 1965 when she turned to 59 years old. Some argued that it was the result of losing her job but according to her, it was not. She was tired to be sad all her life and not mind for the sadness she suffered.

In 1977 she sold her Ottawa house and moved to Florida in order to live near with her friends Beans and Fraidy. When she was 72 years old, her life turned ease. She went to Orkney Island with her grandniece, Victoria and she met her father-in-law, Magnus Flett, who she never knew before. She got ill with heart attack and kidney failure, when she was 80 years old. And she died in the year of nineties in Florida.

Feminist scholars study a range of topics in race, economic status, nationality and sexual orientation. Feminist sociology is the idea that asserts the quality of men and women through political and legal reform. In the point of convergence in Carol Shields's *The Stone Diaries* is a normal situation to a woman in the patriarchal society and depression in the result of women's attempt to survive in the wilderness society. In this novel genealogy includes four generations of the Goodwill and Flett families. The span of years encompasses just about all of the twentieth century. Daisy is born in 1905 and her death sometime in the 1990s is later than all the other years listed. Her life spans the century; the stages of her life parallels the periods or stages of that century, and she is the link between the present of the 1990s and the previous generations.

In *The Stone Diaries*, Carol Shields creates a or narrative puzzle that challenges readers interpretive skills that generated the most criticism among her books because of sudden and sometimes disconcerting shifts in the narrative voice from the first person to the third person. It exhibits a sophisticated and complex feminist critique of dominant discourses such as autobiography, and it anticipates theoretical directions in women's life

and autobiography studies in recent decades. By comparison and critical arguments about its genre and narrative shifts pale in significance. *The Stone Diaries* subverts the generic convention of monologism with dialogism.

The Stone Diaries begins with an epigraph, which is identified as a quotation from a poem, The Grandmother Cycle by Judith Downing published in *Converse Quarterly* in autumn no year given. Judith Downing is a granddaughter of Daisy Goodwill Flett. Despite the discrepancy between intention and statement or action a person's life is still important the quotation asserts and could be called a monument. This epigraph which claims to be a quotation from a published poem written by a real person initiates the pretense maintained throughout that the text is a factual record and not fiction. Moreover the point that the life lived is a person's true monument counteracts the effect of the stone monument Cuyler Goodwill erects over the grave of his first wife Mercy Stone Goodwill. Ironically that stone monument hides altogether the grave marker which records the dates of Mercy's brief life and thus the monument eclipses the facts of the life it seeks to memorialize.

This novel's epigraph is on human is that life is an endless recruiting of witnesses. It seems we need to be observed in our postures of extravagance or shame, we need attention paid to us. Our own memory is altogether too cherishing, which is the kindest thing I can say for it. Other are required, other perspectives but even so our important ceremonies like birth, love and death are secured by whomever and whatever is available that emphatically states in a voice other than Daisy's, her life could be called a monument. Although the narrative is an autobiography, the text's double-voicedness from the outset subverts and exposes the autobiographical form as a simulation of a life. Narrative theorist Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan observes that self-conscious texts often play with narrative levels in order to question the borderline between reality and fiction or to suggest that there may be no reality apart from its narration" (95). *The Stone Diaries* is a metafiction or meta autobiography. Gilmore observes, the autobiographical space may be regarded as a labyrinth of history and language into which the gendered subject disappears (63).

The Goodwill Tower a monument that is built by a man with a silver tongue becomes a trope for the masculinist discourse of autobiography. The tower that Daisy's father builds is described ironically as a monument to the absent woman whose body lies buried beneath the tower's hollow core (70). It becomes, instead, a monument to himself. The text's autobiographical narrative is similarly exposed as void of the presence of author and subject alike just as Gilmore describes the traditional genre. The structure of that space is organized through the discourses of truth and identity and what is left behind is the artefact of autobiographical identity. The space is constructed in such a way that it records this disappearance and makes it meaningful. What disappears here is what has always been disappearing namely the male author who leaves a monument to his absence. The woman autobiographer however caught in the act of self-representation

disappears without a trace. (90-91)As a gendered space, autobiography can nevertheless be resisted and altered in *The Stone Diaries*. This novel exhibits the limits of autobiography as stated in the publisher's blurb on the first edition.

The feminine subject Daisy is both decentred and reconstructed in a polyphonic narrative. The paradoxical treatment of the subject is significant in that autobiography studies have recently been marked by an interpretive contest of opposed theoretical positions. At one end of the spectrum of interpretation, a poststructuralist position is autobiography, tropologically and constructs the self as an effect of language. The feminist position grounds autobiographical form and meaning in the experiences of the women who write autobiography. Here in *The Stone Diaries* expose the context by producing both post structuralist and feminist readings of the genre and subject. The narration of *The Stone Diaries* demonstrates the dual purposes of gesturing toward an apocryphal history and valorizing an ordinary woman's life. The narration in this novel offers the structural metaphor of a *mise-enabyme* in order to reverse, parodically, the disappearance of the figure of the woman writer.

Carol Shields' feminist ideas and emphasis on a female protagonist's life mirror her general feminist theories. Feminism, as a collection of social theories, political movement, and moral philosophies concerning the liberation of women has been an interesting field for many readers, writers and specially critics. Although it has a long history and in comparison to other literary theories is not a new approach, its general orientation and multilateral supportive attitudes toward women surpass time borders and keep it up to date. Carol's successful upheaval in life and profession reflected in Daisy's life story has been and will be an ideal for girls and women around the world. It can serve as an awakening factor for hearing their internal voice to revive their routine lives and make a difference.

Men have changed because they've had to change Shields asserts. Her male voices may ring persuasively to the ear but she believes she is fair-handed. Like Daisy, Goodwill's men in *The Stone Diaries*, one of whom falls out of a window on his honeymoon, Shields' men are sometimes confused but never utterly wicked.

Throughout, Daisy generally refers to herself in the third person perhaps because she has stationed herself as an observer, perhaps because she feels an absence in herself, an absence of self. Her detailed chronicle includes stories and descriptions alongside commentary about life men and women autobiography in general and the one is writing. Shields plays intriguingly here with invention and truth.

The novel has not only a family tree, easily conceived of as pure invention, but also family photographs which are sure to give a reader pause pictures of whom? Daisy's narrative constantly raises the question of

veracity. Daisy knows the power of storytelling is the way primary act of imagination that she determined to hold onto her life. She is also aware of different perspectives she records with humor varied explanations of her breakdown, from her new-generation daughter's theory that it was the loss of her job to her friend's assertion that it was sex. And she is aware of her own perspective her abiding sense of motherlessness and abandonment, the feeling of being erased from the record of her own existence. No picture of Daisy appears among her photograph have influenced the story she tells. So we construct our life stories, the book suggest, seeing or inventing what we need, filling in the picture we cannot truthfully complete.

Shields concludes this novel as a mimic of feminine quest that is embedded in the autobiographical and fictional discourses of a polyphonic novel. The subject Daisy subverts the generic conventions of a unified self and voice. From the orphan to the old crone Daisy is presented as having multiple identities that are socially constructed from the diarist to the columnist she is presented as having multiple voices. Daisy is represented as a subject in language to parody the autobiographical subject and to subvert the narrative authority of a masculinist discourse.

Daisy is a decentred subject whose words are embedded in the life narrative of a second narrator but she is also a performative subject and feminine agent whose words to some extent shape her life. Her life narrative is at the same time shaped by the words of others particularly the collaborative writing of Judith, Alice, and Victoria. By employing the double parody of meta-autobiography Shields ultimately valorizes women's life writing and the life of an ordinary woman. Daisy's life is represented from the dual perspective of exhibiting multiple identities and of having survived them. These are the effects that Shields's text has on the reader who is open to women's life narratives that are at once unconventional and inter subjective or interconnected.

The postmodern impulse of Postmodern characterization in this novel constructed as writing in and from exile, serves to construct the possibilities of elaborating the paradigmatic reader of this novel as a feminized. Woman, as that which cannot be represented, that which is not spoken, and that which remains outside naming and ideologies are always dispositioned towards otherness, alterity. The postmodern characterization is thus to begin to construct the ethics of alterity to replace a philosophy of identity with that of alterity. It is to discover what it means to speak always from the political disposition of the other and find presentation as itself a disposition towards alterity. Shields is highly lauded for her attuned ear for the nuances of language and the way they attach to feelings and probe the most delicate layer of human consciousness.

This analysis has focused that women is a great mimic who center the various strategies of her relationship between life and death. *The Stone Diaries* is feminism that seeks justice for women and the end of

sexism in all aspects. A woman should resubmit herself as much as she can. Particular ideas of herself should be elaborated by the logic of muscularity. The novel is also as a mimic of Feminine quest, with the possible operation of feminine in language and to unveils the fact, that women are such good mimics.

Works Cited

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis:

U of Minnesota P, 1984.

Billingham, Susan E. "Fragile Tissue: The Fiction of Carol Shields." *British Journal of*

Canadian Studies 13.2 (1998): 276-87.

Carol Shields Fonds. 1954-98. Literary Manuscripts Collection. Ottawa: Library and Archives

Canada. 1994, 1997.

Gilmore, Leigh. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*. Ithaca:

Cornell UP, 1994.

Lucy, Niall. *Postmodern Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Blackwell publishers 2000.

Shields Carol *The Stone Diaries* Penelope Lively 2008.