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The Stone Diaries as an “Apocryphal Journal”

BRENDA BECKMAN-LONG

IN *THE STONE DIARIES*, Carol Shields creates a *casse-tête*, or narrative puzzle, that challenges readers’ interpretive skills. This novel has in fact 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. The question that arises is who narrates this account of the life of Daisy Goodwill Flett, an ordinary woman? Shields offers a clue in an interview with Anne Denoon in *Books in Canada* by saying, “I was writing about biography”; however, she adds enigmatically that she was “usurping” the genre (10-11). Though it is still a matter of debate whether Daisy writes her autobiography or whether an anonymous biographer writes her life,¹ one important detail has escaped critical attention. The opening poem bears the signature not of Daisy, but rather of Judith Downing. Entitled “The Grandmother Cycle,” this poem is evidently intended as an epigraph — a quotation or, in a figurative sense, an inscription on stone² — which provides an interpretive frame for the subsequent story. Yet no one to date has addressed the significance of Judith’s signature. Examining its significance, I contend, is necessary to understanding Shields’s larger concern in this novel, which is to challenge perceptions of women’s lives and life writing.

To the attentive reader, the signature suggests that Judith writes her grandmother’s life story. Moreover, as the narrative itself suggests, it is possible that she works in collaboration with Daisy’s daughter Alice and her grandniece, Victoria, to piece together Daisy’s life from journals, letters, and other sources, the traces of which are found in the text. The implications of a narrative that is a self-conscious and multiple-voiced construction of a life are profound. As feminist theorist Leigh Gilmore asserts, women’s resistance to autobiography as a masculinist discourse performs a “complex kind of cultural work” in the form of a feminist critique (22). Shields’s readers would also do well to remember Virginia Woolf’s adage that “we think back through our mothers

if we are women” (83), as Shields does in her essay “Thinking Back through Our Mothers’: Tradition in Canadian Women’s Writing” (12). Furthermore, Shields’s narrative signals the presence of not only the voice of Daisy but also the voice of another I-narrator, whose political project is to subvert the generic conventions of autobiography by rewriting Daisy’s personal history. This reading of the narrative as an apocryphal history, or “apocryphal journal” (*Stone* 118), is supported by archival evidence, by Shields’s own commentary about the novel and about women’s writing, and by textual analysis. In fact, *The Stone Diaries* produces simultaneously resistant readings of gender stereotypes and of the autonomous self, suggesting that both are cultural fictions. The text presents, therefore, a sophisticated and complex feminist critique of dominant discourses such as autobiography, and it anticipates theoretical directions in women’s life writing³ and autobiography studies in recent decades. By comparison, critical arguments about its genre and narrative shifts pale in significance.

With regard, first of all, to the archival evidence, Shields’s play upon both the genre and the subject of autobiography is apparent in the evolution of the novel’s title and protagonist’s name. In the Shields archive, the working title of a draft dated 27 February 1991 is “My Life / by Elinor Goodwill Harris” (acc. 1, box 40, f. 7).⁴ This title implies a fictional autobiography. Significant to my argument, however, is an earlier title, “Elinor Harris: A Life,” which implies instead a fictional biography (acc. 1, box 40, f. 2).⁵ Another draft dated 2 October 1991 is entitled “Daisy Goodwill: A Good Enough Life?” indicating a mock biography or parody (acc. 1, box 40, f. 22, p. 1). On a subsequent but undated draft, the title appears as “Monument: A Life of Daisy Goodwill,” while yet another title page reads “The Stone Diaries / A Novel by / Carol Shields” (acc. 1, box 42, f. 7). By the time that Shields signed a contract with the book’s co-publisher, Random House of Canada, on 1 March 1993, the novel was provisionally called “Monument,” but this title has been crossed out and replaced in ink with “The Stone Diaries” (acc. 2, box 68, f. 1). Autobiography may be interpreted as a monument to “the self that it constructs and that constructs it” (Gilmore 74); therefore, the title “Monument” signals a parody of autobiography.

As the novel’s epigraph emphatically states, in a voice other than Daisy’s, her life could be called a monument. Although the narrative itself may be read as 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 [that is, embedded narratives] in order to question the borderline between reality and fiction or to suggest that there may be no reality apart from its narration” (95). This is indeed the case in *The Stone Diaries*, which I read as a metafiction or meta-autobiography. Gilmore observes, moreover, that the autobiographical space may be regarded as a labyrinth of history and language into which the gendered subject disappears (63). This effect is one that many readers remark upon in Shields’s text. Even 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” (*Stone* 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:

I have been describing the techniques of autobiography as the space into which the writing subject disappears. The structure of that space is organized through the discourses of truth and identity, and what is left behind is the artifact 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, as it is in *The Stone Diaries*. This novel is about 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.⁶ This 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 . . . reads autobiography tropologically and constructs the self as an effect of language. . . . At the other, a feminist position grounds autobiographical form and meaning in the experiences of the women who write auto-

biography” (Gilmore 18). To my mind, *The Stone Diaries* stages this contest by producing both poststructuralist and feminist readings of the genre and subject. The narrative thus demonstrates the dual purposes of gesturing toward an apocryphal history and valorizing an “ordinary” woman’s life. The narrative offers the structural metaphor of a *mise-en-abyme* in order to reverse, paradoxically, the disappearance of the figure of the woman writer.

Many critics correctly identify Shields’s text as parodic and metafictional. For instance, it is characterized variously as a meta-autobiography (Roy 115, Riegel 214), pastiche (Hansson 355), parody of postmodern conventions (Billingham 284), and “auto/biografiction” (Ramon 130). However, as I shall show, a second I-narrator exists but has not been identified by critics, though Christian Riegel posits a second narrator who provides commentary (214). I would therefore say that Shields’s text displays not only a slight parodic edge (Clara Thomas, “Slight” 109) but also a sly parodic edge. In interviews, Shields hints at her political project of “writing from the void” by “masking the narrator” (De Roo 48), while remaining “indifferent to the boundaries between literary forms” (38). She suggests that “the ‘I’ voice,” far from being identified with Daisy’s voice, is actually an intrusion into Daisy’s life (Denoon 10). Either Shields is coy or she is unconscious of this narrative effect; I suspect that she is deliberately coy.

While the I-narrator in the novel’s first line may initially appear to be Daisy, the voice shifts to the third person by the second line. In addition to frequent shifts from first to third person, there are also intrusions of another I-narrator who is largely external to Daisy’s personal history. This narrator observes Daisy’s birth and stresses the narrative’s contingency rather than its determinacy or destiny: “History indeed! As though this paltry slice of time deserves such a name. . . . *I* am almost certain that the room offers no suggestion to its inhabitants of what should happen next” (*Stone* 39; emphasis added). The second I-narrator is sometimes consonant with Daisy’s perspective, but the commentary is often distanced from her perspective and metafictional, emphasizing the text’s status as artifice. Narrative theorist Wallace Martin describes the purpose of this kind of commentary: “If I talk *about* the statement or the framework, I move up one level in the language game. . . . The writer has become a theorist” (181). Daisy is no theorist, for “she’s been far too preoccupied for metaphysics” (*Stone* 320). But the second I-nar-

rator frequently provides a critical commentary: “When we say a thing or event is real, never mind how suspect it sounds, we honor it. But when a thing is made up . . . we turn up our noses. That’s the age we live in. The documentary age” (330). The narrator also frequently comments from a peculiarly feminine perspective: “The real troubles in this world tend to settle on the misalignment between men and women — that’s *my* opinion. . . . But how we do love to brush these injustices aside” (121; emphasis added). In this passage, the reader encounters an I-narrator who questions literary and cultural conventions, especially the binary opposition of feminine and masculine genders, and who exaggerates the formal characteristics of autobiography in a self-consciously parodic way. Readers also glimpse the second I-narrator in the statement that “irony haunts the existence of Daisy Goodwill Hoad, a young Bloomington widow . . . who’s still living in the hurt of her first story, a mother dead of childbirth, and then a ghastly second chapter, a husband killed on his honeymoon. Their honeymoon, *I* suppose *I* should say” (122; emphasis added). This statement is parodic and metafictional, for “whenever the ‘fictional narrative/reality’ relation becomes an explicit topic of discussion — readers are removed from the [generic] framework normally used in interpretation” (Martin 179). Other glimpses of a second I-narrator appear throughout *The Stone Diaries* in statements such as these:

The doctor — whom I am unable, or unwilling, to supply with a name — announced bronchial pneumonia (74);
 How much of her available time bends backward into the knot of their joined lives. . . . To be honest, very little. There, I’ve said it (230);
 That’s Daisy for you. . . . In a sense I see her as one of life’s fortunes, a woman born with a voice that lacks a tragic register (263);
 She lies there thinking . . . and attempting to position herself in the shifting scenes of her life. Her life thus far, I should say (282);
 Isn’t there anything else you can tell me? (348).

The intrusions of the second I-narrator increase in frequency toward the end of the novel, as though intended to be progressively self-revealing.

These intrusions of an unnamed I-narrator represent ruptures in the autobiographical pact, an implied social contract between the narrator and the reader. The “autobiographical pact” is a term coined by Philippe Lejeune, the father of autobiography studies, who also notes that autobiography presupposes an identity of name among the author, narrator, and protagonist (12). Even a fictional autobiography assumes

the identity of the narrator and protagonist. However, *The Stone Diaries* subverts the generic convention of monologism with dialogism. While the second I-narrator is not the subject of her own story, she is a narrator-participant in the story. Because this I-narrator does not give her name, the text falls into a generic “zone of indetermination” and it becomes a game of ambiguity with the reader (Lejeune 19). Different readings of the same text can coexist, and this uncertainty stimulates theoretical reflection. Because the text allows the reader to oscillate between autobiographical and biographical readings, the text becomes a generic hybrid. The ambiguity, in effect, affirms the text’s fictionality while it valorizes the life of an ordinary woman.

The generic mystery grows as the perceptibility of the second I-narrator becomes increasingly overt, particularly in the ninth chapter when the I-narrator describes a hospitalized Daisy: “She’s lost track of what’s real and what isn’t, and so, at this age, have I” (*Stone* 329; emphasis added). The ambiguity has been heightened consciously, as a corrected draft in the Shields archive reveals:

Does Grandma Flett actually say this last aloud? ~~From~~ *She’s* not sure. ~~From~~ *She’s* lost track of what’s real and what isn’t- [next text inserted:], *and so, at this age, have I.* (acc. 1, box 43, f. 6, p. 334; emphasis added)⁷

The changes are not in Shields’s handwriting, as her hand appears on other drafts, but rather in an editor’s handwriting. The corrected draft follows a cover letter with the letterhead of “Hazel Coleman / Editorial Services” at “14 Lower End / Piddington, / Bicester / Oxfordshire / OX6 OQD” (acc. 1, box 43, f. 4, p. 1). Dated 17 March 1993, the letter is addressed to Christopher Potter, Shields’s editor at her London publisher, Fourth Estate. These changes represent, then, an editorial decision to make overt here what Shields implies elsewhere in the text. From the absence of any attempt by Shields to restore the original wording, one can only assume that she approved of the changes. In an interview with Joan Thomas in *Prairie Fire*, Shields approves of similar changes. She reveals an editor’s hand in clarifying the text’s hierarchy of voices: “In this book I fell into using parentheses by the thousands, and my editor Christopher Potter . . . suggested I look at that again. There’s a sort of *undervoiced*” (56). Furthermore, Shields explains that Daisy is not writing, but rather thinking her story. She emphasizes the *mise-en-abyme*, or

“box-within-the-box, within-the-box” structure (58), in which Daisy’s story is embedded. In other words, Daisy is not the only recorder of events in *The Stone Diaries*.

This double-voicedness, or polyphony, accounts for the commentary and the many authorial intrusions throughout the text. In a particularly overt comment regarding Daisy, the narrator states, “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 unbridgable gaps” (75-76). This comment, among others, draws attention to the narrator’s writing process, as does the epigraph.

The epigraph frames the narrative in such a way that the signature of Judith suggests that she, not Daisy, writes this life story. Taken from the poem “The Grandmother Cycle,” the epigraph characterizes Daisy as a woman who never said “quite what she meant” but whose life “could be called a monument.” These lines indicate that Daisy is the text’s subject, rather than the speaker, and they raise many questions. The epigraph prompts the reader to ask, who is Judith Downing? Evidently, Shields’s editor asked this question because in the Shields archive, among the novel’s manuscripts, are proofs from Fourth Estate with Shields’s handwritten note after Judith’s name: “a minor character” (acc. 1, box 42, f. 7, p. 15).⁸ On this corrected copy, and in an earlier version of the poem (acc. 1, box 42, f. 6, p. 1),⁹ Judith’s name stands out emphatically on a separate line, not in a parenthetical attribution as it appears in the published novel. The title of the source is punctuated, moreover, with a forward slash as “*Con/verse Quarterly*.” From Shields’s note and emphasis, I take the epigraph as a framing device and a parodic one: a “con” verse. From the family tree on the subsequent pages, it is apparent that Judith is Alice’s daughter and Daisy’s eldest granddaughter. The reader may ask who would write about Daisy’s life, if not a daughter or granddaughter? The name Judith, or Judy, appears not only in the epigraph but also throughout the narrative with references to her infancy (228), christening (242), gift (331), and adoration of her grandmother (332, 343). Furthermore, she is present when Daisy visits Alice in London (284) and when Alice visits Daisy in Sarasota, Florida (339). In the latter instance, Judith’s presence becomes clear only in retrospect. The narrator remarks, “Grandma Flett knows she rambles . . . she repeats herself, and Alice, bless her, never stops her, never says, ‘You’ve already told *us* about that, Mother’ (339; emphasis added). Judith and her children are

all named in Daisy's obituary, too. Judith has access, of course, to her mother's memories and to Daisy's papers, which are in the possession of Alice and her siblings after Daisy's death. It is most likely Judith who records the closing chapters and who is the source of the second-to-last chapter's resounding question: "what is the story of a life? A chronicle of fact or a skillfully wrought impression?" (340). The narrator self-consciously foregrounds the practice of women's life writing as a creative gesture and ethical act of commemorating a life.

Another question that the reader may ask is this: what would motivate Judith to write Daisy's life story? The final chapter, which is full of unanswered questions about Daisy's life, provides several clues. Many questions follow the discovery of Daisy's papers by her family. Alice reflects, "What I can't figure out is why she never told us about this first marriage of hers" (350). Evidently, Daisy's daughter knows very little about her mother's early life, including her match with the affluent Harold Hoad. She also asks, "Do you think her life would have been different if she'd been a man?" (353). Her siblings ask more questions about Daisy's former editor: "Remember Jay Dudley?" and "Do you think they ever . . . got together?" (354). The narrator similarly inquires, "Isn't there anything else you can tell me?" (348). Her question echoes Alice's demand in the preceding chapter: "Just tell me how I'm supposed to live my life" (326). These questions convey the family's urgency in desiring to recover Daisy's personal history. The ostensibly biographical narrative of the final two chapters strongly suggests that many questions about Daisy's life persist among her descendents after her death and that these questions motivate the narrator to reconstruct Daisy's life.

Read retrospectively, as a biography by a family member, the narrative of *The Stone Diaries* fills in gaps in Daisy's life story — including her first marriage in the fourth chapter, "Love," and her mid-life affair with an editor in the sixth chapter, "Work" — as though in answer to Alice and her family's questions. Read chronologically, however, the life narrative appears to be full of gaps or holes. For this reason, critics who view the novel as Daisy's autobiography get caught up in questions about Daisy's reliability or unreliability instead of addressing more productive questions about perspective, narrative strategies, and the narrative process, especially what Martin calls the "retrospective character of all narrative" (78). The process of interpretation itself is a retrospective process. In my view, the narrative concludes with an account of its gen-

esis; in the words of narrative theorist Dorrit Cohn, it is a “circuitous *recurso*,” like Marcel Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu* (76). The mysteries of Daisy’s life and its lessons are left for her successors — and readers — to uncover.

The process of retrospective interpretation finds a fitting figure in the final chapter where Daisy’s signature is, in effect, erased when no one thinks of having daisies at the funeral, but only pansies. The daisy is, after all, recognized as a kind of “signature” in embroidery and part of her legacy (*Stone* 350). While the reference to the pansy ironically evokes passivity, it also evokes an active surrogate mother, Clarentine (77), who was a member of the Mothers’ Union and part of a turn-of-the-century movement for women’s suffrage. The flower imagery — and by association a woman’s name and signature — subverts feminine stereotypes to signify women’s agency. It symbolically reverses the erasure of Daisy and her predecessor from the historical record.

But if Daisy’s signature, which in effect would guarantee an autobiographical narrative, is not evident, whose is? Judith, as I have shown, is the most likely candidate, but her mother, Alice, must also be considered. Daisy’s final words, “I am not at peace” (361), are set off by double quotation marks, once again indicating a double-voicedness that signals the narrator’s presence in reporting her thoughts. A possible clue to the narrator’s identity is found in the literary allusion of these final words. In part 4, section 3 of Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, the phrase “I am not at peace” appears in the context of the autobiographical narrator’s frustrated ambition (282). This allusion suggests that Alice, as a scholar of Russian literature, influences the narrative. Other allusions, such as the imagined return to childhood (337), the kidney (357), the “mouth in a little round circle” (355), Daisy’s “oh, oh” (352), and the meditation on death, echo another Russian novel, Leo Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. It is also significant that Alice takes Daisy’s name by changing her own name from Flett to Goodwill: “Flett was a dust mote, a speck on the wall, standing for nothing, while Goodwill rang rhythmically on the ear and sent out agreeable metaphoric waves, though her mother swears she has never thought of the name as being allusive” (325). Alice, rather than the “literal-minded Daisy” (321), must also inspire the reflection on names in the preceding pages: “That’s all — just Daisy Goodwill. . . . cutting off the Flett and leaving the old name — her maiden name — hanging in space, naked

as a tulip. . . . She cherishes it” (320). It is probable that the reflection is shared with Judith because the description comes from her perspective: “A secret rises up in Grandma Flett’s body” (320). Alice, the failed novelist, is in the process of rewriting her own identity; indeed, she is thinking back through her mother.

Alice is also a diarist, who is disillusioned with feminine stereotypes and cultural notions of autonomous selfhood. She has burned her old diaries, but she can still recall her youthful idealism. After her first year of college, she claimed to have altered her life in a day, simply by plastering over a crack in the ceiling that seemed to her a sign of destiny and a culturally prescribed identity: the “old crone” (231). When her mother is in fact perceived as an old “hag” (335), Alice contradicts this gender stereotype but without smoothing over its effects. Her rethinking of her mother’s life undoubtedly influences Judith. Alice’s views of her mother and identity are everywhere apparent in the narrative, especially in the dialogue and letters, ranging from her belief in Daisy’s “latent ability” to write (210) to her belief that Daisy’s “death” actually occurred while she was “still alive” (342). Alice’s perspective particularly dominates the fifth chapter on “Motherhood,” as she helps Daisy with a meal, resists her mother’s explanation of sex, recalls her cousin Beverley’s first visit, and takes the lead in conversations with her siblings. Alice is the probable source of the family consensus that Daisy has been “crowded out of her own life” by the gender role of a mother (190). In Alice’s portrayal, Daisy exemplifies the growing alienation of women from the postwar cultural ideal of the self-sacrificing wife and mother, as illustrated by Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, a favourite book of Alice (242). With its publication in 1963, this book marked the beginning of second-wave feminism. Daisy’s experience is evidently interpreted through the lens of Friedan’s work.¹⁰ Significantly, in the family album it is Alice’s photo that appears three times, though Daisy’s image is absent.

While it may be argued that Alice is the biographer-narrator, several factors suggest otherwise. Although Alice appears to be the opinion leader in the family, she is not always presented in a favourable light but focalized from a critical distance, suggesting that she herself is not the narrator of the text. For instance, the reader is told that “Alice is discouraged at the moment” because of her failed novel (325), and that “from her middle-age perspective, [she] believes her mother to have a soul already spotless — spotless enough anyway” (332). Ironically,

she almost canonizes Daisy; a biography by her alone would resemble hagiography. The narrative provides a critical view of Alice; therefore, she is herself a focalized subject and not the sole narrator of *The Stone Diaries*. Instead, I see her as influencing or collaborating with Judith, who is thinking back through her mother, just as Alice has done, and Daisy before her. There is, I would argue, no singular perspective in this text.

In addition to Alice, Victoria may be a participant in the collaborative writing of Daisy's life. Near the end of the novel, there is a description of the diarist Daisy as "Day's Eye" (339), her witnessing eye opening daily, like the flower for which she is named. This poetic description again signals to the reader the narrator's artful intervention in the text by recalling the opening chapter, when the eyes of Daisy register the sensation of her first breath as if to say "open, open" (40). In contrast to the newborn baby whose mother dies in childbirth, witnesses to her birth are "borne up by an ancient shelf of limestone" (39), like the supporting arm of a mother. The paleobotanist, Victoria, is the probable source of the limestone imagery that functions as a *mise-en-abyme* for the narrative in its entirety. The subject, Daisy, is embedded in cultural and family narratives, just as fossils are embedded in limestone. Even in the final chapter, the description of Daisy's metaphorical merging with her mother in a rock formation recalls "God's Gate" (300), which Victoria observed on a trip to the Orkney Islands with Daisy. In fact, the eighth chapter, "Ease," is told largely from the perspective of Victoria, incorporating many details about the life of her own mother, Beverley, who conceived her out of wedlock and who was supported by Daisy. Victoria's participation in the narrative may also explain the inclusion of her children's photos at the end of the family album, a textual clue that has gone unnoticed by critics.

For Judith, Alice, and Victoria, reconstructing a woman's life necessarily involves a process of interpretation, particularly in the selection and ordering of events and the representation of the subject. Together, they produce an apocryphal history and thereby seek to restore a woman's life to the historical record, an impulse that animates much postmodernist revisionist history, especially among feminist revisionists (McHale 90-91). The unauthorized biography is, then, compiled by Judith, whose very name alludes to a writer of apocrypha. Daisy is said to feel as though she were part of an "apocryphal journal" (*Stone* 118),

a term coined by the narrator. The narrative begins autobiographically with an opening statement in the first person: “My mother’s name was Mercy” (1). However, as previously mentioned, it subsequently oscillates between the first person and third person. For this reason, I agree with Simone Vauthier that the narrative is only “purporting to be the autobiography of Daisy” (177), but I cannot agree that the narrator is anonymous (185). In my view, it is Judith who, in collaboration with other women in her family, constructs an apocryphal journal and deliberately plays with generic ambiguity.

With the assistance of Alice, and perhaps Victoria, Judith must reconstruct her grandmother’s life from multiple sources, the traces of which are found in the text. As already noted, “the papers are all there” in her estate at the end (*Stone* 350). Even earlier, the narrator indicates, “Let it be said that Daisy Goodwill has saved every one of Barker Flett’s letters” (145), from his early correspondence to his last letter to her. The text refers elsewhere to Barker’s private journal, which, though pompously written, discusses Daisy’s lost letters to him (111-12). His journal becomes a source for much of chapters two to five. In their retirement, Barker and Daisy are advised to write an autobiography (163) and diary (262), respectively, and Daisy keeps a notebook even in her final illness (323). There are traces, too, of Daisy’s travel journal that records her journey to Niagara Falls and a visit to Barker in the fourth chapter: “‘I feel as though I’m on my way home,’ she wrote in her travel diary, then stroked the sentiment out, substituting: ‘I feel something might happen to me in Canada’” (132). Although critic Hilde Staels assumes that the diary is lost (122), the reader is told only that it disappears for Daisy after she marries Barker. He is the one into “whose hands it may have fallen” (156). He must have kept it because the diary is quoted exactly: “‘In one hour I will be there,’ Daisy writes in her travel journal, underlining ‘there’ three times” (150). There are traces of yet another journal, which Daisy kept as a young woman and which she gave up after her second marriage: “Daisy Goodwill’s own thoughts on her marriage are not recorded, for she has given up the practice of keeping a private journal” (156). Journaling was probably her chief occupation during nine years of widowhood after her first marriage, when, the reader is told, Barker wonders, “what did she *do*” (154). Daisy’s journals are evidently the sources of her observations about Cuyler, such as his speeches at her graduation and wedding, as well as her reflections on

her first marriage, her private conversations about her virginity, and her memories of her childhood, especially the accounts of her pneumonia and Clarentine's stories. All are recorded from her perspective and often in the first person.

It is possible to infer, therefore, that she has similarly recorded an oral account of her birth in a journal, which is quoted extensively in the first chapter. Daisy herself would have had letters by Clarentine, Cuyler, and Barker to draw upon. Furthermore, she would have had *The Skutari Tales* because the biography of the peddler who discovered Mercy in childbirth is listed among the books in Daisy's estate (355). As a personal history that is compiled by his grandson (37), this biography also functions as a *mise-en-abyme* for *The Stone Diaries*. It is perhaps no coincidence that in an essay Shields describes a similar book entitled *Ruby: An Ordinary Woman*. It consists of diary extracts that were "rescued by a granddaughter and put into print" ("Narrative Hunger" 31). Here Shields's interest seems to be piqued by a narrative strategy that resembles her own. In a review for the *Boston Globe*, she calls *Ruby* an important cultural artifact and a view into a life that bridged the Victorian and modern eras. Similarly to *Ruby*, which spans the years of 1909 to 1969, *The Stone Diaries* spans the period of 1905 to 1985, and both books reveal the cultural and historical forces that shape a representative female life.

Other possible sources for the narrative of Daisy's life include Magnus Flett's books and "family papers" (*Stone* 96), which, though left in a train station in Thurso (140), might have been retrieved and inherited by his only living relative, Daisy. There are also newspaper accounts, including those that document the popular appeal of the Goodwill Tower (53-54) and letters from friends and family, including Beverley and Fan Flett (201, 179), Victoria's mother and grandmother respectively. The entire sixth chapter, "Work," is constructed from letters to Daisy. Daisy is the probable source, too, of the family tree at the front of the text. After Victoria discusses women who record their genealogies, Daisy becomes "preoccupied" with her forefathers, and having read "a few works of social history, memoirs, [and] biography," she resumes her life writing to recover "a bag of buried language" (266). The genealogy clearly reflects Daisy's perspective because a question mark appears for her date of death while none appears for Emma's, whose survival is uncertain but about which "no one says a single word to

Grandma Flett,” even when Emma dies (340). Like autobiography, the genealogy represents the knowledge of a life and its trajectory. Unlike autobiography, however, the genealogy represents not only a life of an individual but also a family narrative. In this respect, the genealogy stands as yet another *mise-en-abyme* for the entire text. It is not a traditional autobiography but rather a family narrative, a strategy of other postmodern novels, such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or Michael Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family*.

As a deliberate blend of fact and fiction or “a fabric of substance and comity” (266), the narrative signifies not only a poststructuralist notion of the impossibility of autobiography but also a feminist notion of thinking back through one’s mothers. This apocryphal journal, therefore, offers a resistant reading of autobiography and a feminist critique: it is the political project of Judith, who rewrites her grandmother’s history, beginning with Daisy’s journals. The text strategically becomes a “discourse of remembering” that is “written against the language of privation” (Gilmore 90) just as Daisy’s journals consider “what can be shaped from blood and ignorance” in her mother’s story (*Stone* 23). While Daisy directly influences the text, her gaps and silences are interrogated through embedded narratives in a self-conscious “pattern of infinite regress” (281). Judith’s narrative incorporates multiple perspectives and framing devices. The genre of autobiography itself is a framing device that has historically ensured women’s absence. At the same time it becomes, as Gilmore argues, a “stage where women writers . . . may experiment with reconstructing the various discourses — of representation, of ideology — in which their subjectivity has been formed.” On this stage, the feminine subject is “already multiple, heterogeneous, even conflicted, and these contradictions expose the technologies of autobiography” (Gilmore 85). Paradoxically, the gendered space of autobiography into which the feminine subject disappears is made visible by parody. Judith’s parody is especially evident in the exaggeration and contradiction of feminine stereotypes.

The simultaneous production and resistance of gender stereotypes becomes the structuring principle of the entire narrative. In “Birth,” Daisy is no orphan, unlike the fictional Jane Eyre whom Clarentine admires, but she is Cuyler’s abandoned daughter. In “Childhood,” “Love,” and “Motherhood,” Daisy is ironically both child and wife to Barker. In “Marriage,” she is not a frigid bride but a young virgin neg-

lected by an alcoholic groom. In “Work,” she is less a grieving widow than a merry widow, while supporting a single mother and unofficially adopting her child, Victoria, as a grandniece. By doing so, Daisy honours the memory of Clarentine who adopted her as a niece. In “Sorrow,” she is a victim, not of depression but of sabotage in the workplace, when a male rival steals her newspaper column. In “Ease,” she is a retiree and part of the “blue-rinsed crowd” (Clara Thomas, “Swerves” 158), but she is no idle gossip. A self-taught researcher, she constructs an unconventional genealogy that resists patrilineage by including surrogate mothers, such as Clarentine, Bessie McGordon, and herself, while excluding Victoria’s irresponsible father. She records her personal memories, and by keeping a diary like Virginia Woolf and commenting on material such as the photo of Clarentine’s rhythm and movement club, she creates an edited and “hybrid version” of her life story (*Stone* 283). In “Illness and Decline,” she is no “old sweetie-pie” or “pet” (322) any more than she is a saint in “Death.” Daisy is consistently portrayed as a resourceful and creative woman who both resists and is constrained by feminine stereotypes.

By its consistent contradiction of gender stereotypes, the narrative becomes a site of resistance. It also resists the genre of autobiography in which “both the self and history are overdetermined as ‘male’” (Gilmore 35). At stake in Judith and her family’s parody, as in other women’s life writing, is “the relation between discourses of power and identity” (Gilmore 19), and together they expose the limits of dominant discourses and identities. For Judith’s generation, in particular, the life narrative is “a moving target of ever-changing practices without absolute rules” (Smith and Watson 7). Judith’s implied readers are, in all likelihood, Daisy’s other granddaughters who are represented in the last pages of the family album that occupies the centre of the text. The autobiographical space is used, then, not to trace the development of a unified self or narrative voice but to represent interconnected selves, as well as multiple perspectives and identities. Contemporary women’s autobiography is thus characterized, as Susanna Egan observes, by a polyphonic dialogism in order to raise questions about cultural representations of subjectivity (19). Many women writers, though not exclusively women writers, deliberately problematize the genre or, like Shields, blend it with fiction because the novel is an already dialogic genre. Shields’s text functions as a meta-autobiography, a form which “foregrounds

interaction between people, among genres, and between writers and readers of autobiography” (Egan 12). While representing the interaction of Judith and her family with Daisy’s life writing, the text exposes the “self” as a construct and the autobiography as a fiction. The torsion of a double parody is the “torque” that Shields intentionally puts on the autobiographical narrative in this complex novel (“Arriving” 250).

The authorial intent to subvert generic boundaries is revealed by yet another level of embeddedness in the text. As archival evidence also demonstrates, material from Shields’s own life is incorporated into the text. Shields includes in the family album photos of her daughters and the sister to whom the novel is dedicated. Together with a photo of Shields’s son, these images fill the final page of the family album.¹¹ The photo of the toad-like Harold Hoad, Daisy’s first husband, is ironically a baby picture of Shields’s husband, Don Shields (acc. 1, box 45).¹² Most importantly, Shields also includes in the text many details from a journal that is written by her own mother. The “Trip Diary of Inez Warner” records a retirement trip that resembles Daisy’s trip in the eighth chapter, “Ease” (acc. 2, box 54, f. 4).¹³ Warner travels to England from her home in Sarasota, Florida, just as Daisy does. She visits her daughter Carol before taking a grand tour of the United Kingdom, just as Daisy visits Alice. Warner writes of limestone quarries in Yorkshire as Daisy does in the Orkneys. She observes flowers and gardens and bridge games, all interests of Daisy. Shields posthumously commemorates her mother, further blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction.

In conclusion, as a feminine subject 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 I-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. In this regard, Susanna Egan’s observation about women’s meta-autobiography may be applied to Shields’s text:

“Precisely because no single ‘authorial “I”’ would control perception, the ironic reader would be more fully implicated in the text. . . . Because the perceptions being established would destabilize each other, they would also confirm each other” (2-3). By employing the double parody of a 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. In this type of life writing, as Marlene Kadar contends, one narrative “unmasks the master narrative of history” while the other constructs a survivor narrative and generates hope for the future (“Ordinariness” 129). 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 intersubjective or interconnected. Rather than a postmodern impulse, the text ultimately demonstrates an ethical impulse: “What a narrative such as this makes plain is that the life genres are not only in flux but that they fluctuate because of an ethical imperative to represent tropes of surviving a gendered economy, in an unjust representation of history” (130). The narrator underscores the “injustice” of gender constraints in the final chapter (*Stone* 345), emphasizing the political urgency of her narrative. By rewriting Daisy’s life in the form of an apocryphal journal, her granddaughter Judith, daughter Alice, and grandniece Victoria commemorate a life that has nevertheless been “shaped in a slant / of available light.” It is a life that is interconnected with the lives of others, not a monument to an autonomous male self.

AUTHOR’S NOTE

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NOTES

¹ For example, see David Williams 15 and Simone Vauthier 185.

² See Hugh C. Holman’s entry on “epigraph” in *A Handbook to Literature* 174.

³ Marlene Kadar defines life writing as follows: "At the most extreme end of the spectrum, life writing is a way of looking at more or less autobiographical literature as long as we understand that 'autobiographical' is a loaded word, the 'real' accuracy of which cannot be proved and does not equate with either 'objective' or 'subjective' truth. Instead, it is best viewed as a continuum that spreads unevenly and in combined forms from the so-called least fictive narration to the most fictive" (*Essays on Life Writing* 10).

⁴ This and subsequent quotations from archival manuscripts come from the *Carol Shields Fonds* in the Literary Manuscripts Collection of Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa. They will be identified in parenthetical citations by accession and box number and, when available, file and page number.

⁵ No date for this draft is given; it is simply marked "very early." An early name for Daisy Flett is Elinor Harris, as Alex Ramon also notes. I agree with Ramon that Shields writes against traditional autobiography and historiography (129) and that she unsettles the balance between Daisy's voice and other voices in the text, but I cannot equate Daisy's voice and the narrative voice, even if her voice is regarded as both inside and outside the narrated events (132-33).

⁶ For further discussion of polyphony, which is also referred to as dialogism or double-voicedness, see Mikhail Bakhtin 16, 262-65.

⁷ This wording does not appear in earlier drafts. For instance, compare it to the draft dated August 1992 (box 41, f. 14, p. 22), in which the passage instead reads, "Does Grandma Flett actually say this aloud? I'm not sure. I've lost track of what's real and what isn't."

⁸ No date is given for the corrected copy.

⁹ This earlier version of the poem is dated 31 December 1992.

¹⁰ In contrast to Alice, a second-wave feminist, Judith does not come of age until the third wave of feminism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At the age of thirty, when this life narrative is published in 1993, Judith has undertaken a feminist revisionist project of recovering Daisy's personal history, as the epigraph suggests.

¹¹ After examining photos of family and friends in the archive (acc. 1, boxes 67 and 79), I believe that Lissa Taylor may be identified as Sara Shields; Judith Downing and Sophie Flett-Roy as Meg Shields; Hugh Flett-Roy as John Shields; and Jilly Taylor as Shields's sister "Babs." The photos of these subjects are not always identical but similar to those in the novel. Elsewhere, Shields admits that all of her daughters are in the album (Joan Thomas 59).

¹² The photo is dated 10 October 1935 and marked "Donald Hugh Shields, almost a year old."

¹³ Warner's diary is dated 6 May - 12 June 1969. See pages 3, 12, 34, 45, 61.

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