

Carol Ann Shields Happenstance - An Epiphany into Nuptial Testimony

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Abstract

Canadian literature has been resolutely influenced by international immigration, particularly in recent decades. Carol Ann Shields works mainly probe on the existential aspects and individual self. Marriage is just the inception of a perpetual relationship where men and women determine to live together till death. Family is the principal unit of society, whereas man and woman unite to form a family, for the cause of the procreation and the subsistence of human life. The two vital components of marriage are individual and social. The individual element of marriage is for the man and woman to mutually agree with one and other. The social element of marriage is a persistent relationship to humans as husband and wife. The universal law of marriage is that when a male and female unite, they can create a life out of their own. The wife renounces and sacrifices for her husband and children. The process of giving birth and taking care of her whole family is a significant nature of a woman. A woman surveys for her true personality for being a wife in her marital status. Carol Ann Shields' novels mainly exhibit the existential aspects in marital status and relationship. Happenstance is no repudiation. It portrays the essence of marriage and relationship. Jack is as reflective as Brenda is pragmatic. This paper "Carol Ann Shields Happenstance - An Epiphany into Nuptial Testimony" analyzes the possible operation of femininity and masculinity to maintain relationship in a family.

Keywords: Existence, Marriage, Love, Persistent, Relationship, Procreation

One's life has value so long as one attributes
value to the life of others, by means of love,
friendship, indignation and compassion. ...

Simon de Beauvoir

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In Canadian literature, writing began as a competent colonial literature. Consequences of Canadian writers are wide both geographically and historically. They constitute Canada's diversity in culture and religion. Native literature has begun to prosper and is related to many distinct oral traditions, language, and cultural practices. Early European contact and the confederation of Canada, domestic people in North America have occupied the land and have maintained diversity in their

culture, related to identity, language, art, and literature. In recent days, Canadian Literature has been strongly impressed by the emigrants from other countries. In 1980 Canada's ethnic and cultural diversity has been reflected in its own literature, with many of its most projecting writers probing on ethnic minority, identity, quality, duality, and cultural differences.

Carol Ann Shields, born on June 2, 1935, was an American born Canadian novelist, a short story writer, biographer, literary critic, playwright, and poet. Her work exhibits the lives of ordinary people. Her first novel, *Small Ceremonies*, was published in 1976, followed by *Box Garden* in 1977, *Happenstance* in 1980, and *Swann Mystery* in 1987. *A Celibate Season* in 1991, the most memorable novel reveals consistent missed connections and failure of understanding. It perhaps best exemplifies the cool relationship between her portrayed characters. For the novel *Larry's Party* in 1997, she won the Orange prize and the Prix De Livre. For her last novel *Unless* in 2002, she won the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize, Man Booker Prize and Scotiabank Giller Prize. In 2003, she also got the Orange prize for this famous novel. Her last novel *Unless* contains a passionate defense of female writers who write of domestic subjects and basic upliftment of down trodden society. Carol Ann Shields has a clever command of linguistic irony and verbal wit. *Unless* hits the humor shifts from her typically lighthearted banter to comedy of a decidedly black nature.

Carol Ann Shields works are experimental, disassembling of the genre of autobiography. Its focus is on average and usually forgotten middle-aged women. It brings forth the existential questions about the nature of identity, and the definition of the self, that lie at the heart of the work. Shields is highly acclaimed for her sensitive ear for the nuances of language and the way they attach feelings and probe the most delicate atmosphere of human consciousness.

Carol Ann Shields in her novel *Happenstance* splendidly narrates the Man and Woman relationship, and mostly a woman's role in marital relationship and family contriving her existence. Carol Ann Shields *Happenstance*, more rigidly, articulates a recurring feminist theme. This is the abnormal format of containing two books in one novel. Jack Bowman and Brenda Bowman both are main protagonists. Jack is as self-examining as Brenda and both are more practical. Carol Ann Shields excels her views on the differences between male and female conception. These two unique intimate novels tell the stories of Jack and Brenda Bowman during a rare time apart in their many years of marriage. In *The Husband's Story* originally published in 1980 as *Happenstance*, Jack is at home coping with domestic crises and two discourteous adolescents, while inactivated by self-doubt and questioning his worth as a historian.

In *The Wife's Story* which was originally published in 1982, as *A Fairly Conventional Woman*, Brenda Bowman, is a housewife who has recently achieved commercial success and cultural renown as a quilt maker. Brenda, travelling alone

for the first time is a stranger in a city struggling with an apparel of emotions, and toying with the point of an affair. She is seen as insightful and never idealistic. As the novel starts, she is seen leaving her Chicago home to attend a Quiltmaker's conference in Philadelphia. The conference leaves Brenda in an exasperating sensation. She finds herself thrilled to accommodate herself and share a room with the renowned quilter Verna Glanville. She however, finds Verna in the mist of a sexual encounter. Brenda becomes increasingly intimate. She realizes the different ways people plan in their marriages. All these are set against the backdrop of the meetings on crafts.

Over the course of a week, she attends workshops on various phases of quilt making, and makes friends. She becomes progressively intimate with a man she meets. On the first night at the conference, she met him in his room and leaves there her marquee new red raincoat, which she purchased at an excessive price, and finds it missing when she returns. She reflects much on her relationship with her husband Jack and with the two teenage children she has left at home.

Her long nightmare, the loss of love, had inexplicably dissolved. Love was restored, for whatever reason. Jack, perhaps, was persuaded that the grieving process had come to its natural end – and perhaps it had, for Brenda was never able to unwind completely the complicated strands of that winter's despair. Looking back, it seemed to her to be a time of illness; she had been assailed by a freak visitation, and preserved the knowledge that it could happen again.(243).

Meanwhile, Jack remains at home. His half of the story covers the same extent but imperatively none of the same events. Jack is a historian who has been working for years at the same book and is beginning to doubt himself and his subject matter. He reads in a journal that an ex-girlfriend, the girl he left for Brenda, has just published a book on ostensibly the same topic, about the trading practices of Native Americans. His best and perhaps only friend, Bernie Koltz, his best friend separates from his wife and comes to stay at Bowman house; the next-door neighbor attempts suicide. Jack is found as introspective as Brenda is practical. It establishes the differences between male and female thought. While considering the future of his career, Jack is affected by crises, All the while, Jack considers his own role in history and the way that the inscribed versions of events often leave out the most significant points.

Brenda grows at great speed. She gets a shock of reality, yet, retains her sweet sense of openness to the world. Shields chooses a language carefully to describe the characters. In remembering the one moment in their marriage when she felt a "lapse of love." Brenda reflects that, "she had been assailed by a freak visitation, and preserved the knowledge that it could happen again". Jack muse at one point that, just as a written record of events can never express history, "a marriage licence wasn't the history of a marriage." () Shields demonstrates here, the

marriage is the culmination of a million tiny moments. She strings them together with an intense cumulative power.

Happenstance is thus an intense image of a marriage and of those differences between the sexes that brings life, and a sense of isolation into the most loving relationships. Shields says, "Married! It was another state of being, a state that was sealed like an envelope in its inviolability. The state of marriage was secret and safe, a circle of charmed light beyond the horizon of the easily capsized now." (144)

Marriage between man and woman should be an act of love. Honesty, sincerity, kindness, and integrity are forms of love. Every human should be perfectly honest and sincere with the other. There is not a true marriage when the man approaches a woman for her money. Social status, or to lift his ego, because there is no integrity or honesty. The marriage is not of the heart. When a woman says, that she is tired working; and she wants to get married, for reasons of security; her assumption is false. It shows that she is not using the laws of mind correctly. Her safe zone depends upon her knowledge of the communication of the conscious and subconscious mind and its application.

A woman is not dependent on her husband for health, peace, joy, inspiration, guidance, love, wealth, security, happiness, or anything in the world. Her security and peace of mind come from her knowledge of the confidence within her, and her constant use of the laws of her own mind in an effective fashion. Marrying for money or to get even with someone is, of course, a farce and a masquerade. A man and a woman must be subjectively united in the sense that real love or sense of oneness prevails; in other words, two hearts are united in love, freedom, and respect.

The endings of these novels "converge" in the middle, just as Brenda and Jack "converge" at the Chicago airport. Brenda's absence has made Jack's heart grow fonder, and at the end of his story, he is reaching out, thankfully, to her. But at the end of her story, Brenda is thinking in the future tense, peacefully going over in her mind the formal routines which she knows will follow. Just before sleep comes, however, Brenda shifts into the present tense and "drifts away on her own." She has retrieved her life, previously determined by Jack, by motherhood, by marriage.

Carol Ann Shields in her writing, has reviewed the pragmatic picture of modern middle – class woman, Brenda. Through her, she portrays on women's issues and places a women's point of view on the world. Shields's fictional forte is the clarification of the psyche of women. Her feminism sometimes seems a little "uncertain" because it is not anti-male. However, Shields is resistant in her persuasion that exceptionally in Western societies, feminism cannot be 'anti-male' since both man and woman must communicate and work towards a better, more meaningful, cordial relationship. Carol Ann Shields matured social awareness has made her to write on the man – woman relationship which she led to her analysis of the institution of marriage in this age of transition. Shields points out the uneasiness

of a woman in the habitual role which expects her to be an epitome of sacrifice of woman's self-identity. She focuses the woman as a monument of devotion and patience.

There are differences as well as parallels between both the stories narrated. Jack's procrastination as an artist, has an unfinished manuscript that lies languishing for years. In Brenda's story too though Shields presents her as a doer, there is an unfinished quilt, probably not to make Jack feel bad about his unfinished book. Jack is portrayed as lazy and so depended on other people. He leaves his kitchen a mess and not changing the ribbon on his own typewriter. Both Jack and Brenda are loyal, though they have the same romantic idea of their shared domestic situation, delighting in the simplicity along with the mark of adulthood. Brenda ends one phase of her life and begins another. Her kids no longer depend on her, though her husband does. She experiences grief over it, and the anger phase seems more prominent. All these differences might seem trivial, but are experiences that create a sense of importance in a couple's married life. In *Happenstance* Shields concludes, that a woman leaving her marital relationship in search of freedom, but the explication of the freedom is to be widened to embraced bonds of loyalty and love. Anthony S. Brennan says,

Shields has no interest in grandiose, heroic gestures, rather she is concerned to demonstrate that adulthood requires flexibility, a certain stoical persistence, and a realization that wisdom is a cumulative process not a destination to be plunged towards at others' expense. (80)

This paper thus portrays the simple truth of family relationships and validates the title, "Carol Ann Shields *Happenstance* - An Epiphany into Nuptial Testimony."

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