



**A BUTLERIAN READING**

**Hasnaa Sadruldeen Hassan Al-Qubbanchi**

Department of English Language, College of Education,  
The Islamic University, Najaf, Iraq

**Cite This Article:** Hasnaa Sadruldeen Hassan Al-Qubbanchi, "Gender Role and Performativity in Carol Shield's Unless: A Butlerian Reading", Indo American Journal of

Multidisciplinary Research and Review, Volume 9, Issue 1, January - June, Page Number 10-18, 2025.

**Copy Right:** © IAJMRR Publication, 2025 (All Rights Reserved). This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

**Abstract:**

This study is an attempt to investigate the work of a Canadian author, Carol Shields, and her book *Unless*. The novel can be defined as feminist debates on the social construction of femininity and gender roles. It questions the patriarchal power structures that shape people's identities. There are female characters in the novel who are the embodiment of femininity based on patriarchal notions. The analysis is based on some approaches: a presentation of several characters and their impacts on the main protagonist; an investigation of how the main characters' gender identity is constructed; and the presentation of a subversive performance of gender. Feminist Performativity, which is Butler's main philosophy and is generally called Philosophy of performativity, would be the central idea of this study. The study argues that the gender performativity leads to the construction of identity and women have numerous challenges in the process of making their identity. These challenges of female members are mostly the ones imposed by society in attempt to normalize and assimilate the members into the established social conventions. This fact is criticized by Butlerian feminism that calls these issues as great misunderstandings. Butler asserts that misunderstanding of gender (masculine, feminine) is caused by seeing it as the result of sex (male, female) that is seen as the reason of tendency towards the opposite sex and disavowal of the same sex

**Key Words:** Femininity, Gender, Gender Role, Performativity, Sex,

**Introduction:**

Carol Shields (1935-2003) was a writer from the United States and Canada. She wrote books, short stories, plays, and poems. She was born Carol Ann Warner as the third child of Robert Elmer, who ran a candy factory, and Inez Warner, who was a teacher. In her obituary in *The New York Times*, Alex Clark remembered Carol Shields, a skilled writer famous for her lovely stories about daily life. She said that Shields was born in Illinois, USA, and went to Hanover College in Indiana. She fell in love with Donald Hugh Shields, a Canadian engineer, and they got married. In 1957, she moved to Canada and became a citizen there. She continued her studies and got her Master's degree in literature from the University of Ottawa in 1975. Her project was about a Canadian writer named Susanna Moodie, who was born in England.

In 1973, Shields worked as an editorial assistant for the *Canadian Slavonic Papers* journal. She taught at the University of Ottawa from 1977 to 1988, where she also earned her PhD. While she lived in Vancouver, she taught creative writing at the University of British Columbia from 1988 to 1990. Shields and her family move to Winnipeg, Canada. She taught in the English Department at the University of Manitoba from 1982 until she retired in 2000.

Shields writes her first novel when she is forty years old. Her first book, *Small Ceremonies*, comes out in 1976 and wins a prize from the Canadian Authors Association for fiction. This leads the author to continue her writing career by creating two more novels: *The Box Garden* (1977) and *Happenstance* (1980). In these books, Shields starts to show her special skill for finding amazing things in everyday life and excitement in ordinary situations. Shields' fifth book, *Swann: A Mystery* (1987), won her another prize: the Arthur Ellis Award for Best Canadian Mystery. The book came out in Britain in 1990 and is called *Mary Swann*. It tells the story of four people trying to piece together the life of a murdered poet, and it received great reviews right away (Clark 2003). Shields is best known for her book, *The Stone Diaries*, published in 1993, which won her the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in the U. S. and the Governor General's Award in Canada. The last book by Shields is called *Unless* (2002). It won the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize and was nominated for many other writing awards. "Unless" is about a middle-aged writer and translator named Reta. She is trying hard to make sense of life by writing about it. The novel is "a feminist story about a writer whose oldest daughter, Norah, drops out of college and starts begging quietly on the sidewalk, holding a cardboard sign that says 'Goodness'" (Lehmann-Haupt, 2003). In the book, the author uses unique chapter titles made up of words like adverbs and conjunctions, such as 'Unless, "Therefore, "Only, "Whether, "Ever, "Else,' and 'Instead. 'Shields starts the last chapter, "Not Yet," by highlighting this way of thinking about life.

Life is made up of many separate events. To make these events into a clear story, we need special words that connect them. These words, like adverbs and prepositions, help show how things relate to each

other. Examples of these words are: therefore, else, other, also, instead, otherwise, despite, already, and not yet.

In explaining her purpose in writing, Shields says, "My novels focus on a few main ideas - the lives of women, gender issues, the passage of time, how art is created, coincidences, and the connection between fiction and real-life stories" (Lehmann-Haupt, 2003). Lehmann-Haupt says that Shields often wrote about everyday things that are deep and meaningful. She believed these topics are often ignored by fiction writers.

#### **Statement of the Problem:**

This study looks at the work of Canadian author Carol Shields and two of her novel, *Unless*. It does this by using ideas from Judith Butler, a well-known feminist thinker and critic. Feminist Performativity, which is the main idea of Butler's philosophy and is often called the Philosophy of Performativity, will be the focus of this study. The study says that how people act according to their gender helps shape their identity, and women face many difficulties in creating their own identity.

The problems faced by women are often caused by society trying to make them fit into traditional social norms. Butlerian feminism criticizes this fact, saying these problems are major misunderstandings. Butler argues that people often misunderstand gender (men and women) because they think it comes from being male or female. This belief leads to a tendency to be attracted to the opposite sex and to reject the same sex.

It also says that societies run by men intentionally left out women and made them accept certain roles in life. For example, Daisy's son, Warren, describes her as a "wife, mother, and person living in our time" (Shields, *The Stone Diaries* 268). In another part of the story, Warren talks about Daisy, saying, "My mom is an older woman, from a middle-class family, she's of average smarts, has a normal level of confidence, and her life has been pretty average." The description suggests that there is a set idea about what a woman is and how she should behave in society. This is also shown by the specific names of the chapters: 'Birth', 'Childhood', 'Marriage', 'Love', 'Motherhood', 'Work', 'Sorrow', 'Ease', 'Illness and Decline', and 'Death'. Naming shows what society expects from women, like Daisy Goodwill. It reflects the reality of their lives and roles.

#### **Methodology and Approach:**

In this thesis, the researcher uses Judith Butler's ideas about gender identity, which she says is something people do or perform. This action comes from the ways society is set up, including the patterns and rules that a male-dominated society forces on its people. A performative act means that an action doesn't come from a person but is influenced by political reasons that define categories like gender and sexuality. (Habib 142) So, "woman" or gender, in general, isn't something that is set or unchanging; it is shaped by power and society. Butler's two important books, *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), explain these ideas and will be used in this research. In her book "*Gender Trouble*," Butler says that "a person is considered a woman if they behave in ways that society expects women to behave." This means that people act in ways that society thinks are normal for them. Butler says that society shapes our ideas about gender, but she also thinks that we can fight against these power structures.

To do this, the researcher looks closely at the female characters in the books. In *Unless*, the researcher looks at the character Reta and how her gender identity is formed. In this book, we need to look at Reta's writing, her visits to the beauty shop, and her interactions with her husband and children to understand how gender roles are formed. Performativity is the result of different influences in a society, with language being the most important. This is where we can see the clash between masculinity and femininity. The experts take advantage of her words, and Reta understands that her main duty is to make her family happy. In the end, she points out how both men and women have roles: women are expected to please others, while men are rewarded for being pleased. Throughout the book, there are some memories that show Reta's life as a woman and a stylish person. Her relationship is affected by some outside things, but she has never married Tom. This is about how he thinks and the social situation of women. Feeling intense affects how Reta acts and behaves in life, and she constantly worries about their relationship. When Reta was a young girl with long brown hair that went down to her waist, she was studying French. That's when she met Tom Winters, a medical student, and they fell in love.

#### **Literature Review:**

Abby Werlock, in her 1993 work "Canadian Identity and Women's Voices: The Fiction of Sandra Birdsell and Carol Shields," looks at the writing of Carol Shields and compares it to that of another famous Canadian writer, Sandra Birdsell. Werlock says that the main ideas in Shields's writings are happiness, love, women's friendships, gender, and language. She concludes her study by saying that Shields is like the "daughter" of earlier Canadian women writers, and her writing adds to what it means to be Canadian. Also, Christopher Levenson, in his introduction to Shields' "Coming to Canada" (1992), says that Shields' writing has the cleverness found in many modern poems. "Smart thinking enjoys being short, nice, and to the point. These traits clash with the idea of a big Canadian poem that tells a national story and with a lot of recent poetry by feminist writers about personal experiences."

Carol Shields is definitely a feminist writer. In her piece "Eight Hundred Women Heard My Voice" (1997) for *The Independent*, she shows this when she talks to Andrew Marshall. In 1921, a well-known

British screenwriter attended the Women and Words conference in Vancouver in 1983, and it greatly influenced her life. To show the variety in Shields's works, Wendy Roy says in her 2003 article "Autobiography as Critical Practice in The Stone Diaries" that Shields uses autobiography to explore feminist ideas about life stories. Roy also talks about the way the story is told in The Stone Diaries. She notes that it's unclear if Daisy is the main voice in the story, but the repeated mentions of her writing her life story suggest that she is thinking about how others might react to her experiences and those of people around her, even though she writes her autobiography in a hidden way.

Alex Ramon, a man who reviews women's writing, looks into how female identity is portrayed in the work of Carol Shields. Ramon says that Shields's writing can be understood in many ways, especially from a feminist viewpoint. The story is flexible, which lets readers see things from different angles and think beyond traditional ideas about gender (Ramon 170). Ramon talks about Shields' interview with Marion Garner and the author's thoughts on fiction. "Why do people read made-up stories. " Because our own lives aren't interesting or exciting enough for us. By reading stories, we can broaden our lives, which can often feel limited. Lorna Irvine says in her essay "A Knowable Country" (2007) that Carol Shields wants her readers to feel uneasy rather than comfortable when they read her books. She does this by switching perspectives and voices quickly, moving between different places and times like the past, present, and future.

#### **Discussion:**

The story of the novel shows how ideas about gender are built in Canadian society. At the start of the story, the reader gets to feel the personal feelings of Reta Winter, the main character, who is a successful and wealthy writer. The main character, Reta, is going through a tough time and is feeling very sad and lost right now. Throughout her life, she has heard people talk about feeling a deep pain, but she never understood what that pain was. Reta is sad and feels a lot of loss and grief, especially because of problems related to being a woman.

Reta believes that her big loss is connected to the many good things in her life, like her family, her job, and her comfortable lifestyle. But she overlooks the most important part of becoming a woman in this society, which is being a girl or woman. Reta talks about how writing has taken her into the experience of feeling sad and mourning.

And it is true. At the age of forty-three, soon to be forty-four in September, I feel a strange mix of comfort and discomfort when I think about what I've written and published during my younger, happier days-before I really knew what sadness was. "My Writing": This is a small way I try to help myself feel better, and I've been convinced it's better than feeling nothing at all.

Butler's idea of a sad person in "sad heterosexuality" needs a quick explanation of Freud's ideas about sadness and mourning because she has been influenced by Freud in some ways. Freud explains sadness by comparing it to grieving. He begins by explaining that mourning is usually how we respond to losing someone we love, or losing something important to us, like our country, freedom, or ideals. It's important to remember that grieving can change our lives a lot, but it's not seen as a sickness. It will get better after some time. From what Shields has said, it seems her writing has kept her away from social life. Reta, who is sad, understands that what she lost is gone, but it takes time for her to let go of her strong feelings for it. After the grieving is over, "the ego becomes free and can act freely again" (245). The thing she has lost makes her sad, and it's something she thinks is really good, but she doesn't know what it is. Freud suggests that she might understand who he has lost, but she doesn't really know what that loss means for him. This means that her sadness is connected to a loss she isn't fully aware of, unlike mourning, where the person knows exactly what they have lost. Reta is trying to understand the feeling of loss she has as a woman. She thinks that writing and having her own space would help her avoid feeling pressured to act a certain way. Reta thinks she deserves punishment because she feels worthless, unable to do anything well, and morally bad. "He puts himself down in front of everyone and feels sorry for his relatives for being related to someone so unworthy. " She is unhappy with her self-importance, but "on moral grounds, it is the best quality" (248). Instead of accepting and moving past her loss, she feels sad and lets it affect her sense of self. She says, "I feel a bit uncomfortable saying that Isolation is my own writing. I was pretty creative when I first learned about Isolation, but I really didn't know what I was talking about" (Shields 4).

The idea of performativity is very important in Butler's theories because it helps explain her ideas more clearly. For Butler, gender is something you do, not something you are. Gender is something people do, and there isn't a specific person doing it before it happens. To support her point, she cites Nietzsche, who in *On the Genealogy of Morals* says that there is no real "being" behind actions. He believes that "the doer" is just a made-up idea that we add to the action-the action itself is what matters the most. She adds her own idea that "there's no true gender identity behind how people express their gender; instead, that identity is created by the expressions themselves" (*Gender Trouble* 33). For Reta, being a woman is something you do or act out, and this act helps to create what we think of as a feminine woman. Reta's sense of gender comes from the words she uses. This means that for her, there is no understanding of gender before using language. In fact, it is the way people talk and use language that shapes Reta's gender. Reta doesn't show any feminine qualities apart from the way she talks. Her identity is shaped by

her actions and the culture around her, making her who she is. In this way, her gender identity is something she shows or acts out:

After this, I lost a year, which I don't get, because all three girls had started school, even though Natalie was just in morning kindergarten. I was caught up in thinking about what it means to be a writer. I worried about how Tom felt, if he was upset, and I compared myself to Danielle. I also thought about complicated ideas, needed a place to write, and felt older than I had ever felt as I turned thirty-five. I'm thirty-five, and that number always seems to remind me of things I can't do, making it hard for me to see what my life has to offer. Thirty-five never sat still with its hands in its lap. Thirty-five was not calm. (Shields 5)

Butler's idea is that our gender is shown through different actions we do, like how we dress, speak, walk, and other things we do over and over. Reta talks about certain things, especially clothes. The way she dresses and speaks shows who she is as a woman. She shows that the red color and wearing a skirt indicate her role as a woman. Also, women should not be out in public or seen in public places. Defining women based on what they wear and stopping them from joining in social activities shows how we see them and their gender. "I had a dress that Emma Allen made from some fabric from Africa. A print with blue and black colors. You've seen the photo. At that time, she was just Emma McIntosh. "Was she part of your wedding group." (Shields 46) She talks about how cultural rules in society affect gender roles through what people wear.

As mentioned, gender is created by culture and shows the beliefs of society. In other words, for Reta, it comes from how people relate to each other in society. In simple terms, the way we sort and rank different types of femininity has shaped what it means to be a woman. Peter Digeser says that Butler's idea relies on. If this is true, the best thing to do is to stop following the plan: Don't play your role. The way we repeat actions to shape gender roles in our culture can be seen in Reta's experience when she visits a beauty shop.

After some time, I went to get my eyebrows shaped and colored at Sylvia's. They call it a "spirit spa," which means that while Madame Sylvia worked on my eyebrows with a small brush, she spoke softly and sang to me. It was nine-thirty in the morning and I was lying on a small table in a little white room. "You need to take care of the delicate skin around your eyes at your age," she said. A woman's face may age, which is natural, but her eyes keep shining bright. When you're eighty or ninety, your eyes will still be beautiful.

Reta says Salvia doesn't know anything about her life. Rita has never been to this place before and has never considered getting her eyebrows colored. Her eyebrows are nice and well-shaped, but when Reta looks in the mirror, she notices some small grey hairs. It's not surprising for a middle-aged woman.

The author suggests that these women were likely following the social rules of their culture, which means they were behaving in a way that fits their expected feminine roles. In fact, they need to stay in their roles and behave as expected because, according to Butler's theory, no one can do more than what their role allows. This is true for them, and they need to follow the rules. These rules are set for her gender, so people think Reta shouldn't do anything that goes against those rules. In simple terms, gender acts like a cage for both men and women. In this case, Reta feels stuck because she is a woman, and her husband feels trapped by being a man. Using Butler's idea, one could say that both of their roles have been created and established in society. Butler says that the topic, along with the idea of a past time, is shaped by the law, which acts as a made-up basis for its own right to be accepted or valid. Reta is affected by seeing these women, which makes her think about her own womanhood that she has lost. Instead, she has taken on a new role as a maid.

Butler's idea about performativity tries to break down the natural differences between male and female. When Butler says that gender is created by acting out different roles, she is really highlighting that this idea is shaped by social and cultural influences. Additionally, she says that we need to break down and challenge the traditional ideas of what it means to be male and female through actions in performances, because actors are always part of how these performances work. However, they can show that gender is just something created by society, and it is not a natural and universal part of being human. This breaking down of gender roles can be seen in what players do. But Reta shows how she can go beyond what is expected of her because she is a woman. Reta automatically takes on the role of a woman and mother, which means she feels she needs to make her husband happy. Sylvia tells Reta that she needs to stay true to her femininity. By accepting her role as a woman, Reta understands that she can't wish for things just for herself. She is a loving wife, so she puts her husband's happiness before her own needs.

Language rules shape Reta's gender identity in this story. Performativity happens because of different influences in society, with language being the main one. It shows the conflict between masculinity and femininity. The people with strong beliefs take advantage of her way of speaking, and Reta knows she needs to make her family happy. This means that what she says shows how both men and women have their roles: women are expected to please, while men get to enjoy being pleased. Reta does this action of performing. Sylvia tells Reta what she should do to fit into her expected gender role. Sylvia says that a woman's beauty stays with her for her whole life, but she should be careful about how she

shows her femininity. When Reta hears this, she responds by saying she doesn't want to be seen as attractive like women are expected to be. Reta is told that any woman can be pretty without spending much money. All she needs is to be charming, which is really easy to do—just smile brightly and share that happiness. The way she lifted her wrist, raised her chin, and brought her thumb and forefinger together to make a little loop looked like she was pretending to sit on a tiny glass chair. It reminded me of a cheap perfume. Reta's views on being a woman are tested. Sylvia likes the idea of being a mistress, while Reta does not want to accept this idea or play that role. Butler believes that having specific genders helps to make people feel more like individuals in today's society. Gender is not something real; instead, the things people do related to gender help form the idea of what gender is. Without these actions, there wouldn't be any gender at all. But if we use Butler's idea, we can see that Reta stays a woman because she feels like she has to keep acting like a woman and mother without even thinking about it. In simple words, Reta feels a lot of pressure because of the time and society she lives in. She is changing how she sees her role as a woman in this situation. This means that she focuses on how her biology and sexual identity shape her personality. Reta recalls a tough question she was asked in her interview about her role as a woman. She was asked to share her thoughts on what it's like to be a working woman and a mother.

I'm in my early middle age now, and I have a nineteen-year-old daughter who lives on the streets. I don't need to be charming anymore, with all those lovely purple shapes and outlines. Maybe I didn't do it. I won't right now make my sentences nice for anyone. The next time a reporter asks me a personal question to get details, I'll respond firmly. "Winters, how do you manage your family and work life. "I will give a strong look with the new stare I've been practicing. How can I make my life balanced. I have colored eyebrows. What kind of questioning is this. Wouldn't you rather, Mrs. Winters, focus on your own writing instead of translating Dr. Westermann's work Not that again, please. How did you meet your husband. What does she think about your writing.

This shows that Reta uses language to express and shape her identity as a woman, which is connected to being a mother. Being a mother is seen as a special time for a woman because the love between a mother and her child is one of a kind. Reta believes this idea, and because of it, she thinks she is a sad woman since her daughter is missing and she feels lonely without that love. This means Reta is playing her role without really thinking about it, and she doesn't realize that being a woman is just acting in a certain way.

In the book, there are moments where we see memories from Reta's life as a woman and as a lover. Her relationship is affected by outside things, but she has never been married to Tom. This relates to how he thinks and the social situation of women. Feeling powerful affects how Reta thinks and acts in her life, and it also impacts how she approaches her relationship with him. When Reta was a teenager, she had long, straight brown hair that reached her waist. While studying French, she met Tom Winters, who was a medical student. They fell in love. They chose to stay together from that time on, and Reta thinks that she has given up parts of her body. I grew up listening to Helen Reddy sing "I Am Woman. "People think that men have a natural advantage over women, and this advantage comes from how men express their sexuality. Men can show their power through sexual actions. So, Reta is seen as a sexual object, and Tom is seen as a man who can make her pregnant. This shows how they act out their roles and what it means for Reta to be feminine. This is even clearer through Reta's role as a mistress. During their sexual activity, even when she agrees, she is still controlled by the man. Reta and Tom show their ideas of being female and male through sex. Reta has to be "passive and distant," while the doctor can be "active and confident – able to take control of the situation for his own gain" (Beauvoir 53). Shields shows how Reta, as a woman, is mostly passive in her relationship with Tom.

Even though gender identities exist before a person is born, people don't really have the freedom to choose their identity. So, it's not correct to see Butler's idea of a person as someone who can freely pick their identity. The strict rules that develop over time make it hard to have many choices. In other words, the options are decided ahead of time by society, the situation, and the economy. in which someone is located.

It's important to understand that when Butler talks about how gender is created by society, she doesn't mean that people lose their identity or that their identity is completely fake. She is not saying that people are stuck in these ideas without any power to change. Instead, she discusses how to repeat something and, by doing so in many different ways, change the gender rules that allow that repetition to happen (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 189). She also says that "Construction doesn't go against having control; it's actually where having control happens and how we understand it in our culture" (187). Marriage makes Reta something that men want to own, and she has to follow their rules. Also, Reta has to see herself as part of Tom because she is with him now. While having her first baby, Reta goes through the journey of becoming a woman. In her novel, Shields shows how important family is for men because it helps strengthen the bonds and identity of their group. By talking about the night they began their life together, Reta is pretending to be a married woman to help herself get used to the new situation. In simple words, she becomes a woman by following the rules and expectations for how women should behave (Butler, *Gender* 17). This means that women have certain traits in society that express their femininity.

In this part, Reta begins to wonder about her gender after looking at her body. This means that because she is trapped in this social environment, she has even forgotten what it means to be a woman. Also, her body has changed, and she no longer feels like a woman. Reta begins to think about her gender role and identity. She wonders how women's roles can be shown through what they wear and how she can prove her own womanhood. Reta defines female sexuality based on her vulnerabilities and physical traits, which are influenced by how she interacts with the expectations of society. In this environment, she learns how to behave like a woman and understand the "lessons of violence" (Beauvoir 357). In this society, she has not gained anything from being a woman. Throughout her experiences, Reta has become like a doll that only plays a part in her sexual roles. She undervalues herself and acts like a toy for Tom because she believes she can only be significant to him if she helps him.

Reta is like the "public voices that work" in society. She is struggling with how normal life is in society, and she feels left out. The picture of her represents a sad generation that has been treated unfairly. The book might show how fear from the public and "acts of terror" can affect people's personal lives. Shields breaks down society in her novel by using Butler's ideas about being different and feelings of sadness in situations of uncertainty. What can be understood about Reta is about owning things. The author shows the idea of ownership by writing a book that symbolizes this idea. Shields tries to show that Reta is troubled by her fears and thoughts, leading her to a point of emotional breakdown. Possession is related to hurt, humiliation, shame, madness, and punishment. Social duties control Reta's thoughts, making her feel like she is owned by them. People think she is crazy, but really, her unconscious mind is in charge of how she acts. Reta's sadness comes from the problems in society that have left her feeling disconnected and troubled. She is always going through changes. People tell her that she needs to step out of her comfort zone, and like a phoenix, she might start fresh and feel new again. Reta's comments about her role in sex suggest that it allows Tom to feel powerful in their relationship as a man over a woman. Beauvoir explains that men show aggression because they want to prove themselves. Before having children, a man takes ownership of the act that keeps the species going, and by competing with other men, he shows who he is as an individual.

We can understand Reta's gender by looking at her relationship with Tom. In this situation, every cultural change affects how people see their gender. She remembers that Tom often talks about the strange way trilobites evolved, especially when it comes to her body and understanding her gender. Nobody knows anything about how trilobites thought or how they had babies. All the soft parts have disappeared, and only the hard calcium shell is left. Most trilobites had big and complicated eyes on the sides of their smooth heads. The strict rules that develop over time make it hard to have many choices. In other words, the options are decided ahead of time by society, the situation, and the economy. in which someone is located.

It's important to understand that when Butler talks about how gender is created by society, she doesn't mean that people lose their identity or that their identity is completely fake. She is not saying that people are stuck in these ideas without any power to change. Instead, she discusses how to repeat something and, by doing so in many different ways, change the gender rules that allow that repetition to happen (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 189). She also says that "Construction doesn't go against having control; it's actually where having control happens and how we understand it in our culture" (187). Marriage makes Reta something that men want to own, and she has to follow their rules. Also, Reta has to see herself as part of Tom because she is with him now. While having her first baby, Reta goes through the journey of becoming a woman. In her novel, Shields shows how important family is for men because it helps strengthen the bonds and identity of their group. By talking about the night they began their life together, Reta is pretending to be a married woman to help herself get used to the new situation. In simple words, she becomes a woman by following the rules and expectations for how women should behave (Butler, *Gender* 17). This means that women have certain traits in society that express their femininity.

In this part, Reta begins to wonder about her gender after looking at her body. This means that because she is trapped in this social environment, she has even forgotten what it means to be a woman. Also, her body has changed, and she no longer feels like a woman. Reta begins to think about her gender role and identity. She wonders how women's roles can be shown through what they wear and how she can prove her own womanhood. Reta defines female sexuality based on her vulnerabilities and physical traits, which are influenced by how she interacts with the expectations of society. In this environment, she learns how to behave like a woman and understand the "lessons of violence" (Beauvoir 357). In this society, she has not gained anything from being a woman. Throughout her experiences, Reta has become like a doll that only plays a part in her sexual roles. She undervalues herself and acts like a toy for Tom because she believes she can only be significant to him if she helps him.

Reta is like the "public voices that work" in society. She is struggling with how normal life is in society, and she feels left out. The picture of her represents a sad generation that has been treated unfairly. The book might show how fear from the public and "acts of terror" can affect people's personal lives. Shields breaks down society in her novel by using Butler's ideas about being different and feelings of sadness in situations of uncertainty. What can be understood about Reta is about owning things. The author shows the idea of ownership by writing a book that symbolizes this idea. Shields tries to show that

Reta is troubled by her fears and thoughts, leading her to a point of emotional breakdown. Possession is related to hurt, humiliation, shame, madness, and punishment. Social duties control Reta's thoughts, making her feel like she is owned by them. People think she is crazy, but really, her unconscious mind is in charge of how she acts. Reta's sadness comes from the problems in society that have left her feeling disconnected and troubled. She is always going through changes. People tell her that she needs to step out of her comfort zone, and like a phoenix, she might start fresh and feel new again. Reta's comments about her role in sex suggest that it allows Tom to feel powerful in their relationship as a man over a woman. Beauvoir explains that men show aggression because they want to prove themselves. Before having children, a man takes ownership of the act that keeps the species going, and by competing with other men, he shows who he is as an individual.

We can understand Reta's gender by looking at her relationship with Tom. In this situation, every cultural change affects how people see their gender. She remembers that Tom often talks about the strange way trilobites evolved, especially when it comes to her body and understanding her gender. Nobody knows anything about how trilobites thought or how they had babies. All the soft parts have disappeared, and only the hard calcium shell is left. Most trilobites had big and complicated eyes on the sides of their smooth heads.

"Thank you for bringing me into the world," my middle daughter, Christine, said to me today, October 12th, which is also her seventeenth birthday. Loins "Where did she learn a word like 'loins'." "It's from a book by Tom Wolfe," she said. "It means womb." "Or else womb." "She was in the kitchen eating leftover pizza for breakfast and drinking apple juice." "You're welcome," I said, then to keep the conversation going, I added, "It was nice."

What Reta is talking about is the typical way that women and wives are expected to behave. When a woman has a baby, it highlights her role as a mother and helps her fit into her place in society. According to the idea of gender roles, people can't change how they are seen as male or female. This means a wife has to stay in her role as a woman and can't step outside of it. Butler describes gender as something that happens because people keep acting in certain ways, which makes it seem like there's a normal way to be a certain gender. This acting hides the fact that any one person's way of showing their gender can be different and doesn't always fit into one category. This effect creates what is called Reta's "true gender." It is often hidden that people agree, without saying it out loud, to act out and keep separate and opposite genders as cultural stories. These stories seem real and believable (Butler, *Gender* 179). This can happen through actions and behaviors in society. For Reta, being pregnant and taking care of her kids played a big role in shaping who she is. One of the most important things related to her gender is being pregnant. Shields is trying to show that when women give birth, it helps define what being a woman is. Pregnancy that comes from marriage means that a woman should experience being a mother to fully embrace being a woman. So, getting pregnant, going into labor, and the pain that comes with it are seen as things that need to happen. Reta does it, and getting married is the main reason Reta changes into a woman.

Reta's daughter understands that giving birth is not something that should be seen as one of life's happy moments. Reta's response to her daughter's statement shows that her gender and how she acts shape her sense of being a woman.

"How do you know that, Chris. Can you explain." I looked at the clock above the stove, and she noticed me looking at it while I noticed her watching me. Her mouth was full of half-eaten pizza crust, and her strong teeth were chewing it. It's not a nice view, but I love our chubby daughter and try every day to keep her close and loving. "Well, to be honest," she said, frustrated, "I did watch that video about having a baby at home. (42)

Butler says that "performativity" is connected to how culture shapes identity. This happens when power influences people through repeated actions and behaviors. Gender is how people behave based on the accepted ideas about how someone of their sex should act and think. "Gender activities come from and support our belonging to a specific sex category"

**Conclusion:**

In the stories, Shields imagines a world where gender roles can change and swap easily. We see women acting in ways that go against traditional roles for women and showing traits that are usually seen as male. At the same time, we see men stepping away from their usual masculine behavior and displaying traits that are typically thought of as feminine. In her novel, the way gender roles can change shows that gender identity isn't fixed or steady like people used to think. Instead, it can change based on different social and cultural influences.

Shields shows a society where traditional gender roles and identities are turned upside down, and the usual power differences between men and women are switched. Shields uses character development and acting in different roles to show how gender can change and be performed. In her book, Shields shows many different gender identities to question traditional ideas about gender and to highlight that there are other ways people can express their gender that don't fit into the usual male-female categories. By using a cross-acting technique, Shields skillfully shows that it's hard to decide the gender of characters and highlights that the ideas of masculinity and femininity are not fixed and are actually made up.

This research found that in Shields' stories, people have some control over shaping their own identities by how they act. Shields agrees with Butler's idea that our identity and who we are influenced by history and how we relate to others. However, she thinks that people have the ability to choose whether or not they let those outside influences shape their identities. Shields's characters are strong and pick special roles that highlight some ideas while challenging others. However, they sometimes struggle to break away from traditional gender roles. By rejecting a certain definition, the characters can break down the old idea of who they are and create a new idea of themselves through their unique performances. The novel shows different events that reveal how gender is created, broken down, and acted out by the characters.

**References:**

1. Atwood, Margaret. "Introduction". In Carol Shields. *Collected Stories*. London: Harper Perennial, 2004, v-ix.
2. Austin John. *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford University Press, 1962.
3. Bates, Catherine. et al. Eds. *Visions of Canada*. The Central European Association for Canadian Studies: Czech Republic: Masaryk University Press, 2007.
4. Besner, Neil. Rev. of *The Stone Diaries*, by Carol Shields. *Prairie Fire* 14.4 (1993-94): 106-09.
5. Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
6. ---. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
7. ---. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge, 1997
8. --- "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" *Theatre Journal* Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1988), pp. 519-531.
9. ---. *Precarious Life the Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2004.
10. Chambers, Samuel. *Judith Butler's Precarious Politics*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
11. Clark, Alex. "Carol Shields: Gifted Writer Famed for her Masterful Depictions of Ordinary Life." *The Guardian* 18 July 2003 <<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/jul/18/guardianobituaries.artsobituaries>>16August. 2017.
12. De Beauvoir, S. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany Chevallier. NY: Vintage Books, 2010.
13. Duguid, Lindsay. "Book Review / Picture window on a made-up world: 'The Stone Diaries' - Carol Shields: 4th Estate, 12.99." *Independent* 28 August 1993 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/book-review-picture-window-on-a-made-up-world-the-stone-diaries-carol-shields-4th-estate-1299-1464157.html>>17August. 2017.
14. Edley, N. *Discourse as Data A Guide for Analysis*. London: Sage: Publications Ltd., 2001.
15. Fee, Margery. "Autol Biographical Fictions." Rev. of *The Stone Diaries*, by Carol Shields. *Canadian Literature* 144 (1995): 173-74.
16. Irvine, Lorna. "A Knowable Country: Embodied Omniscience in Carol Shields's *The Republic of Love and Larry's Party*." *Carol Shields and the Extra-Ordinary*. Ed. Marta Dvorik and Manina Jones. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007. 139-56.
17. Lee, Hermione. "Reading Beyond the Fridge Magnets". *The Guardian* "Review" 3 July 2004 <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,12084,1252142,00.html>> 7 February. 2017.
18. Lehmann-Haupt, Christopher. "Carol Shields Dies at 68; Wrote 'The Stone Diaries.'" *The New York Times* 18 July 2003 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/18/arts/carol-shields-dies-at-68-wrote-the-stone-diaries.html>>18August. 2017.
19. Levenson, Christopher. "Introduction". In Carol Shields. "Coming to Canada". Ottawa: Carleton UP, 1995. xi-xxv.
20. Lionnet, Françoise, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender. Self-Portraiture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989.
21. Loizidou, Elena. *Judith Butler: Ethics, Law, Politics*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
22. Lorber, J. and S. A. Farrell *The Social Construction of Gender*. California: SAGE Publications, Inc. 1991.
23. Marshall, Andrew. "Eight Hundred Women Heard My Voice." *The Independent*. 9 September 1997. 10.
24. Morrison, Blake. "Third Helpings". *The Guardian* "Review" 14 December 2002, <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,12084,859506,00.html>> 30 January. 2017.
25. Nicolaescu, Cristina. "A Psychoanalytical Approach to the Construction of Female Self with Carol Shields and Alice Munro." *Studia UBB Philologia* 61, 1(2016): 121-133.
26. Ramon, Alex. "Domestic violence? A Reassessment of the Fiction of Carol Shields." *Visions of Canada*. Eds. Catherine Bates et al. The Central European Association for Canadian Studies: Czech Republic: Masaryk University Press, 2007. 19-34.
27. -----, "Writing About a Woman Writer's Writing: On Gender Identification(s) and Being a Male Critic of Carol Shields's Work." *Text Matters* 1, 1 (2011): 170-182.

28. Roy, Wendy. "Autobiography as Critical Practice in The Stone Diaries." Narrative Hunger and the Possibilities of Fiction. Ed. Edward Eden and Dee Goertz. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003
29. Růžicková, Karoline Němcová. "Multiperspectivity: Narration in The Stone Diaries". Masaryk University Faculty of Arts Department of English and American Studies Shields, Carol. The Stone Diaries. London: Fourth Estate, 1993, 2013.
30. -----. Unless. London: Fourth Estate, 2002.