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Carol Shields and the Extra-Ordinary. Edited by Marta Dvořák and Manina Jones. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007. x + 275 pp. Notes, works cited, index. $75.00.

This collection, which emerges from papers given at the Carol Shields colloquium held at the Sorbonne Nouvelle in March 2003, ranks alongside Edward Eden and Dee Goertz's *Carol Shields, Narrative Hunger, and the Possibilities of Fiction* (2003) as a significant addition to Shields scholarship. As its title suggests, the focus of the volume is Shields's multifarious engagement with—and subversion of—categories of "ordinariness" and "extraordinariness" in her fiction, although some of the thirteen essays address this theme rather tangentially.

Like *Narrative Hunger*, the collection opens with a previously unpublished essay written by Shields herself, in this case "A View from the Edge of the Edge," in which she assesses her position as a female Canadian writer and her ambivalent relationship to a literary tradition that has tended to marginalize work on both national and gender grounds. Ranging in an erudite but witty and accessible manner from the microcosm to the macrocosm, from the books that occupied her parents' shelves to a shrewd analysis of contemporary literary culture, the piece serves as a valuable reminder of the perceptiveness of Shields's insights, her elegance in expressing them, and how much these qualities have been missed since her death.

The volume's subsequent essays cover a relatively wide range of Shields's production and benefit from an impressive diversity of approaches, offering close readings of individual novels and stories: librarian Catherine Hobbs's insight into the Shields archival fonds; Lorraine York's incisive analysis of Shields's status as literary celebrity; an inventive "fictocritical" piece by Aritha van Herk. Of the more traditional essays of literary criticism, Manina Jones's original reading of *A Celibate Season* reveals how Bakhtin's concept of "prosaics" illuminates this collaborative text, while Lorna Irvine's superb analysis of the complexities of Shields's use of point of view provides some radiant insights into the ways in which her fiction "plays with distance and closeness, with report and question, with writerly versus readerly construction."

Structural problems mar some of the contributions. Ellen Levy's "'Artefact Out of Absence': Reflection and Convergence in

the Fiction of Carol Shields" offers some very perceptive analysis, but would have benefited from a tighter focus on fewer texts. Similarly, although Christyl Verduyn's "(Es)saying It Her Way: Carol Shields as Essayist" highlights Shields's undervalued achievements in this genre, an excessively lengthy historical overview of the essay form limits the critic's ability to engage with the Shields's texts themselves. Overall, however, this admirable collection does justice to the implications of the fusion of the commonplace and the numinous in Shields's work, "its ability to connect the infinitesimal and the ineffable, its joining of the moment and the momentous, and its implication that history itself is implicit in instances of profound intimacy."

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