BEAUTY AS FAIRY TALE IN FAY WELDON'S NOVEL
THE LIFE AND LOVE OF A SHE-DEVIL

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Abstract: The contemporary fiction reveals a great interest in the representation of fairy tale motifs and structures. Fay Weldon's novel, *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil,* attempts topresent the power of resurgence of fairy tale by depicting and revising several of fairy tale motifs and structures. This article focuses on the motif of beauty, as it is one of the central paradigms of most fairy tales, and emphasises that beauty continues to be one of the most stringent preoccupations of individuals living in the contemporary culture of appearances. Not only in fairy tales but in today's world as well the oppressive beauty norms and the struggle to achieve perfection become a problematical concern for most women.By employing many popular fairy tale motifs like jealousy, desire and craving of the stepsisters (in *Cinderella*), stepmothers (in *Snow White* and *Rapunzel*), rivals (in *Little Mermaid*), antagonists (like Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty*), the novelist tries to question virtue implied in beauty. This study shows that Fay Weldon's novel depicts the dominant ideology of beauty which is inserted in the fairy tales, questions the excessive interest in beauty and female body in the mainstream culture, divulges the artificiality of such preoccupations,illustrates the abusive and deluding nature and presents their damaging impact upon individual's identity.

Keywords: Beauty, Culture of Appearances, Body Shame, Fairy Tale, Revision.

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FAY WELDON'IN *BİR DİŞİ ŞEYTANIN HAYATI VE AŞKLARI* ADLI ESERİNDE PERİ MASALI ÖĞESİ OLARAK GÜZELLİK KAVRAMI

Öz: Çağdaş yazın, peri masalı motiflerine ve yapılarına büyük ilgi göstermektedir. Fay Weldon'ın ünlü romanı, *Bir Dişi Şeytanın Hayatı ve*

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Aşkları, farklı peri masalı motiflerini ve yapılarını inceleyip kullanarak, peri masallarının son dönemde kazandıkları gücü okuyucuya sunar. Bu çalışma birçok peri masalının en önemli paradigmalarından biri olan ve çağdaş görüntü kültüründe yaşayan bireylerin en önemli kaygılarından biri haline gelmiş güzellik ögesine odaklanmaktadır. Yalnızca peri masallarında değil günümüz dünyasında da, baskıcı güzellik normları ve mükemmele ulaşma çabası birçok kadın için büyük bir sorun haline gelmiştir. Weldon romanında, üvey kız kardeşlerin (*Külkedisi*), üvey annelerin (Pamuk Prenses), rakiplerin (*Küçük Deniz Kızı*) ve antagonistlerin, (*Uyuyan Güzel*) kıskançlık, arzu ve ihtirasları gibi birçok popüler peri masalı öğesini kullanarak, güzelliğe yüklenen anlamı sorgulamaya çalışır. Bu araştırma masallarda yer alan baskın güzellik ideolojisini anlatırken, hakim kültürde kadın vücudu ve güzelliğine atfedilen ölçüsüz önemi sorgulamaktadır. Fay Weldon romanında bu tür endişelerin yapaylığını anlatarak, güzelliğin aldatıcı ve bozuk doğasını resmeder ve bireyin kişiliğinde yol açtığı olumsuz etkileri sunar.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Güzellik, Görüntü Kültürü, Vücut Utancı, Peri Masalı, Revizyon.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the human existence, philosophers, artists and sociologists all around the world tried to explain the concept of beauty. Although there has never been reached a consensus, starting with ancient civilizations up to 21st century, this concept was discussed, and many attempts were made to analyse what was beautiful and attractive, basing all the assumptions upon various reasons.

Beauty concept and the attitude toward beauty have experienced many changes throughout the history. For the purpose of the research, it will be relevant to mention some of the examples of these attitudes, especially the ones that, in the contemporary mainstream culture, connect beauty to female body.

1. The Concept of Beauty in the Culture of Appearances

In her prominent work*Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf asserts that female beauty is socially and politically constructed in order to restrict the freedom of powerful, educated and independent women. As Wolf emphasizes, "The more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon us" (1991, p. 10).

According to Wolf, beauty is created with the intention of supporting the current patriarchal system in order to fulfil the economic and political necessities of the time:

> The beauty myth tells a story: The quality called 'beauty' objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual and evolutionary: Strong men battle for beautiful

women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful (Wolf, 1991, p. 12).

Standards and norms of beauty are created by patriarchal culture, and most of women are convinced that they are obliged to comply with these compulsory and "constructed" standards in order to be visible and desired. Women who dare to get out of the domestic realm becomeentrapped in another net which is created by patriarchal society and capitalist system. Many women who fail to correspond to the idealized feminine model, experience demoralization, perplexity and insecurity due to the pressure of the oppressive beauty standards andthe need of social approval.

Women who succeed in getting outside of theirdomestic realm, i.e. children - husband triangle, become easily manipulated in the culture of appearances, as they attain a new and empty purpose, which takes much of their time, energy and money. In this respect Bordo states:

> [f]emale bodies become docile bodies – bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation and 'improvement'. Through the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, makeup and dress – central organizing principles of time and space in the day of many women- we are rendered less socially oriented and more centripetally focused on self-modification. Through these disciplines, we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel and conviction of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough (2003, p. 166).

Whilewomen are gaining more rights and independence, in a body-loving era, ironically, they become more and more oppressed and controlled by a system which supports the hegemony of the idealised images of femininity, created by the mainstream ideology. As Orbach emphasizes, "[t]he message is loud and clear. The woman's body is not her own. The woman's body is not satisfactory as it is. It must be thin, free of "unwanted hair", deodorised, perfumed and clothed. It must conform to an ideal physical type" (2006, p. 17).

It should not be underestimated that the mainstream culture's influence on shaping body and beauty aesthetics, since social audiences create views on what is the ideal or beautiful body for women. Women are, therefore, forced to measure themselves against the constructed images of femininity, thus creating their existence and identity via their body image and, in fact, defining their self while being under the pressure of such aesthetics. The process of building the identity of a woman becomes directly affected by the surrounding media images of female beauty that make a woman feel inevitably ashamed of her own appearance, especially when comparing themselves to the parameters of female bodily acceptability.

Sandra Bartky, who studies the focus of women on the body in the contemporary world, explains that it objectifies and subordinates women which are urged to "make themselves as pleasing to the eye as possible" (1990, p. 28).In their endeavour to compile to images of feminine beauty, women feel

greatly embarrassed, as they see their own bodies defective and deficient, thus coming to experience a deep body shame. As Bartky mentions,

> Not only must we continue to produce ourselves as beautiful bodies, but the bodies we have to work with are deficient to begin with. Even within an already inferiorized identity (i.e. the identity of one who is principally and most importantly a body), I turn out once more to be inferior, for the body I am to be, never sufficient unto itself, stands forever in need of plucking or painting, of slimming down or fattening up, of firming or flattening (1990, p. 29).

Therefore, even though women attain a sense of beauty as close as possible to the existing idealised image of female beauty, they see their own body, and therefore themselves, as an object which is in a constant need of transformation, correction or adjustment, andwill always fear to become unacceptable or invisible in case they fail to correspond to the model.

2. The Visible Beauty in Fairy Tales

Though frequently considered as bedtime stories or a type of entertainment for children, fairy tales have a powerful effect and deeper significance than it was earlier thought. Loaded with great resonance and meaning, fairy tales continue to create a profound impact upon a human being, helping to shape the personality and one's expectations in life early in childhood.

In this respect, Bettelheim, pointing to the function of fairy tale in a child's life notes:

> Fairy tales carry important messages to the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious mind, on whatever level each is functioning at the time. By dealing with universal human problems, particularly those which preoccupy the child's mind, these stories speak to his budding ego and encourage its development, while at the same time relieving preconscious and unconscious pressures (2010, p. 5-6).

In addition to this, Zipes remarks that fairy tales play significant role and they have a prominent power in revealing cultural values, norms, manners of a certain time and also in preparing children to become civilized individuals. It is evident that fairy tales are used as a vehicle to develop proper behaviours and manners starting with childhood and continuing to coming of age, values which are in accordance with particular societal norms and the roles (Zipes, 2010, p. 47).

According to Zipes, folktales, recorded in earlier periods, underwent a change in terms of structure, motifs and patterns before they were turned into literary tales for children. Zipes states that: "(…) the matriarchal worldview and motifs of the original folktales underwent successive stages of "patriarchalization." (2012, p. 7) It means that the oral folktales, originally stamped and overloaded somewhat with matriarchal mythology, circulated and reached the Middle Ages in a form that clearly states its ideological transformation: the goddess became a witch, an evil fairy, or a stepmother; the active, young princess was changed into an active hero; matrilineal marriage and family ties became patrilineal; the essence of the symbols, based on matriarchal rites, gotexhausted and grew obsolete.

A similar explanation is given by Joseph Campbell, who considers that the image of the Mother goddess was central for individuals who lived in agrarian communities. Campbell claims that the power of the Mother derives from the earth. As he claims, "The human woman gives birth just as the earth gives birth to the plants. She gives nourishment, as the plants do. So, woman magic and earth magic are the same. They are related" (1988, p. 167).

It was only after fertility cultures got outmoded and gradually were replaced by warrior ethos, which was conveyed by invading nomadic tribes, that powerful cultural transformation took place, as a result of which the hegemony of the goddess/Mother got considerably reduced. The archetypal psychologist Jean Bolen also claims that "the Goddess (known by different names) became the subservient consort of the invader gods and her attributes and powers were absorbed (swallowed) or came under the domination of a male deity" (Bolen, 1989, p. 298).

As a consequence of these fundamental cultural changes, from the confrontation of powers between Mother goddess and Father god, the image of the mother has gained some unexpected aspects, developing into both negative and positive images, which corresponded to their ideological orientation. The goddess, if active, was represented as *femme fatale*, a witch, an evil fairy, or a stepmother, and such alterations led to construction of some stereotypes that met the necessities of patriarchal order. In the opposite pole stands the newly acquired positive aspect of the goddess, a submissive, passive and delicate creature, who completely relies upon the power and ingenuity of the patriarchal hero.

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Fairy tales definitely assert this ideology and their male and female characters are designed to serve the purpose of existing system of values. While male protagonists are depicted as active, intelligent, courageous and ambitious, who risk their life in order to save the beautiful princesses in distress, heroines are naive, patient, obedient and fragile, since only in this manner they may correspond to virtues of an ideal woman. Fairy tales such as*Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Little Mermaid*, and *Rapunzel* rely on such paradigmatic virtuous behaviour of the heroines, whose salvation and happiness depend on the brave hero, a representative of the male dominated society. Parsons aptly remarks that: "Fairy tales are sites for the construction of appropriate gendered behaviour. Although fairy tales are certainly not solely responsible for the acculturation of children, they are an integral part of the complex layering of cultural stories and influences that affirm and perpetuate cultural norms" (2004, p. 135).

In parallel to the portrayal of virtuous submissive and passive heroines, one of the most significant characteristicsthat is underlined in fairy tales is heroine's physical attractiveness, a characteristic which, in its essence, marks the transition from the "socially invisible" to the "visible to the eye" status. Therefore, fairy tales present beauty as the most important quality of a woman,

a characteristic which all women must possess if they want to escape their own invisibility.

While in most fairy tales beauty is associated with good manners, morality and chasteness, ugliness is generally linked to cruelty, jealousy, arrogance and slyness. Since most of the main characters are beautiful, kind-hearted princesses and pretty heroines, fairy tales contributeto the promotion ofthe patriarchal culture and ideology by depicting female charactersthat correspond to idealized image of physical appearance. Consequently, by encouraging and elevating such "visible" values, fairy tales have a significant impact on the creation of a gender identity, since they imposeonly the accepted societal gender roles to children. At the same time, by representing traditional value systems and social roles, fairy tales provide an opportunity to shape the gender stereotyping in children.

In many traditional tales, beauty is presented as a vehicle of reaching success and, therefore, is frequently associated with reward. Though there are many female figures in the stories, only the most beautiful or the prettiest are rewarded by a marriage to a handsome prince in the final scene. As it is given in fairy tales, it is acknowledged that physical appearance represents a "boon of success", to use Campbell's term, for any woman who wants to cross a threshold. Only the possession of physical beauty most frequently suffices for a young heroine to be considered valuable, and thus, able to be elevated to a different social status. In *Snow White* or *Sleeping Beauty* stories, for instance, the prince falls in love with the protagonist while being asleep, a proof that demonstrates once again that value of a female character is evaluated primarily according to her physical attributes.

By emphasizing the recurrent fictionalised female role models, whose only power lie in their beauty, it is understood that fairy tales convey some gender conceptions convenient to the patriarchal tradition and to the expectations of the society. Marcia R. Lieberman, with regard to the above mentioned aspects, insists on the following:

> A close examination of the treatment of girls and women in fairy tales reveals certain patterns which are keenly interesting not only in themselves, but also as material which has undoubtedly played a major contribution in forming the sexual role concept of children, and in suggesting to them the limitations that are imposed by sex upon a person's chances of success in various endeavours (1972, p. 384).

Seen from this perspective, fairy tales cannot be regarded as inoffensive stories used to entertain children any more, but when read, they should be used with care, as they also carry an ideology that may distort or impede the development of an individual's personality and also the expectation of a human in life.

3. Beauty revised in Fay Weldon's novel *The Life and Loves of a She Devil*

As a productive writer who adapts and subverts fairy tale motifs successfully, Fay Weldon wittily introduces an anti-fairy tale structure in her popular novel, *The Life and Loves of a She Devil.* The novel is based on the concern of female

rivalry, which can be considered as an indispensable phenomenon in fairy tales. In her novel, Weldon creates an anti-fairy tale frame, which is presented patently by the subversion of the expected scenario of the beautiful young woman waiting for her prince. In the novel, the situations of most of the characters are inverted, so that the reader can easily detect the ironic glance of the novelist.

As in a parody, the pretty and admirable Mary Fisher, a creator of modern fairy tales, that is, love novels or romances, lives in the High Tower, on the edge of the sea, like a princess in a tale and she is in love with charming and attractive Bobbo. The main character, RuthPatchett, who is Bobbo's wife, is in turn neither an innocent nor a beautiful young woman, to say that she is not even a princess who may indulge herself into a scenario which would guarantee her rescue by the prince charming. Fairy tales mostly emphasize women's beauty and describe their heroines as beautiful, pretty and fair, but in the novel Ruth is depicted as an ugly and monstrous woman who "avoided mirrors" and whose appearance is embarrassing even to her own mother. While the typical heroines of fairy tale, like Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and Snow White are suppressed and excluded by a rival or antagonist due to their beauty and grace, Ruth's ugly appearance is the source of her shame and detestation. Ruth's physical appearance does not complement in any manner the feminine image, as she is a very large and heavy woman, has a black hair and an extremely obvious hairy mole on her chin. A large nose and a clumsy manner of being complete our heroine's description.

At first, it might be thought that Weldon sympathises with her protagonist Ruth, as she is a victim, who is crushed by the oppressive feminine norms of society. Ruth's awareness of her bodily deficiency make her feel inferior when she measures herself against her rival, Mary, who is as blond, elegant and glamorous as all the heroines from her romances. Ruth reveals an inferiorized identity, to use Bartky's term, because she constantly compares herself to the idealized model of bodily acceptability and sees herself all wrong. She is too tall, too big, too heavy, big-boned, lantern-jawed and clumsy. So deep is her embarrassment with herself that she starts thinking that she represents a mistake of nature. The disastrous impact caused by the culture of appearance pressure is evident, as Ruth asks: "And how, especially, do ugly women survive, those whom the world pities? The dogs, as they call us. I'll tell you; they live as I do, outfacing truth, hardening the skin against perpetual humiliation, until it's as though and cold as a crocodile's" (Weldon, 1983, p. 6-7).

Though Ruth knows that her charming and womanizer husband Bobbo cheats on her with Mary Fisher, who symbolizes feminine beauty, success and creativity, she is convinced that "it is a good life" (ibid.:4) and she tries to lead a happy life by creating an identity as a wife and a mother, an identity that will make her acceptable in the society. The self-awareness of her own insufficiency is presented in the novel Ruth impressive self-description:

> I am six foot two inches tall, which is fine for a man but not for a woman. I am as
> dark as Mary Fisher is fair and have one of those jutting jaws which tall, dark

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> women often have, and eyes sunk rather far back into my face and a hooked nose. My shoulders are broad and bony and my hips broad and fleshy, and the muscles in my legs are well developed. My arms, I swear are too short for my body. My nature and my looks do not agree. I was unlucky, you might think, in the great Lucky Dip that is woman's life (Weldon, 1983, p. 5).

At the beginning of the novel, Ruthfulfils her social roles as a submissive wife and a devoted mother, and repeats to herself the litany of a good wife, in hope that at least in some respects, she would correspond to the social paradigm. However, she lives constantly with the awareness that she is invisible, insignificant and unlovable in the eyes of her husband due to her physical appearance. Lacking a complete sense of self-esteem, Ruth still feels grateful to Bobbo, due to his acceptance to marry her despite her freaky and monstrous appearance. Even her neighbours often imply this when they tell her: "You are so lucky, having someone like Bobbo" (Weldon, 1983, p. 6). The situation hardens even more after Ruth's first meeting with Mary, in her rival's lighthouse. Next to Mary, Ruth feels even more abhorrent and repugnant than she is in real life.

Ruth is forced to face reality only when Bobbo deeply humiliates her again during the big quarrel they have in front of Bobbo's family: "You are a bad mother, a worse wife, and a dreadful cook. In fact I don't think you are a woman at all. I think that what you are is a she-devil!" (Weldon, 1983, p. 42).

Up to this moment, the reader is induced with a strong feeling of injustice, since it sympathises with Ruth, who, though ugly, has a good soul. Inevitable is the reader's accusation of everyone in the mainstream culture who may lead many women to feel as embarrassed as Ruth due to their deficient physical appearance. However, Weldon is an extremely witty novelist who enjoys playing with the reader's expectations.

Therefore, Fay Weldon makes use of stereotypes of victims and abusers and develops them in a manner that blurs their security. Definitely, at first, the reader is made to reflect about the problem of victimization and abuse in a society, as it is a stringent problem of their era, and the reader tries also to look for ways of avoiding victimization. The display of such problems may also function like shock tactic, that will make the reader reflect upon his/her own attitude toward beauty and toward people who possess or lack it in their environment.

However, the novelist is a superb comic writer who can be acclaimed for her display of humour. She skilfully uses some surprising contrasts and inverts some situations in such a manner that leads the reader to develop sympathyfor human frailties and at the same time to laugh at them. For instance, Ruth's decision to make a pact with the devil, setting the house from Eden Grove up on fire, her decision to take revenge, and mostly her determination to change herself from an ugly, but very strong woman, to a petite that charms men are among these surprising inversions which are extremely hilarious.

The reader grows aware that Weldon mocks with this craving of women to look like the idealized images of femininity, their absurd need to compete withothers and their obsessive tendency to develop rivals. The initial attitude of sympathy and compassion for Ruth dissipates, as it is seen how the protagonist's ardent desire interrupts the narrative and the third person narrator becomes totally dominated by this first-person voice:

> And I tell you this; I am jealous! I am jealous of every little, pretty woman who ever lived and looked up since the world began. I am, in fact, quite eaten up by jealousy, a fine lively, hungry emotion it is. But why should I care, you ask? Can't I just live in myself and forget that part of my life and be content? Don't I have a home, and a husband to pay the bills, and children to look after? Isn't that enough? "No!" is the answer. I want, I crave, I die to be part of that other erotic world, of choice and desire and lust. It isn't love I want; it is nothing so simple. What I want is to make everything and return nothing. What I want is power of the hearts and pockets of men (Weldon, 1983, p. 24).

In fairy tales, such jealousy, desire and craving are typical of stepsisters (in *Cinderella*), stepmothers (in *Snow White* and *Rapunzel*), rivals (in *Little Mermaid*), antagonists (like Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty*), etc. The protagonist, who is already beautiful and therefore virtuous, undergoes many ordeals, which emerge as a result of the evil intentions of antagonists. Weldon's protagonist displays a malefic energy which is contained in the voice and such a wicked intention that overwhelms the reader completely.

This eccentric protagonist, from the moment of her epiphany, does not want to undergo the trials of her fairy tale counterparts, but is determined to fight back. Surely, the craving and jealousy give Ruth the energy to abandon passivity and get what she desires. However, in Ruth's revenge plan she abandons her obligations as a mother and a wife and tries to reach the feminine beauty ideal and for that only and empty purpose she is ready to endure unbearable suffering and pain.

Fay Weldon is extremely ironic when she allows her protagonist to become, finally, "an impossible male fantasy made flesh" (Weldon, 1983, p. 225). She isn't stuck in her domestic paradise anymore, but she is entrapped in the tyranny of beauty. The novelist mocks the complete lack of insight of her protagonist, as she replaces one form of imprisonment with another one. While she tries to transforms herself from a miserable and ugly wife to a She-Devil, she fails to create a new identity and becomes a copy of Mary Fisher. She sacrifices her own identity, abandons her children, in order to become a fake. As McKinistry remarks, "Ruth literally reduces herself into another woman in order to regain her place as the wife" (1994, p. 112).

As Vesta Rose, she helps women "who had good skills but lacked worldly confidence after years of domesticity" (Weldon, 1983, p. 122) by offering them a job opportunity. The agency she establishes provides shopping and delivery service and a day-care centre for the children to its workers. Ruth struggles to improve the conditions of women "shut away in homes performing sometimes

menial tasks, sometimes graceful women trapped by love and duty into lives they never meant, and driven by necessity into jobs they loathe and which slowly kill them" (Weldon, 1983, p. 120). By supporting them both financially and emotionally she tries to destroy the system that enslaves women.

Here the reader feelsmostly Weldon's satire, since Ruth, who proves her own capacities and therefore the ability of a woman to fight the victimization, abandons the inertia of daily routine existence of a woman, takes life into her hands and makes herself visible to the world due to her acts and achievements, but she prefers to become the object of male desire, instead of challenging male dominated society, in which validation of a woman depends her desirability and attractiveness. Ironically, Ruth fails to acknowledge that her worth is not in her physical beauty but in her spirit of initiative, activity and usefulness, qualities that, in fact, make her unique among others.

Beth Pentney claims that "[w]hile*The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* may be read as subversive for its literary sneer at conventions, by the end of the text it is clear that a challenge to status quo does not necessarily lead to revolution but rather to reinforcement of normative structures"(2009, p. 82). Therefore, it is seen that Ruth's decision on her extreme make-over as a pathetic strengthening of the ideology of the culture of the appearances and her attempts to fight it as absurd. This may also be qualified as Fay Weldon's wicked laughter, since her protagonist sacrifices her own life and identity in order to become a stereotypical female sex object which will be desired after the achievement of beauty.

The stereotypical ending of fairy tales –reunion of beautiful wife and her charming husband – is inverted again. The reader feels the wicked energy, infused by the novelist, which results from the subversion of Happily Ever After scenario, when Ruth, now a beautiful Mary, eats her caviar and drinks her Champaign in the High Tower by the sea and reflects upon her own happiness: "I cause Bobbo as much misery as he ever caused me, and more. I try not to but somehow it is not a matter of male or female, after all; it never was: merely of power. I have all and he has none. As I was, so he is now" (Weldon, 1983, p. 241).

Conclusion

Fay Weldon's novel *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*focuses on the perennial female preoccupation with beauty and reveals the conflicts of the individuals who try to comply with the promoted norms of feminine ideal of beauty. The novelist employs many resurging fairy tale motifs as jealousy, desire and craving of stepsisters, stepmother-stepdaughter relationship, abandonment, rivalry and antagonism, in order to question whether the true virtue is implied in beauty or not.

Weldon's eccentric protagonist, Ruth Patchett, from the moment of her epiphany, decides to deviate from the passive acceptance of the road of trials undergone by her fairy tale counterparts and exhibits a very strong

determination to succeed in everything she proposes to herself, including the fulfilment of her desire of becoming the ideal of feminine beauty.

Fay Weldon questions the reward promised by the possession of beauty in the culture of appearance.The protagonist's 'success' in attaining her aim of feminine beauty ideal is depicted with the novelist's characteristic irony and playfulness.Although Ruth isn't trapped in her domestic paradise anymore, she is entrapped in the tyranny of beauty. The novelist mocks and plays with the complete lack of insight of her protagonist, as she replaces one form of imprisonment with another one. While she tries to transforms herself from a miserable and ugly wife to a She-Devil, she fails to create a new identity and becomes a copy of Mary Fisher. She sacrifices her own identity, abandons her children, in order to become a fake. The virtue implied by beauty is greatly questioned and mocked in Weldon's novel.

If fairy tales transmit messages about the importance of female beauty, Fay Weldon deconstructs any promises of such recompense, and forces the reader to consider once again the prominent preoccupation with beauty, which proves to be only a lure.

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