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The Fairy Tale Enchantment and Metamorphoses in Fay Weldon's Novel The Life and Loves of a She-Devil

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Abstract

This article focuses on enchantment and metamorphoses motifs as used by Fay Weldon in her work The Life and Loves of a She-Devil. Since the encounter with magic is frequently stimulated by the human's desire for more, the novelist explores these possibilities in order to represent the protagonists' quest for the self. This study aims at discussing the protagonists' encounter with marvellous and the way it triggers the process of metamorphoses. The transformation affects primarily the protagonists' personality, as in the process of enchantment he/she dares to disclose her/his own potential, of which he/she was unaware prior to the exposure to wonder. This article also tries to reveal how Fay Weldon uses and subverts the mechanisms of enchantment because of her awareness that the apparently inoffensive transformations can cause privilege or repression of an individual.

Keywords: *Fairy tale*; *motif*; *metamorphoses*; *marvellous narrative*; *culture of appearances*; *cosmetic surgery*; *appearance anxiety*.

Introduction

Fairy tales, *par excellence*, are the stories where the encounter with enchantment takes place. Much of the popularity of these old stories relies exactly on their capacity of performing many magic tricks, as a result of which some new powers are unleashed. Making and unmaking of some spells and also transformations, which result as a consequence of these spells, become some of the most recurring motifs of fairy tales. In this respect, Maria Tatar emphasises that "[m]etamorphosis is central to the fairy tale, which shows us figures endlessly shifting their shapes, crossing borders, and undergoing change" (Tatar, 2010: 55).

Crucial to most fairy tales, magical transformations transpose the reader into a fantastic world, in which there are no limits for desires. The heroes, being helped by a magic wand, or possessing a magic power, or even being helped by some supernatural guides as fairies, undergo unsurmountable tasks and

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eventually succeed in solving all their problems. At times, the reader witnesses the impossible in real life miraculous metamorphoses of animals or monstrous creatures into handsome princes or *vice versa*, pumpkins turning into coaches and dead maidens are brought back to life. The attractiveness of fairy tale also depends on its capacity to surprise its audience with impossible transformations. Warner underlines that"[t]ransformations bring about a surprise, and among the many responses story solicits from us, is surprise. The breaking of rules of natural law and verisimilitude creates the fictional world with its own laws" (2007: 18).

Fairy Tale as a Marvellous Narrative

In folk and fairy tales, the characters are frequently placed in confrontation with marvellous, magic and enchantment. This kind of experience, *par excellence*, seems to be natural in the case of fairy tale, as the characters in the marvellous narratives act on curiosity and he/she inquires the limits in order to explore the world, so that it is observed in awe the characters' openness to change, which is exposed to him/her by the encounter with marvellous. Though it might be logical to have such patterns of "once upon a time" in the earlier literary representation, it becomes difficult to explain the reasons for adapting the marvellous, magic and enchantment in the late twentieth and twenty-first century literary narratives.

> In her important book on fairy tale, *Series in Fairy Tale Studies: Fairy Tales Transformed?*, Cristina Baccilega discusses the poetics of enchantment. To her, the consumer's buying into magic" is connected to "the contemporary call for disenchanting the fairy tale [as] directly related to a now-public dissatisfaction with its magic as trick or (ultimately disempowering) deception, a disillusionment with the reality of the social conditions that canonized tale of magic idealize (2013:5).

However, the presence of marvellous, magic and enchantment in a contemporary narrative cannot be limited only to Baccilega's explanation. Fairy tales provide an opportunity to dwell in bewilderment and investigate new prospects, to engage in the unexpected possibilities which open with the desire for exploring the outer and inner world.

Though, as discussed above, folk and fairy tale present highly recognizable patterns for symbolic exploration of the world and the emblematic psychic growth of an individual, fairy tale can also present what Tiffin calls as a "deliberate removal from the real" (2009: 10). Thus, while its constant concern is focused on perennial issues of human existence as life and death, love and hatred, challenge and quest, reward and punishment, etc., the world in which the action of the fairy tale unfolds is considerably different from the real, and the expectations of the real become completely thwarted.

Rosemary Jackson, signalling the transition of fairy tale into another reality, suggests that the marvellous world is not only significantly different from our

world, but it is also inevitably detached from it. As she suggests, "[t]his secondary, duplicated cosmos, is relatively anonymous, relating to the 'real' only through metaphorical reflection and never, or rarely, intruding into or interrogating it" (1981: 42). This "metaphorical reflection" breaks the mimetic expectation and leads instead to an awareness of a story, rather than reality. Moreover, fairy tale encrypts itself as a text which, as Tiffin suggests, signals "a precise relationship with reality which makes no pretence at reality, but which is continually aware of its own status *as story*, as ritualized narrative enchantment" (2009: 13).

Fairy tale acquires its awareness as a story, an artefact rather than reality, and this aspect makes it fascinating. Such details infused into the story as mirror, comb, ring, crossroad, etc., achieve a precise, intense and effective symbolic force that provides more resonance and make the story more appealing. Both author and reader who participate in the marvellous world of the fairy tale are aware that this text is a created or duplicated object rather than a constructed reality.

The distance from reality and the acceptance of the text as a story beyond any mimetic expectations lead to a kind of constructed unreality provided by magic. Definitely not all fairy tales integrate magical elements; however, most of them incorporate an aspect of marvellous like wizards, witches, fairies, or at least characters capable of changing on ordinary object in a magical manner.

The marvels contained in the fairy tale entail wonder as a response, since it drives the reader or audience into a different universe. In the quest implied in the fairy tale, the illustration of moral absolutes of the character is frequently revealed in the moment he/she marvels or is tested by magic, thus discovering something unexpected about his/her potential and about his/her world. The character may speculate, or anticipate some possibilities, and out of curiosity he/she needs to inquire further. The experience of wander as a state or emotion is stimulated by the character's desire for something more, his/her knowledge of the world widening unexpectedly by the opened possibilities. Therefore, throughout this quest the protagonist becomes open to change, both for his actions and his being. Moreover, the encounter with marvellous triggers in a way the process of metamorphoses of the character's personality, as he/she dares to explore the hidden potential of which he/she was unaware before the exposure to wonder.

Fairy tales are extremely attractive, since their magic fulfils many desires. Their powerful symbolical scenarios make the reader believe that their initially unpromising heroes succeed. So appealing was this scenario that many writers, starting with antiquity, tried to use these magic motifs in their writings, to mention only Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. However, acknowledging their dangerous role in the formation of a child's psychology, many postmodern writers understood the importance of the transformation of the fairy tale itself.

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Fay Weldon is one of these writers who assumed the responsibility of breaking this magic spell cast upon the young and adult audience. By subverting the mechanisms of enchantment, Weldon tries to reveal how the apparently benevolent and inoffensive working of magic can cause privilege or repression. At the same time, the novel will try to warn its readers about the double-edged magic, i.e. constantly changing identities with their positive and negative implications.

The Transmutation into a She-Devil

Fay Weldon's novel *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* opens with the life of the protagonists in the suburb Eden Grove. The name of the place is extremely suggestive, it was meant to be a paradise for all the families, but especially for the wives of the houses. Although Bobbo constantly tells Ruth that "It is a good life" (Weldon, 1983: 4), the constantly missing husband and frequently left alone children and wife question this paradisiacal state. Nancy A. Walker mentions that "one of Weldon's purposes in She-Devil is to deflate the notion of ideality that is the goal of fairy tales and myths, and the perfection of prelapsarian Eden is one of her targets" (1994: 14).

This domestic paradise is characterised by artificiality and emptiness, obvious not only in Bobbo's deceit of marriage, but also in the obligations implied in the "Litany of a Good Wife", which Ruth recites whenever she feels upset:

> I must pretend to be happy when I am not; for everyone's sake.
>
> I must make no adverse comment on the manner of my existence; for everyone's sake.
>
> I must be grateful for the roof over my head, and the food on my table, and spend my days showing it, by cleaning and cooking and jumping up and down from my chair; for everyone's sake.
>
> I must make my husband's parents like me, and my parents like him; for everyone's sake.
>
> I must consent to the principle that those who earn most outside the home deserve most inside the home; for everyone's sake…
>
> I must love him through wealth and poverty, through good times and bad, and not swerve in my loyalty to him, for everyone's sake. (Weldon, 1983: 23)

The statement "for everyone's sake", sounds as a refrain of a morally upright wife, a selfless creature, who must constantly suppress her own desires and play a role in the paradisiacal frame imposed upon her by societal norms. Ironically, even the role of a she-devil is enforced upon Ruth by Bobbo's spell. Fay Weldon inverts the expected Faustian bargain with the devil, where the hero conjures the spirits by his extraordinary powers and brings about the pact with the devil. It is his desire to give his soul in exchange of some pleasures or achievements. The Faustian myth is used extremely wittily by the novelist when

she implies that Bobbo's words, which function as an enchantment, instead of punishing and humiliating Ruth, transpose her into a liberating passage from selflessness to selfishness.

Mara Reisman claims that "Ruth's transformation into a she devil is the cosmic help she needs in order to behave badly. Within the framework of being a good wife, behaving badly simply means paying attention to one's own needs" (2011: 652).

Hilariously, Weldon suggests that the "devilish" becomes preferable to Ruth's "paradisiacal" status. This unexpected metamorphosis is extremely surprising. It relies on Cinderella's transformation from a simple servant to a beautiful princess by the help of a good fairy and her magic wand. In the novel, though there is a reference to the transformation of the social roles, the expected outcome is playfully inverted again: "Peel away the wife, the mother, find the woman, and there the she-devil is" (Weldon, 1983: 44).

Weldon, in the making of the she-devil, may also have been inspired by Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *Master and Margarita*, another literary version of the Faustian myth. Bulgakov's character, Margarita, enjoys greatly her transformation into a witch, since it allows her freedom to love and to revenge, a freedom that she could never exert as a woman, as a wife in her community. Fay Weldon develops further this liberation motif, as her protagonist acknowledges the advantages of being a she-devil when she exclaims that "[t]here is no shame, no guilt, no dreary striving to be good" (Weldon, 1983:43).

Although both Bulgakov and Weldon develop the Faustian theme and suggest a possibility of making justice through evil, Bulgakov's protagonist will continue to love just as strongly and innocently as before the transformation and her engagement into the pact will be made on the behalf and for the benefit of someone else, stressing her altruistic intentions, whereas Weldon's protagonist's morality will become extremely ambiguous. Ruth becomes an agent of justice and retribution only after the discovery of the virtue of selfishness, exposing thus the deceptiveness of the Litany of a Good Wife.

Fay Weldon inflates the situation of a scorned woman, who, if provoked, becomes devilish, discovers the power of desire and expects a demonic fulfilment without any remorse. When Ruth is enlightened by her newly acquired condition, she exclaims: "But this is wonderful! This is exhilarating! If you are a she-devil, the mind clears at once. The spirits rise. (…) There is only, in the end, what you *want*. And I can take what I want. I am a she-devil!" (Weldon, 1983: 43).

Weldon's novel reverses all the moral values of her protagonist. In the process of accomplishing her demoniac expectations, Ruth almost kills the guinea pig, burns the house and abandons her children to Mary and Bobbo, wickedly knowing that they are not prepared for such a shift. The targets of her diabolical fun and mischief are exactly these two love birds, Mary Fisher and Bobbo, who have created a kind of fairy tale love frame and tried to present themselves to the world as romance heroes that will live happily ever after. And

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it takes a devil's effort to destroy that. Fay Weldon ironically suggests that it becomes a devil's target to search for honesty in man, especially as her she-devil fails to discover sincerity even in herself.

Definitely Weldon's construction of a she-devil aims at exploding the fairy tale stereotypical passively enduring heroines which undergo all the ordeals imposed upon them by the witches or evil characters. Her protagonist, Ruth, prefers instead to become devilish, therefore deconstructing the image of angelic and submissive prototype, and thus giving the reader an opportunity to revise and re-evaluate the admired protagonist's qualities which should change in order to meet the new cultural conditions.

Transformation into Mary Fisher

During the retributive course of action, Ruth definitely transforms, but her metamorphosis has nothing to do with magic. Fay Weldon's playful use of fairy tale, which operates metafictively, functions in order to expose the way formulaic stories operate. When everyone expects transformation to occur as a result of enchantment and spells, Weldon presents a different *modus operandi* for a metamorphosis, the heroine's reinvention of herself.

In a way, Ruth transforms economically, psychologically and physically. In her vengeful process, she starts working on herself. Primarily Ruth tries to get rid of her past so that she will be able to start a new life. She takes on a new identity and establishes Vesta Rose Agency, an organization that trains women for basic secretarial skills and looks for possibilities of their employment. In the same period, she wickedly sneaks into Bobbo's office and transfers money from the accounts of Bobbo's clients to Ruth and Bobbo's joint account. Both from her own income and from the dilapidation of her husband's clients' accounts she changes her economic status, as now she is able to spend money on anything she wants, thus enjoying a financial freedom without precedent.

Ruth's financial transformation simultaneously stimulates her psychological change. Her confidence is boosted considerably, since she is an active woman, full of entrepreneurial initiative, able to help other women find their place in life and she becomes capable of taking her own decisions. She also learns to avoid letting people taking advantage of her. From now on no one and nothing could stand into her way. Her newly discovered confidence gave her power in the vindictive process. Weldon's protagonist shows that no woman should expect passively a moment of enchantment for transformation to take place. Ruth destroyed her "good girl" image and starts stealing money, manipulating whoever she needs, so that she becomes Ruth-less.

However, in this transformation process Ruth proceeds from some acts which are logical and comprehensible to some acts that are ironically excessive. If her determination to change herself is fully a laudable act, her physical transformation is mostly extreme. As a part of her vindictive plan, Ruth decides to go through extensive cosmetic surgeries in order to get rid of her gigantic and repellent body and to become an exact copy of her rival, Mary Fisher. Ruth

takes multiple health risks that might occur during surgeries; she ventures loss of millions of dollars and is determined to go through an indefinite period of healing process. Since she thinks that her weakness arises from her body and its failure to comply with the beauty standards of the society, she decides to "remake" herself. Her determination is obvious when she exclaims: "I do not put my trust in fate, nor my faith in God. I will be what I want, not what He ordained. I will mold a new image for myself out of the earth of my creation. I will defy my Maker, and remake myself" (Weldon, 1983: 162).

Ruth doesn't transmogrify into a pretty and glamourous woman by the help of a magic wand, but she uses cosmetic surgery, the magic of new age, that provides her transformation. When the doctor asks "What is it you really want?" Ruth replies "I want to look up to men. That's what I want" (Weldon, 1983: 177). Ruth's inability to look up to men is, in fact, one of the central jokes of the novel, since her attainment of a diminutive state as a result of having her legs shortened. Ironically, she gives up an already high position in order to comply with some romantic ideals of most men and women.

In her quest for beauty and power, Ruth has remodelled her jaw, extracted her teeth, straightened and trimmed her nose, flattened her cheekbones, made her breast smaller, shortened her arms and finally her legs. Fay Weldon attains a mixture of fantasy and comedy from the intertextual relation with Alice in Wonderland, since some parts of Ruth's body are constantly shortened, extended, flattened, trimmed, etc. However, by creating such metafictional background, Weldon's purpose is to reveal that such optical games are not funny at all. On the contrary, she tries to warn her readers against the dangers such magic may produce.

Cosmetic surgery is a problematic and complicated issue of the contemporary world, regarded as "the fastest-growing 'medical' specialty" exactly due to the great interest women pay to it in the mainstream culture (Wolf, 1991: 218). While some critics consider cosmetic surgery as an individual choice, a vehicle to liberation, gain power and take control, others regard it as a practice that leads to victimization of women who are oppressed through their bodies. In this respect Davis states that cosmetic surgery "tends to be regarded as an extreme form of medical misogyny, producing the pernicious and pervasive cultural themes of deficient femininity" (1991: 22). It becomes clear that cosmetic surgery promotes the sexist ideology and the patriarchal order that impose the constructed values to women and subjugates them.

In her novel, Weldon introduces the dilemmas of cosmetic surgery. While Ruth's metamorphosis empowers her, helps to accomplish her revenge and changes her status in life, she still has to accept the norms determined by mainstream society. As Davis explains,

> …the heroine also uses cosmetic surgery as a source of empowerment, a way to regain control over her life. Ruth is both a victim of the feminine beauty system and one of its most devastating critics. Her decision to undergo cosmetic surgery both supports the status quo of feminine

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> inferiority and shifts the balance of power – temporarily, at least- in her own relation. (1991: 31)

After a long time of fear of visual exposure, Ruth experiences what Benjamin Kilborne, a theorist of shame, has aptly named as "appearance anxiety". As a natural reaction of someone who has experienced "increasing anxiety about appearances", humans have the tendency, if the opportunity occurs, to control the way they seem to the others, and therefore, the way they seem or feel about themselves, as a kind of defence mechanism which will hide whatever was so far "unacceptable" (Kilborne, 2002: 5-6). In response to fear of embarrassing exposure, Ruth also tries to control the way she looks like, and therefore the way she appears to others, ignoring the way she appears to herself. As a socially invisible woman who is scorned and suppressed through her life and who is rejected by her family and abandoned by her husband, Ruth thinks that the only thing she needs is a miraculous metamorphosis, although she is aware of the severe physical pain she is going to feel.

In her longing for recognition Ruth can be associated to Hans Christian Andersen's Little Mermaid, who makes a pact with the witch in order to possess legs instead of a tail so she will be visible and available to the prince. In the tale, the sacrifice of the mermaid is emphasised, since every step the Little Mermaid makes equals to the treading on knives. Beyond the excruciating physical pain endured by this heroine there is another sacrifice implied, as she renounces her voice for the sake of being with the prince.

Again the reader detects Weldon's playful use of fairy tale, which operates metafictively and functions in order to expose and deconstruct the way formulaic stories operate. Ruth, like the Little Mermaid, is also aware of the risks and pain experienced by her body for the rest of her life. In order to look like Mary Fisher, she endures a lot. When the question of harm arises, Ruth doesn't hesitate, she blatantly admits it:

> Of course it hurts, (…) It's meant to hurt. Anything that's worth achieving has its price. And, by corollary, if you are prepared to pay that price you can achieve almost anything. In this particular case I am paying with physical pain. Hans Andersen's little mermaid wanted legs instead of a tail, so that she could be properly loved by her Prince. She was given legs, and by inference the gap where they join at the top, and after every step shetook was like stepping on knives. Well what did she expect? That was the penalty. And, like her, I welcome it. I don't complain. (Weldon, 1983: 150)

Ruth's self-conscious connection to the fairy tale heroine reveals her willingness to endure whatever it takes in order to become a part of the worlds of fairy tale or romance. Both Ruth and the Little Mermaid know they have to suffer in order to be attractive and they voluntarily embrace the pain. Concerning this situation Battisti states:

> Both the mermaid and Ruth are well aware of the pain involved in magic/cosmetic surgery, but they know that women have traditionally regarded their bodies, especially if they are beautiful and young, as a locus of power: the affirmation of a woman's beauty brings with it privileged heterosexual affiliation, and privileged access to forms of power that are unavailable to the plain, the ugly and the aged. (2011: 321-322)

In an age when the validation of self is bound to appearance, Ruth feels obliged to accept what is imposed upon her and in order to reach the ideal physical beauty and the acceptable feminine image in the society, she destroys her own identity. Though Davis remarks "cosmetic surgery can only be a transformation of the body as object, never as self" (1991: 29), Ruth's case constitutes a different state, as she becomes totally overwhelmed, experiencing a dislocation of the self.

Weldon's use of intertextual relations is extremely witty and ironic. Andersen's story of the mermaid relies especially on the virtue of sacrifice. The character remains memorable with her readiness to die in the name of love, turning into sea foam, when she fails to bewitch the prince's heart. Bitter is Weldon's laughter when she presents her protagonist's plight, acceptance of sacrifice and suffering for the sake of nothing. If initially, like fairy tale heroine, she desired unconditional love and financial and emotional security, Ruth, in the process of her transformation, follows some chimeric ideals about beauty and femininity, which prove to be dissipating as the sea foam, since they are all socially constructed. The bitter humour is included in the joke of Ruth's transformation from a self-sacrificial person to a vindictive and ruthless woman and mother. The grotesque image is apparent when the reader is aware of the process of the annihilation of the self, through the acts of cutting and adding, fixing and adjusting, confiscating Mary Fisher's body, but killing her own self.

The pivotal joke of Fay Weldon is set around Ruth's wish to transform herself into an object of desire from an object of contempt, thus sacrificing her own identity. "By enclosing Ruth in the fairy-tale plot, Weldon has ensured that she will end as a replica rather than a person" (Walker, 1995: 68). Her self-creation, which occurs by the help of high technology, does not lead to her liberation. On the contrary, it becomes another kind of submission and obsession, as McKinistry states it is "a form of sexual suicide" (1994: 110).

In fairy tales, metamorphoses occur in the name of love. The true love of the characters transforms the beasts and frogs into handsome princes or dead princesses into living beings. However, in *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, the source of Ruth's motivation for transformation is hatred, especially the one she feels for Mary Fisher. As she says: "Hate obsesses and transforms me: it is my singular attribution" (Weldon, 1983: 3). Moreover, the exaggerated masochistic element involved in the process of this extreme make over horrifies the reader as well.

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Fay Weldon, by deconstructing the formulaic stories of the ugly ducklings turning into beautiful swans, tries to warn the young women, and especially the pre-pubertal children about the unreasonable hopes that might grab someone's youth, deprive the one of the self, or more dangerous make someone a hateful masochistic person.

Who Is the God Now? A Transformation Again

The transformation story of Ruth, in which fantasy intermingles with reality, shows parallelism with the myth of Pygmalion. In this myth Ruth can be identified with Galatea, the artistic creation of Pygmalion, the ivory statue with whom he falls in love. As Peel claims "…the myth is an exquisite allegory for the unequal relations of women and men in a male-dominated or patriarchal society" (2001:179). The tale presents traditional gender roles, Pygmalion possesses creative power, and thus male side plays the role of God, while Galatea is a passive, voiceless and insignificant object. Therefore, in the myth, Galatea's personality receives scarce attention. The story emphasises the artist's impact, as he is the agent of change, since Pygmalion animates Galatea, bringing to life the thing he desires.

Weldon changes the genders of the creator and the creation of the original myth, and manages to subvert the tale in accordance with her purpose. Apparently, Dr. Black, the cosmetic surgeon, believes that he is the one who recreates Ruth. He is completely overwhelmed by his work, exclaiming narcissistically: "I am her Pygmalion. I made her and she is cold, cold! Where is Aphrodite, to breathe her into life?" (Weldon, 1983: 224) The irony of Weldon's text consists of the fact that the joke is on the joker. The doctor indulges himself into the role of god, but in fact he provides Ruth's transformation into a deity. His exclamation, "someone like you doesn't need to *say* anything. All you have to do is to *be*" (ibid.: 223), suggest the admiration that charming beings generate in the culture of appearance. Ironic is also the creative capacity of Weldon's Pygmalion, as he indulges himself into thinking that he has created a unique work, whereas in fact he creates only a trivial copy, a *kitsch*.

Weldon alters again the original tale, as she presents Ruth's self-transformation story in which she is determined to change. But although Weldon's character can be laudable for her determination to act, Ruth's transformation into a sex object, a succulent artefact designed to offer pleasure to man is laughable. The protagonist remakes her womanhood, and turns into a new woman as a result of her will power, without any magic. Ruth's triumphant metamorphosis makes her feel divine, but the gruesome details of her sacrifice problematize the happy ending of the story.

In most of fairy tales, the "happily ever after" scenario comes immediately after the magic transformation. Galatea, as many fairy tale heroines, also reciprocates her benefactor or creator's love, but Weldon completely deconstructs this magic moment. Her Ruth doesn't want to "depend upon him or admire him, or be grateful" (Weldon, 1983: 217.) Although the doctor almost

prays to Ruth, telling her "You'll have to marry me. We'll have to have children", Ruth is determined to stay away from such edenic situations. She is adamant in her attitude, saying "But I don't want children. I am busy earning the present, not the future" (Weldon, 1983: 226). Weldon ingeniously inverts the transformation of the cold statue of Galatea into a loving woman, presenting instead a woman who has grown cold as a result of her own status and appearance, emphasizing once again the threat which is present in the culture of appearance, since the way one looks like determines his/her personality.

Gruesome Ruth chooses cosmetic surgery for her extreme transformation and she manages to attain the appearance of Mary Fisher. However, at the end of her journey she becomes an artificial figure, who has lost her own body, personality and even voice. As Peel claims, "Although the protagonist analyses her former exploitation and revolts against it by seeking power, she is no more paragon of feminism than Hans Andersen Christian's Little Mermaid who willingly undergoes mutilation for love and of whom the she-devil could be a grotesque parody. This Galatea may create herself but she fails to love herself" (2001: 184).

Pentney also mentions Ruth's great effort, stating: "Through allusions to the Little Mermaid fairytale and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Ruth is situated among mythical characters that have similarly chosen pain or death rather than suffer ridicule and shame for being different" (2009: 86). The compulsory body modifications of Ruth can be considered as a way to balance the power of unequal gender relations, however Ruth gains "pyrrhic victory", by submitting the arbitrary social and cultural norms and sacrificing her identity to be desired and attract the attention of men. Ruth makes herself beautiful in the eyes of everyone, thus adapting herself to men's wishes. Ironically, she abandons all signs of self-awareness, concentrating completely only on how to best reflect men's desires. She spends so much volition to have as a reward only a pathetic lack of identity, surrendering her all in order to meet men's phantasies. The magical reversal of fortune, which revolves around the moment of self-improvement, becomes drastically questioned in Weldon's novel.

Fay Weldon questions the act of creation as well. Ruth's creation into a muse has revealed a catastrophic turn, since it becomes clear that the creation does not consist only of putting together or dismembering. The novelist tries to emphasize the manifestation of one's narcissistic self when the spirit is wasted in search for some chimeric technical heights. The dream of sublime artist is greatly mocked when it reveals that any literal begetting of a new self is nothing else but a negative epiphany.

Conclusion

In her novel *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* Fay Weldon depicts some of the most recognizable fairy tale patterns and motifs, like the encounter with magic and metamorphoses, recombines them and presents completely new meanings, thus showing to her readers that these eternal patterns and motifs are based

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upon some constructed ideas, and, at the same time, she tries to create some new meanings which are pertinent and valid in her age.

The novel is based on one of the irreplaceable elements of the fairy tale realm: the desire of a woman to be loved and chosen by a man. In the novel, Weldon creates fairy tale scenes and characters. Mary Fisher, who is the symbol of beauty and charm like the fictional characters of her novels, is depicted as a princess in her tower waiting for her prince, Bobbo. On the other side, Ruth has all the characteristics of a fairy tale heroine, except beauty, namely obedience, submission and passivity. One of the aims of the postmodern writers, who rework traditional fairy tales, is to challenge the patriarchal discourse and sexist ideology that these tales have promoted. By creating a She-Devil, Weldon distorts the traditional representation of woman as dependent and submissive and the predominant patriarchal order. She also ridicules the "innocent persecuted heroine" image by transforming her protagonist, Ruth, into a cruel and merciless woman that abandons her own children and cheats on her husband in front of him.

In spite of the novel's reliance on fairy tale structure, the novelist presents the characters whose life is much more complex than the one in fairy tale. Moreover, the sharp dichotomy strictly respected in the fairy tale becomes blurred, and Weldon's protagonists' moral ground is constantly fluctuating.

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