

**SUBVERSION OF FAIRY TALE MOTIFS IN FAY WELDON'S *THE LIFE  
AND LOVES OF A SHE-DEVIL***

**Özge KARİP**

**Yüksek Lisans Tezi  
İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı  
Danışman: Doç. Dr. Tatiana GOLBAN**

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**T.C.  
NAMIK KEMAL ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ  
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI  
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Özge KARİP tarafından hazırlanan Subversion of Fairy Tale Motifs in Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* konulu YÜKSEK LİSANS Tezinin Sınavı, Namık Kemal Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Öğretim Yönetmeliği'nin Maddeleri uyarınca 15.07.2016 günü saat 11:00'da yapılmış olup, tezin\*  
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## ÖZET

Zamanın başından beri peri masallarının kültür ve edebiyat üzerinde her zaman hissedilen bir etkisi vardır. Ataerkil ideolojinin etkisi altında kayda geçirilen bu sonsuz yapıtlar, sadece cinsiyet rollerini oluşturmakta değil aynı zamanda toplumların geleneksel değerlerini ve normlarını şekillendirmek ve yansıtmakta da bir araç olarak kullanılmaktadırlar. Yirminci yüzyılın ikinci yarısından itibaren peri masalları, postmodern yazarların dikkatini çekmiştir. Bu yazarlar, postmodernizmin de etkisiyle, masalların alışılmış konularını, kalıplarını ve karakterlerini ters yüz etmişler ve bozmuşlardır. Bu tezin amacı peri masallarının geleneksel motiflerini sunmak ve bu motiflerin Fay Weldon'ın *Bir Dişi Şeytan'ın Hayatı ve Aşkları* isimli eserinde hangi yollarla alt üst edilip yeniden düzenlendiğini göstermektir. Weldon, bu popüler romanında kadın erkek ilişkileri, evlilik, cinsiyet rolleri, toplum tarafından inşa edilmiş kadınlara dayatılan normlar gibi günümüz dünyasının sorunlarından bahsederken, güzellik, anne – kız ilişkisi, dönüşüm ve mutlu son gibi masal öğelerine de değinmiştir. Gelenekselleşmiş peri masalları ve motiflerine meydan okuyan Weldon, bu kalıpları ironik bir yolla alt üst etmeyi başarırken, diğer yandan da kadınların erkek egemen toplumlar tarafından oluşturulmuş kuralları içselleştirmelerini ve bu normlara karşı duydukları obsesyonu karikatürize eder.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Fay Weldon, peri masalları, alt üst etme, *Bir Dişi Şeytanın Hayatı ve Aşkları*, peri masalı motifleri.

## ABSTRACT

Since primordial times, fairy tales have had a pervasive effect on culture and literature. These eternal products, which were transcribed under the influence of patriarchal ideology, have not been used only as a vehicle to construct gender roles but also to shape and reflect the traditional values and norms of societies. Since the second half of the twentieth century, fairy tales have attracted the attention of postmodern writers. Along with the influence of postmodernism, these novelists subvert, reverse and deconstruct the themes, patterns and characters of these traditional tales. The aim of this thesis is to present fairy tale motifs and to enucleate the ways these motifs are subverted and reconstructed by Fay Weldon in her most known novel, *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*. In the novel, Weldon demonstrates the problems of the contemporary world as male – female relations, marriage, gender roles, constructed norms imposed upon women, while also dealing with some fairy tale motifs such as beauty, mother - daughter dyad, transformation and happily ever after scenario. When challenging the conventional fairy tale motifs and succeeding to subvert these patterns in an ironic way, Weldon also ridicules women's internalization of certain values and their obsession with the norms constructed and imposed by male centred societies.

Key Words: Fay Weldon, fairy tales, subversion, *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, fairy tale motifs.

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## INTRODUCTION

Ageless and universal products, fairy tales can be regarded as “the most important cultural and social event in most children’s lives” (Zipes, 2012: 1). Though considered as literature for children, fairy tales have a prevalent power in reflecting traditional values and shaping societies with appropriate norms. As Bettelheim states,

Through the centuries (if not millennia) during which, in their retelling, fairy tales became ever more refined, they came to convey at the same time overt and covert meanings -- come to speak simultaneously to all levels of the human personality, communicating in a manner which reaches the uneducated mind of the child as well as that of the sophisticated adult. (2010: 5)

Due to their perennial nature, fairy tales have gained popularity again and have raised the attention of postmodern writers, such as Angela Carter, Anne Sexton, and Margaret Atwood. Besides these writers, there is one more novelist, Fay Weldon, who discovers the power of fairy tales and demonstrates it in her art of novel writing. These postmodern novelists mostly subvert, reverse and deconstruct the themes, characters and motifs of fairy tales, while adjusting them for postmodern fiction. As Wilson remarks, “Often turning fairy-tale plots upside down, reversing outcomes, and using unreliable narrators, anti-heroes/heroines, and magical realism, the texts generally exist in a romance mode and may still depict transformation and metamorphoses” (2008: 99).

Franklin Birkinshaw, known as Fay Weldon today, was born as the second daughter of Margaret and Frank Birkinshaw, in Worcestershire, on September, 22, 1931. She has descended from a bohemian family, whose members had artistic talents: a novelist grandfather, a musician grandmother and a writer mother. Weldon spent her early childhood in New Zealand. After the divorce of her parents, Weldon moved to England with her mother. Following her graduation from South Hampstead High School, she gained a scholarship and completed her education at St. Andrews University, where she received a master’s degree in economics and psychology, in 1954.

Before she became a popular novelist, Weldon worked as a copywriter for the Foreign Office, and during the sixties she continued to work as a copywriter in different advertising agencies. As Dowling states, “The period spent in advertising has had a lasting effect on Weldon’s style and typography” (1998: 27).

The main themes of Weldon’s novels, which focus mainly on the stories of female characters, are: “single parenthood, sisterhood, reproduction and mothering, heterosexual sex, marriage and divorce, infidelity and revenge, woman turned demon, madness and rejection” (Dowling, 1998: 27). In most of her novels, Weldon uses extraordinary heroines and protagonists that can be considered as the Other. As Ellis states, “her fiction focuses primarily on the everyday lives of women, and political action often happens in kitchens, on playgrounds, or at suburban dinner parties - wherever women spend their lives” (2002: 349). Since Weldon was brought up among women who were desperate and abandoned, this had caused a great impact both upon her life and, naturally, upon her subject choices. As quoted in Dowling’s *Fay Weldon’s Fiction*, Weldon confesses that “I thought the world was composed of women. I always assumed the world was female and I was astonished to discover that on outside it was assumed to be male”.

In her ninth novel, *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, Weldon narrates the revenge and self-creation story of Ruth, who was cheated by her husband, Bobbo. In her popular novel, Weldon examines the problems of modern era such as female and male relationships, marriage, gender roles, compulsory social and cultural norms enforced upon women. Beside these preoccupations, her novel makes references to specific tales and myths, such as *Cinderella*, *The Little Mermaid*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Ovid’s *Pygmalion*. As a postmodern novelist, Weldon succeeds to deconstruct fairy tale motifs wittily, while adapting them for the necessities of the contemporary readers. She does not only challenge the sexist and patriarchal ideology presented in fairy tales, but also portrays women’s internalization of the norms, which are constructed by male-dominated society, in an ironic and parodic manner.

The aim of this study is to depict the fairy tale motifs and, at the same time to present the ways in which these fairy tale motifs are employed and subverted in Fay Weldon's popular novel *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* in order to serve her purposes. This thesis also focuses on the emergence of new meanings created by the novelist as a result of the deconstruction of the otherwise eternal structures.

The first chapter of this study deals with the theories of fairy tale which reveal their resurging power. It also tries to present the numerous fairy tale motifs which demonstrate the capacity to mutate and to recombine, but although they change or alter, they surprise the reader with their constancy of patterns, regardless the social and cultural context in which they have been narrated. This chapter attempts to show that although fairy tales represent highly encoded structures, the interaction of the employed formulas of content lead to their inevitable recognisability and, at the same time, to the assertion of the integrity and identifiability of these fairy tale structures within other literary forms.

At the same time, the first chapter tries to attract the attention to the fact that the content and the ideology of fairy tales have grown obsolete in the contemporary society. Therefore, an important task of this research will be to reveal the way the fairy tale material functions in the postmodern context, as postmodernism rejects any notion of a unified or universal structure in any form of text, either literary or cultural.

The second chapter of this thesis analyses one of the overemphasized motifs in fairy tales, which is the feminine ideal of beauty, and the manner in which Weldon touches upon this issue in her novel. Beside naivety, passivity and obedience, the most prominent attribute of a woman that is underlined in fairy tales is her beauty. In this context, fairy tales serve the purpose of spreading the patriarchal ideology, gender hierarchy and expectations of male dominated societies. By portraying brave, active and intelligent heroes and submissive, docile but beautiful heroines, fairy tales create prescribed gender roles which stand in conformity with the patriarchal values. 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.

Fay Weldon's novel focuses exactly on this major preoccupation of women who live in a world of constructed and promoted norms of feminine ideal of beauty. Her protagonist, Ruth Patchett, is one of those invisible women who is not accepted in society due to her monstrous appearance. 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. Weldon's 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.

This chapter depicts Fay Weldon's irony when she allows her protagonist to become, finally, the ideal of feminine beauty. 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 transform 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 in Weldon's novel.

The third chapter focuses on another fundamental motif in fairy tales: transformation. Fairy tales offer to their readers a magical and enchanted world, where animals or monstrous creatures turn into handsome princes and dead maidens are resurrected. In her novel Weldon, employs this motif in accordance with her purposes. Her protagonist Ruth, from a devoted and submissive wife who follows the "Litany of a Good Wife", transforms in to a She-Devil, as Bobbo calls her, a ruthless, unmerciful and selfish woman. Ruth is trapped between her desires and her body in her fake paradise and she fails to succeed to liberate herself by the acquisition of a

new identity. Weldon deconstructs the obedient and angelic fairy tale heroine pattern by transforming her protagonist into a She-Devil.

Weldon does not employ charms for Ruth's physical transformation, but she uses cosmetic surgery, which can be regarded as the magic of modern era. In order to be a part of the world she desires for a long time, and to become a visible woman, Ruth endures agonizing consequences of operations. In the novel, Ruth is depicted as a rebellious character, who defies her Maker and recreates herself according to her desires, however she still remains the victim of the society she lives in. She surrenders to the constructed beauty norms and sacrifices her identity in order to become the object of desire.

The fourth chapter of this thesis analyses the mother daughter dyad, which is a frequent motif in fairy tales, and reveals how this relationship is subverted in the hands of Weldon. The concept of motherhood, regarded as the supreme role of a woman, is shaped and controlled by male dominated society for the perpetuation of patriarchal norms. It is a remarkable fact that in fairy tales the absence of birth mother is a common motif; generally, she dies before the story begins and if she is alive, she is so powerless and passive that she cannot oppose the witch or the monstrous creature who want to take away her daughter.

In some old stories, the relationship between mother and daughter is depicted as precarious, the mother frequently being abusive and cruel toward the child. In later versions of the fairy tales, in order to preserve the conventional benign mother image, present the natural mothers as dead and replace the maternal figure with an evil and wicked stepmother or a witch. Grimm brothers, especially, tried to veil the abusive relationship between mother and daughter, and to preserve the sanctity of motherhood and social values of the time by replacing the natural mother with a witch or evil stepmother.

However, Weldon deals with motherhood concept and mother - daughter relationship from a completely different approach. Contrary to fairy tales, Weldon doesn't conceal, but exposes the undesirable realities about motherhood to her readers. By portraying selfish mothers who avoid self-sacrifice, Weldon trivializes

motherhood concept which is constructed by patriarchal culture. In fairy tales, stepmothers substitute for vicious and cruel biological mothers who are considered as a threat to the social order, while Weldon presents mother figures, that lack maternal instinct and reject the maternal role given to them without any hesitation.

The final chapter of this thesis focuses on marriage that is displayed as a happy ending in fairy tales and the way Weldon has exploded this “happily ever after” scenario. Fairy tales portray marriage as the only way to obtain happiness and in this manner they lead to a dependency on a male figure. While in fairy tales marriage is presented as a reward and a path to salvation, in contemporary world it is an obligation for woman in order to become a self-realized individual. In both of the worlds, marriage is a necessity to be approved by society and a sign of achievement. By re-uniting Ruth and Bobbo in the final of the novel, Weldon mocks women’s obsession with marriage and divulges the dangerous twists implied by matrimonial life.

## 1. Theories of Fairy Tale

The world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries differs much from the romantic world of the “once upon a time” illusory narratives of the preceding centuries. The contemporary human experience and the worldview, as a part of a perpetual flux, changes drastically. However, though it is understood that our awareness of the world as well as our cultures change, the interest in fairy tales does not cease to exist. On the contrary, the contemporary fiction shows a great interest in the representation of fairy tale motifs and structures, a fact which makes us question their power of the resurgence.

The folk and fairy tales, in their long narrative history, have revealed their recurrent power and endurance. Their numerous motifs demonstrate the capability to mutate, to recombine, but in every combination process they somehow follow the same pattern, regardless the social and cultural context in which they have been narrated. As Jessica Tiffin claims, “Fairy tales signal their particular nature and function through highly encoded structures, a complex interaction of characteristics and content which nonetheless operates with a simple and holistic effect to create a sense of nostalgic familiarity” (2009: 2). Although fairy tales represent highly encoded structures, the interaction of the employed formulas of content like repetitions, tripling, cumulative effects, rhetorical questions lead to their recognisability and, at the same time, to the assertion of the integrity and identifiability of these fairy tale structures within other literary forms.

Concurrently, the content and the ideology of the folk and fairy tale do not correspond to the vision of the world of the contemporary society. In this respect, we should observe the way the fairy tale material functions in the postmodern context, as postmodernism rejects any notion of a unified or universal structure in any form of text, either literary or cultural. In fact, the postmodern tendency is to prove the artificiality of any structures, claiming that they are deluding constructions rather than universal patterns. Valentina Castagna mentions that “[being] cultural products, the popular narrative models, both old and new, can therefore be deconstructed and

transformed; re-working them is tantamount to intervening on their forms and structures” (2010: 35).

In this case, folk and fairy tale motifs and structures become a suitable material in the hands of the postmodern novelist who enjoys the process of deconstruction, re-working and re-presentation of that material to fit the perspectives which are relevant to his landscape.

### **1.1 The Recognition of Folk and Fairy Tale Motifs in Contemporary Fiction**

In the study of folk and fairy tale units, as represented in the contemporary fiction, the importance of the motif should be emphasised since the motif is the smallest element of the thematic material, which, by its variation in the text, strengthens the theme of a literary work. Stith Thompson in the *Motif-Index* attempted to give the following definition to the motif: “[a]nything that goes to make up a traditional narrative... When the term motif is employed, it is always in a very loose sense, and is made to include any of the elements of narrative structure” (1955: 19).

Based on the dynamics of reiteration, the use of motif or constitutive unit, becomes similar to a variation in music. It could be resembled to the use of successive moments of a single composition which become strengthened through parallelism, recurrence and variation.

As the motifs of fairy tales follow usually the same order of the employed formulas regardless of the characters involved, the element of recognition becomes of primary importance. The postmodern novelists, interested in the insertion of fairy tale motifs in their work, carefully reckon the novelty but also the familiarity of the reader with certain patterns.

Jessica Tiffin, in her book *Fairy Tale Studies*, makes an important suggestion on the reliance of some literary forms on the generic formulas. The Gothic horror, romance and detective story, like folk and fairy tale, depend on their interaction with their generic patterns in their process of building the meaning of a



text. For Tiffin, “genre narratives cannot exist in isolation, but in fact engage, through both adherence to and departure from genre norms, in continual dialogue with the history and pre-existing body of work which constitutes their genre” (2009: 3). The narrative formula becomes paradigmatic, an encoded structure which is continuously called upon, rediscovered, recreated and strengthened with every new recounting. Thus, recognition is pivotal in this process, as the creation of a narrative does not rely only on the generic interplay but also on the dynamic exchange between producer and receiver, story-teller and audience, both sides sharing an acceptance of the parameters, characteristics and motifs of the narrative.

This shared experience between teller and its audience becomes central to the study of postmodern fiction which integrates fairy tale within its body, as it is self-conscious and metafictional *per se*. Moreover, as a generic tradition, fairy tale reveals a deliberate and conscious creation of itself within a set of patterns recognizable by both author and reader. As Tiffin specifies, “[r]ecognition of fairy tale relies on its striking motifs and circumscribed and predictable plot structures, and also on its status as a marvellous form” (2009: 4). However, although the postmodern fiction develops a tendency toward dissolution, mystery, uncertainty, and abolishment of narrative authority, the postmodern narratives which rely on fairy tales do not necessarily aim to the refusal of mimesis. Even though this fiction calmly accepts the magical, or the simulation of the magical, it will deliberately reflect the experience of the individuals of a contemporary community.

Speaking of the recognisability of fairy tale within a narrative, J. R. R. Tolkien says that it is “precisely the colouring, the atmosphere, the unclassifiable individual details of a story, and above all the general purport that informs with life the undissected bones of the plot, that really count” (1966: 18).

Tzvetlan Todorov, in his work *The Fantastic*, also strengthens the idea that “what distinguishes the fairy tale is a certain kind of writing...” (1970: 54). Todorov insists that the form of fairy tale relies primarily on the easily recognizable effect which is transmitted through some characteristics like tone, structure, pattern and motif.

Mentioning the importance of discernibility of folk and fairy tales, Alan Dundes, in his essay “Texture, Text and Context”, continues the ideas of both Todorov and Tolkien, but adds a new dimension, the texture, which could be sensed through language. As he points out, “[in] most of genres (and all those of a verbal nature), the texture is the language, the specific phonemes and morphemes employed. Thus in verbal forms of folklore, textual features are linguistic features” (Dundes, 1980: 22). It is true that folk and fairy tale narratives depend on a vivid and clearly defined plot, characters and objects; however they much rely on the sparsity and simplicity of language as well.

The characteristic language of fairy tale contributes, according to Dundes, to the creation of “texture” in folkloric expression, which becomes recognizable, as it is interwoven in its structure, content, style and voice. This texture is mostly felt in the case of the postmodern reworking of fairy tale, as in the of use Gothic fairy tale, which rejects the simplicity of fairy tale linguistic formulas, though conveying some universal patterns and symbols which also belong to fairy tale texture. Jessica Tiffin also insists that “[this] attribute of texture, rather than language or motif, renders a fairy tale intrinsically familiar and identifiable even through literary manipulation, and it is precisely this quality of identifiability which allows the form to provide such a rich ground for metafictional play” (2009: 7).

Especially the postmodern approach is referred to fairy tale, as it is in the case of Fay Weldon’s novel *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, a work which focuses on the exploration of such contemporary issues as marital relationship, mother-daughter relationship, and the preoccupation with beauty. Through the texture, there will be a constant reference to fairy tale narratives, provided by the inclusion of some familiar motifs, even though the content, the language and the tone will differ radically. By calling into attention the elements as language, style, structure, paradigm and motif, the postmodern reworking of fairy tale might acknowledge and reproduce some carefully constructed reinterpretations which have validity in the contemporary world.

## 1.2. The Structure of Fairy Tale

In the study of fairy tale, the approach to structure is of fundamental importance. Although the structuralist and formalist approaches to fairy tale have grown somehow unfashionable with the advent of postmodernism, the vitality of the structure which renders significance to both classic and contemporary folk and fairy tale cannot be ignored. The postmodern tendency is to detect and deconstruct the well-known structures as artificial constructions. Our purpose will be to focus on the structuralist mode of thinking, especially on the notion of meaning as a relationship of elements, as the individual utterance gains meaning especially when it interacts with the system to which it refers. In this respect, Tiffin mentions that “[each] fairy tale text is intertextual, created within the context of the structures of the genre understood through its other exemplars” (2009: 10). Therefore, it will be attempted to discover the new meanings created in the interaction of structures.

### 1.2.1 Vladimir Propp

The study of the patterns of folk and fairy tale is central to the work of Vladimir Propp. The Russian scholar developed a systematic method which is based on the isolation of the component parts of a fairy tale, and attempted to describe the relationship between them. Propp also suggested a relationship between constants and variables within a specific tale tradition. In *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, he analyses around 600 Russian folk tales and isolates a set of invariables, which constantly appear in all tales, even though there could be noticed some variations. Propp observes that though the names and *dramatis personae* vary from one tale to another, their actions and their functions do not change. Therefore, he claims that the study of tale is possible according to the functions of its *dramatis personae*, by function implying “an act of character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action” (Propp, 1973: 21). It is seen that the functions/actions of the characters are determined especially by their position and role in the plot.

Propp advances four key claims about the fairy tale:

1. Functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale.
2. The number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited [...]
3. The sequence of functions is always identical [...]
4. All fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure. (1973: pp. 21–24).

As all the functions arrange themselves around a core-plot pattern, Propp reveals that there are some plot units which consist of a structure of intertwined “moves”. In fact, Propp’s effort discloses the act of pattern recognition on the level of the tale’s structure. This aspect is relevant for this research as it deals with a postmodern retelling of fairy tale, where some plot units create a consecutive story and rely upon structural features, but the meaning created is fundamentally different.

### **1.2.2 Claude Levi-Strauss**

Even though Vladimir Propp’s method exhibits some weaknesses, in a way it has stimulated the rise of the structuralist theories. It had an impact upon Claude Levi-Strauss and the writing of his article “Structure and Form: Reflections on a Work by Vladimir Propp”. Propp has recognised the possible origin of the folktale in myth, but he continues to treat myth and folktale as distinct entities. Levi-Strauss, however, sees the two types of narratives as sharing a “common substance”: “[t]ales are miniature myths, where the same oppositions are transposed to a smaller scale” (1983: 130).

Levi-Strauss brings to light the value of Propp’s methodology with a special focus on the story as a simple mathematical equation. In this respect, Levi-Strauss makes an important statement: “a fairy tale is nothing more than a narrative that puts into words a limited number of functions in a constant order of succession. The formal differences between several tales result from the choice, made by each, among the thirty-one functions available and the possible repetition of some of them” (1983: 124).

As Levi-Strauss does not see tale distinct from myth, he proceeds to explore its composition. For him, myth is a fundamental category of human mind, which is in a perpetual interaction with rational and logical thinking, called mythic thought. The

mythic thought, led by succeeding dichotomies and oppositions, reduces both reality and itself to a simple universal network.

Myth and thought, independent of any historical circumstance, epitomize the most intense expression of the mind and share the same essence as with language. Myth, due to multiple morphological similarities, becomes language, a universal narrative pattern which surpasses any temporal and cultural frontiers, and enunciates to all people. Though resembled to language, the substance of myth should not be sought in its style or syntax, but in the very story it tells. Levi-Strauss perceives the manner in which the constituent elements of the story – mythemes – interact and merge together and produce new meanings. As the structure of myth relies on the awareness of opposites to their resolution, Levi-Strauss claims that in this very characteristic myth discovers its vitality, as it transforms, alters, modifies through the variety of its narration.

This transformational quality of myth/story is emphasized by Levi-Strauss as following:

a myth or a group of myths, far from constituting an inert corpus subject to pure mechanical influences operating by means of the addition or subtraction of discrete elements, must be defined, in a dynamic perspective, as one particular state of a transformational group, temporarily in equilibrium with other states, and whose apparent stability depends, on a superficial level, on the degree to which the tensions prevailing between two states cancel each other out (1990: 208-209).

The interaction and the tensions between the story's mythemes reveal the importance of the structure. As myth represents a system of signs and my themes which is in a perpetual process of fusion, it will constantly transform the pre-existent constitutive units into a new system. In this respect Tatiana Golban suggests that

[t]he newly emerged system reveals the capacity of the same elements to appear in another form, even in an inverted one, but, eventually, following the course of some successive transformations through a sufficiently extensive body of myths, this change reveals primarily the relationship, the inverted symmetry, the isomorphous resemblance to the previous system (2014: 25).

The structural approach to Fay Weldon's novel becomes significant to our study, as it is seen that in *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* a significant number of

mythical/fairy tale structures prevail. However, each of these structures passes through a process of recombination and transformation, producing thus a new system which will have validity for the contemporary cultural codes.

### 1.2.3 Mircea Eliade

The structuralists usually do not reveal any interest in the roots or historical development of the studied systems. However, every focus on myth/fairy tale in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot omit such an interest, as it implies the study of pattern and repetition, which are *par excellence* historically rooted. It is precisely in its emphasis on pattern that fairy tale bares resemblance to its mythological origins.

Mircea Eliade, a historian of religion, associates the recurrent fairy tale motifs to primitive religious expression. As Eliade claims, these are “ritual motifs which still survive in the religious institutions of primitive peoples” (1963: 196). Vladimir Propp also mentions that there is a certain relationship between fairy tale and primitive religion.

Eliade insists that myth and fairy tale exist on different levels of signification, which is determined by changeable degrees of man’s attitude to the sacred. Although Eliade denies that fairy tale represents a “desacralisation” of the mythical universe, he still refers to a “camouflage of mythical motifs and characters” which takes place in fairy tale (1963: 196). Consequently, the patterns of the religious myth and fairy tale might be considered as analogous, but the magical dimension or the mystical significance is reduced to a more domestic frame.

The mythic significance inherited by the fairy tale becomes one of the structuring elements of the fairy tale, as it does not simply help to enrich the significance of the narrative, as the presence of mythic archetypes contributes also to the strengthening of the form of the narrative. The tendency of archetypes toward repetition binds, in a way, the fairy tale narrative.

The mythic patterns inherent in fairy tale represent a modified arrangement of daily existence, which is still charged with certain significance, essential for human existence. As Eliade suggests,

[though] in the West the tale has long since become a literature of diversion [...] or of escape [...] it still presents the structure of any infinitely serious and responsible adventure, for in the last analysis it is reducible to an initiatory scenario: again and again it is found that initiatory ordeals (battles with the monster, apparently insurmountable obstacles, riddles to be solved, impossible tasks, etc.) [...] But its content proper refers to a terrifyingly serious reality: initiation that is, passing, by way of a symbolic death and resurrection, from ignorance and immaturity to the spiritual age of the adult (1963: 201).

Therefore, it is seen that the recognisability of fairy tale pattern is important for the structural recognition and also for its psychological dimension, as the fairy tale patterns represent the psychic growth of an individual, his or her quest for the purpose and place in life.

This might be one of the possible explanations for the fascination folk and fairy tale continues to induce to the contemporary writers. Due to the perennial appeal that fairy tale evokes, it continues to be presented and re-presented in various literary texts, one of them being Fay Weldon's novel *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*.

### **1.3 Fairy Tale as a Marvellous Narrative**

In folk and fairy tales, the characters are frequently placed in confrontation or experience 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 one, 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 wonder 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.

This enjoyment of individual self-discovery is provided by the fairy tale's marvellous structures, and this might be one of the reasons for having this frame used by postmodern writers.

#### **1.4 Fairy Tale as Intertext in Postmodern Fiction**

One of the particular features of postmodern fiction is the practice of rewriting or retelling some earlier representations of fiction. Steven Connor mentions that the process of telling in the contemporary fiction has intermeshed inevitably with retelling, in all its forms: "reworking, translation, adaptation, displacement, imitation, forgery, plagiarism, parody, pastiche" (1997: 166). Therefore, the notion

of intertextuality deserves our attention, as it is the term which refers to the relationship between texts.

Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality was primarily inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of multivocality. Kristeva, stimulated by Bakhtin, sees the text as heterogeneous and dynamic. For her, the text no longer represents something in itself, nor does it encompass any value that might be there, before the reader's eyes, which are needful of perception and interpretation. The text should be produced, or rather continue to be elaborated, always in a process of expansion, as it originated in dialogue. For Kristeva, verbal intertextuality does not consist only of a dialogue of permanent meanings or texts with each other. It is rather a junction of numerous speech acts and discourses (i.e. the author's, the speaker's, the receiver's, earlier writers' and speakers'), therefore meanings perpetually arise in the process of telling and valuing, where, to whom, and in connection to which other statements. In other words, each textual representation presupposes the existence and relation to preceding texts and anticipates forthcoming ones. Arthur Frank also explains that "[s]tories echo with other stories, with those echoes adding force to the present story. Stories are also told to be echoed in future stories" (2010: 37).

However, in the contemporary works, intertextuality should be understood far beyond the meaning of a specific junction of earlier writings. Connor specifies that in the postmodern literary texts intertextual referencing assumes a different facet, as these texts tend to conscientiously focus on "a single textual precedent", whereas intertextuality "can take different forms and have different effects" (1997: 167), which can be labelled as "reduplication" or "rewriting". Brian McHale advances the idea that intertextuality is a strategy of polyphony that aims to interrupt the monologic narrativity: "the strategy of 'injecting' a specialized register of language into a homogenous discourse-world, as a means of inducing polyphony, is typical of postmodern fiction" (1987: 167-68).

The interest in various uses of intertextuality in the postmodern texts arises from the debate around power and resistance, which in the case of postmodern use of fairy tale might be significant. For the majority of scholars, the capacity of

postmodern literature to parody or rewrite its intertextual implications represents a political act which aims at challenging the claim that contemporary fiction, signalling emptiness and exhaustion, is merely pastiche, or reduplication of the past texts. Moreover, the fact that postmodern intertextuality could be viewed as radical and political is supported by traditionally marginalised discursive voices, especially the feminist discourse.

Particularly, the choice of fairy tale as an intertext in the feminist discourse is not so much concerned with the lack of originality or the exhaustion of postmodern artistic potential as with the questioning of the canon construction of fairy tale. The traditionally marginalised female voices in the process of retelling or rewriting, parody or reduplication of the past texts focus on the ideological implications regarding the power of writing fairy tale or resistance of the oral voices to silencing. Another concern of feminist discourse with political connotation centres on the question of which fairy tales are told or retold, a question that aims at contesting the traditional phallogentrism. The feminist critics emphasise the patriarchal inscriptions on the mostly wide-spread fairy tales as *Cinderella* or *Sleeping Beauty*, stories which encourage the feminine passivity and view any feminine activity or initiative as wicked or monstrous.

The postmodern retellings use fairy tale as intertext in order to argue for female's active roles as tellers of tales. At the same time, fairy tale is used as intertext to celebrate the rejection of any form of submission of the female protagonists, to encourage the activity and wisdom of female characters, and also to emphasise that the women's active roles have been mostly suppressed by the patriarchal ideology.

Beside the celebration of the active female protagonists and the subversion of the predominant ideology, the fairy tale becomes a valuable intertext which offers the possibility to explore femininity. The postmodern writers adopt woman-centred fairy tales, with their characteristic feudal focus on marriage and family relationships, and attempt to revise the negative or failed aspects of feminine nature. In these retellings, the female protagonists frequently acknowledge the neglected or

relegated aspects of femininity and, following the confrontation with the magic or marvellous, try to re-evaluate themselves by abandoning the former insecurities that have tormented them and bringing to life the undervalued feminine aspects of themselves. The neglected aspects of womanliness, such as body, emotions, spirit and creative wisdom, are revised, explored, and told anew.

However, the attempt to retell fairy tales should not be understood as an exaltation of the femininity. The postmodern fiction of women-centred subject-matter enables a self-conscious rewriting of specific situations which function as playful text that simultaneously depicts and critiques through its critical and parodic detachment from the pre-text. In fact, this situation could be considered a metafictional practice which alludes to Linda Hutcheon's politicized postmodernism:

Intertextual parody of canonical American and European classics is one mode of appropriating and re-formulating – with significant change – the dominant white, male, middle-class, heterosexual, Eurocentric culture. It does not reject it, for it cannot. Postmodernism signals its *use* of the canon, but reveals its rebellion through its ironic *abuse* of it. (1988: 130)

Indeed, metafictional intertextuality arises when fairy tale is analysed, or when fairy tale is examined in a critical manner. The implied criticism in the text is considered by Genette as “metatextual”, a kind of intertextuality which usually occurs between commentary or critique and the text it comments upon. This kind of intertextuality, as Genette claims, “unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes even without naming it” (1997: 4).

This metafictional intertextuality becomes the mostly preferred technique of postmodern writers. Moreover, fairy tale, due to its basic structure and conventions and its problematic relationship with reality, accommodates itself successfully to metafiction.

## 1.5 Fairy Tale in Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She*

### *Devil*

Like other writers of the end of the twentieth century, Fay Weldon embraces fairy tale's elements of magic or enchantment, its structure and its metafictional nature. Weldon also attempts to re-tell fairy tale, adjusting it for the contemporary reader,

recovering for fiction a disruptive, irreverent character that recalls the instability and endless revision of the oral tradition. She is a teller of tales whose "truth" lies not in a faithful representation of some objective reality, but rather in the familiar rhythms and tropes of a mythic heritage that wears decidedly twentieth-century dress. (Walker, 1994:9)

In her novels, Fay Weldon revises primarily fairy tales collected by Brothers Grimm or Charles Perrault, stories which have recorded and spread the ideology of the nineteenth century. Therefore, these stories reveal the dominant patriarchal view on femininity as passive, submissive, sleeping or waiting. Among these should be mentioned such paradigmatic fates as the one of *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Little Mermaid*, *Cinderella*, *Rapunzel* or *Belle*.

However, Weldon does not limitate her fairy tale horizon only to the above mentioned models. In her quest for rewriting she focuses on some ancient texts, like Apuleius' *The Golden Ass or Metamorphoses*, Chaucer's 'Patient Griselda' or Shelley's *Frankenstein*, or even Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margareta* among others. Along with these literary sources, Weldon makes use of mythical heritage, adding in her novel some motifs which belong to the myth of Eros and Psyche, the myth of Pygmalion and Faustian pact with the devil, which has resonance even in the title of the novel.

The mostly grotesque and witty plot of Weldon's novel *The Life and Loves of a She Devil* is based on the most widespread fairy tale paradigm, that of a woman's dream to be loved, desired and chosen by a man. In Weldon's novel, the characters revise or become ensnared by the fairy tale script when she portrays the main protagonist's strife to become as alluring to her husband as his mistress.

The heroine of Weldon's novel, Ruth - a significantly ironic name - is a clumsy and oversized woman, a socially awkward housewife whose husband Bobbo, a handsome young man, is forced into marriage by his mother after Bobbo left Ruth pregnant. Ruth compensates for her ugliness with the extreme care she exhibits, as a loving wife, mother and daughter. Secretly, Ruth perpetually hopes that her husband, the accountant, will one day reciprocate her dedication and passion. Bobbo constantly has various extramarital affairs, but he falls deeply in love with the romance novelist, Mary Fisher, who responds to his passionate love.

As a result of an argument, Bobbo abandons Ruth and the children, leaving the house for Mary, and calling his wife a She-Devil. The moment of naming Ruth a She-Devil functions as a magic spell that releases the transformative powers, and she truly accepts this condition of devil, which she enjoys much more than her prior pathetic and submissive state. Ruth makes a devilish plan to ruin both Bobbo and Mary and for that purpose she burns the house, ditches the children upon the bewildered father and step-mother, and disappears. She abandons completely her former identity, and assumes a series of false ones, determined to take her revenge upon the lovebirds Bobbo and Mary.

Ruth manages to arrange the return of Mary's elderly mother from the nursing home to her daughter's house, arranges to have Bobbo charged with embezzlement, influences the judge to give Bobbo a long sentence and prepares her final moment of revenge - her physical transformation into Mary Fisher. Mary, turned into a housewife who has in her care an old mother, two adolescent children and an arrested husband, loses her initial appeal and glamour and, eventually, dies of cancer. Ruth, after a succession of false identities as Vesta Rose, Polly Patch, Molly Wishant, and Marlene Hunter, becomes physically identical to Mary Fisher and assumes Mary's place in her exotic High Tower. Additionally, Bobbo, brought back from prison, is constantly exposed to suffering as he watches his wife enjoying the company of her lovers in front of him. His supreme suffering consists of experiencing a continuous confusion, since he is unable to understand clearly whether the woman standing in front of him is Ruth or Mary.

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, as Weldon's protagonists' moral ground is constantly fluctuating.

At times the readers of Weldon's novel become aware that the novelist invokes some obvious fairy tale situations. *The Little Mermaid* and *Rapunzel* motifs become superimposed as Mary Fisher sits like a princess in a high tower waiting for her prince charming, being both a fictional creation and a creator of fictions. The romances she writes correspond to fairy tales, therefore perpetuating the image of a pretty princess that will live happily ever after with her prince. Mary's dissemination of this image in her romances becomes instrumental in Ruth's decision to take the revenge, since she cannot accept being excluded from it. As Ruth says about Mary, "she writes a great deal about the nature of love. (...) She tells lies to herself, and to the world" (Weldon, 1983: 1).

Another patently placed fairy tale image is created as some motifs as Cinderella's jealous stepsisters, Maleficent uninvited to the party, or frustrated Zefir who, tormented by her unused powers considers the possibility of turning into a witch, become overlaid when Ruth decides to bring Mary Fisher down from her exotic tower. Many motifs are made transparent from some literary texts, such as Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses* having transformation at their core, or else when Bulgakov's Margarita is transformed into a witch and is determined to make justice, or the change in the state from Patient Griselda to a wicked witch, all of them being initially stimulated by fairy tale motifs. This witch-like atmosphere is clearly created by Weldon's protagonist Ruth using almost a ritualized speech of spells after she is determined to hate instead of grieving: "I sing in praise of hate, and all its attendant energy. I sing a hymn to the death of love" (Weldon, 1983: 3). It might also create an intertextual reference to Faustus' pact with the devil, when Ruth exclaims: "I want revenge. I want power. I want money. I want to be loved and not love in return" (ibid.: 43).

Weldon often builds some scenes based on magical reversal of fortunes, as present in *Cinderella*, *The Prince and the Frog*, among others, where the main protagonists undergo the process of transformation from invisible to visible status. These fairy tales revolve mostly around the moment of central character's improvement, especially when the daily clothes are cast aside and, finally, the princess is revealed. Fay Weldon, however, displaces the fairy tale plot line in order to create a marginalized subtext. In her novel, the wicked witch becomes central, the initially presented princess dies and the vindictive and unattractive Ruth is transformed into a delicate and lovely Mary Fisher, who eventually regains her husband.

At times the novelist frequently reverses the gender of fairy tale characters or subverts the expected outcomes of fairy tales, as it is the case of *Beauty and Beast*, where the handsome Bobbo bears some similarities with Belle, whereas Ruth's ugliness alludes to the Beast. Weldon deflates completely the predictable scenario of the two lovers' love conquering all the obstacles, since Bobbo, though handsome, remains mostly a frog than a prince, living reduced to a pathetic status of a pet, next to a woman whose identity he is never sure about. To the same reversal of gender may be related the story of Pygmalion, where the male artist is the agent of woman's change, whereas in Weldon's novel the woman herself decides to transform.

At other times, however, Fay Weldon approaches fairy tale motifs with more care, in a subtle manner, evoking them through the use of some symbols or images, as mirror image for example, deepening the meaning of the ordinary. The contemporary magic of the plastic surgery is used as a trope or symbol of dismemberment, which most of the characters experience in the society based upon the culture of appearance, where the external appearance functions as a social mask of personhood that thwart the accomplishment of an authentic self.

Definitely many contemporary female novelists felt attracted by the possibility of retelling fairy tale paradigms, structures, motifs or plots. What separates Fay Weldon from her contemporaries is especially her display of wit and humour, which she employs in her disobedient revision of fairy tales. Her outrageous



humour, her extravagance in developing the plot, and her use of irony and grotesque are consciously chosen in order to depict the grim and gritty problems of the contemporary world.

*Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Little Mermaid, Cinderella* or *Rapunzel*'s intertextual resolutions, such as expected marriage or living happily ever after, are humorously introduced and subverted, leading to various interpretations. The female desirability that gains women power is parodied in Ruth's wild self-tailoring act, since it reveals "the mechanism that turn women into monsters rather than as a call to follow suit" (Sellers, 2001: 40).

Fay Weldon, like other postmodern novelists employs irony as a subversive discourse. Retaining the fairy tale staple element of the protagonist's beauty, the novelist explodes the dominant ideology that venerates certain type of female beauty. Ruth's decision to recreate herself mocks the view of woman as a sex object or a delicious artefact of explicit pornography, intended to give pleasure to men and to stimulate sexual ardour in women. Ironically, Ruth determined to re-make her womanhood, turns herself into an object of desire.

In this respect, we may remember Bakhtin's concept of carnival and its double function, as it simultaneously celebrates and ridicules, crowns and dethrones. This notion gains a particular inference in Weldon's novel, as carnival includes the grotesque comedy of the body, and, through the employment of fairy tale motifs, implying that its inflated status stands for the body of the people rather than representing an individual *per se*. Therefore, Ruth's exaggerated makeover can be viewed as a parable of female body within the frame of romance fiction. Ruth's inscription of her body into the prescribed frame of a myth might function as a

cathartic release for those energies which the prevailing order cannot contain, an untimely conservative mechanism that is arguably challenged in *The Life and Loves of a She Devil* through its unsatisfactory climax: not only Mary is dead and Bobbo reduced to the position of confused servant, but Ruth's triumph has a distinctly hollow ring. (Sellers, 2001: 43-44)

Weldon makes fairy tale atmosphere visible also through the narrator's voice and the sequence of the recognizable events of the story. However, the recognizable intertextual scenes become parodied and mocked through the shifts of various points of view and symbols, transforming the predictable situations or character typology in order to shape an ironic postmodern text that undermines the essentialist and sexist assumptions.

## 2. Beauty as Fairy Tale

### 2.1 The Concept of Beauty in the Culture of Appearances

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.

German philosopher Schopenhauer, for instance, in his book *Metaphysics of Love*, evaluated beauty from an evolutionary perspective. For him, the perception of beauty is associated with the purpose of having a generation that has a definite nature. Another approach to beauty, among many others, is related to Golden Ratio, a concept which can be defined as the formula of beauty, attractiveness and beauty of a person that depends on specific ratio and proportions.

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.

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: 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, 1991:12)

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 become entrapped 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 as a result felt from the pressure of the oppressive beauty standards and the need of social approval.

Women who succeed to get outside their domestic realm, i.e. children - husband triangular, 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: 166)

While women 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: 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: 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. (1990:29)

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, and will always fear to become unacceptable or invisible in case they fail to correspond to the model.

## **2.2 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 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: 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: 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: 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, got exhausted 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: 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: 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.

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: 135).

In parallel to the portrayal of virtuous submissive and passive heroines, one of the most significant characteristics that 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 contribute to the promotion of the patriarchal culture and ideology by depicting female characters that 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 impose only 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 term, for any woman who wants to cross a threshold. Only the possession of physical beauty most frequently suffices for a young heroine in order 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 evaluate 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. (1972:384)

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.

### **2.3 Beauty revised in *The Life and Loves of a She Devil***

As a productive writer who adapts and subverts fairy tale motifs successfully, Fay Weldon introduces wittily 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, Ruth Patchett, 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: 6-7).

Though Ruth knows that her charming and womanizer husband Bobbo cheats 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 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, 1983:5)

At the beginning of the novel, Ruth fulfils her social roles as a submissive wife and a devoted mother, and repeats to herself the litany of a good wife, so that she will feel, at least in some respects, corresponding to a 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 completely a 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: 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: 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 sympathy for 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 with the others 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: 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: 225). She isn't stuck in her domestic paradise anymore, but she is entrapped in the tyranny of beauty. The novelist mocks with the complete lack of insight of her protagonist, as she replaces one form of imprisonment with another one. While she tries to transform 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 McKinstry remarks, “Ruth literally reduces herself into another woman in order to regain her place as the wife” (1994: 112).

As Vesta Rose, she helps women “who had good skills but lacked worldly confidence after years of domesticity” (Weldon, 1983: 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: 120). By supporting them both financially and emotionally she tries to destroy the system that enslaves women.

Here the reader feels mostly 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: 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: 241).

Is it the reward promised by the possession of beauty in the culture of appearance? 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.

### 3. Metamorphoses

#### 3.1 Transformations from and into

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 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 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. 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.

### **3.2 The Postmodern Transformation of Fairy Tale in *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil***

#### **3.2.1 The Transmutation into a She-Devil**

Fay Weldon's novel 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, that 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 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.

### 3.2.2 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 metafictionally, 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 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 the responsibilities of 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 glamorous 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 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 metafictionally 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 she took 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 McKinstry 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.

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.

### 3.2.3 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, 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 atrivial copy, akitsch.

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.

## 4. Marvellous Mothers and Daughters

### 4.1 Mothers, Daughters, and Rivals in Fairy Tales

In her prominent work, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich draws attention of the society to one of the most central and primary relationships a woman can experience: the relationship between mother and daughter. Rich states:

The cathexis between mother and daughter -essential, distorted, misused- is the great unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has laboured to give birth to the other. (1995: 225)

Although the relationship between mother and son is mostly stressed and considered to be “eternal” and “determinative”, mother establishes a more complex and distinctive bond with the female infant. Hirsch, who tries to investigate the mother – daughter relationship, considers that “...mothers identify more strongly with female infants, seeing them more as extensions of themselves, whereas they encourage boys to become separate and autonomous. Ego boundaries between mothers and daughters are more fluid, more undefined” (1981: 206).

Since motherhood is compelled to be a patriarchal institution which is defined, shaped and controlled according to the expectations of patriarchal societal organization, the most “formative” relationship in the life of every woman has been “minimized”, “trivialized” and silenced for eras. Daughters, as their mothers, were seen primarily as caregivers; therefore, it was considered that their roles, in the community as well as in their families, were already determined and unquestioned. Though at times problematic, the relationship between mother and daughter received scarce attention, since their position in the society was definitely not a pivotal one.

It is an undeniable fact that in fairy tales the relationship between mother figure and child – generally daughter – is mostly problematical. Snow White has to escape from her murderous and jealous stepmother who wants to kill her because of her beauty and youth. Cinderella is forced to be a slave and a servant in her own house and Hansel and Gretel are abandoned into a forest by the decision of their step-

mother. In this respect, Tatar states: “Stepmothers stand as an abiding source of evil in countless fairy tales, and it is no accident that they rank among the most memorable villains in those tales” (2003: 141).

The absence of a natal mother is a motif that can be encountered frequently in fairy tales. Generally, she dies before the story begins and in some of the tales she is not even mentioned. In her book *The Hard Facts of Grimm's Tale*, Tatar mentions that in the early versions of some tales the evil mother is the heroine's birth mother, but in order to preserve the good image of mother figure and to avoid the desecration of maternity, evil stepmothers replace the biological mothers. As Tatar claims, “In the first edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales*, Snow White's mother never dies; her vanity and pride turn her into an ogre who orders her daughter murdered” (2003: 141).

The phenomenon of mistreatment of female infants becomes so enrooted and widespread in the social organization that it started to be seen as a threat to the social institution of maternity. The cruelty of the mother, which represented the opposite of the venerated maternal image, had to take a change. As Tatar mentions, “What easier way is there to depict maternal abuse of children and at the same time preserve the sanctity of mothers than by turning the evil mother into an alien interloper whose goal is to disturb the harmony of family life?” (2003: 143) In the earliest forms of *Snow White* tale, the jealous stepmother who orders the death of her daughter is originally her natural mother; nevertheless, the Grimms altered this version, substituting a biological mother with the figure of a stepmother in order to soften the situation of maternal abuse (Frankel, 2010: 133).

In most of the fairy tales mother figures are portrayed especially in the role of stepmothers, and therefore as cruel, wicked, hostile and evil females, “representing the annihilating side of the maternal principle” (Birkhauser, 1988: 26), whereas fatherly figures are depicted as being under the influence of these dark women, who have always destructive effects on others. An example of “bad mother” can also be seen in Hansel and Gretel story, and in the early versions of this tale it was the children's biological mother who forced and convinced the father about

deserting them into the forest. However, in the fourth edition, it can be seen that the maternal figure is replaced by the evil stepmother.

It becomes obvious that Grimm brothers make changes in their records of the fairy tales in order to comply with the social values and principles, which try to preserve and strengthen the sacredness of family and social order of the period. According to Warner, “[m]others had to disappear in order for the ideal to survive and allow Mother to flourish as symbol of the eternal feminine, the motherland, and the family itself as the highest social desideratum” (1991: 30). Fairy tale helped to spread this image, which was considered so sacred be societal norms.

Bettelheim, who has investigated the hypostasis of maternity in society, speaks of the phenomenon of splitting the mother image into two different facets, the benign and the malign. The creation of a stepmother fantasy contributes to the preservation of the image of the good mother and, consequently, prevents the creation of the negative feelings of the child towards the Mother image. Bettelheim clarifies that

[t]he typical fairy-tale splitting of the mother into a good (usually dead) mother and an evil stepmother serves the child well. It is not only a means of preserving an internal all-good mother when the real mother is not all-good, but it also permits anger at this bad “stepmother” without endangering the goodwill of the true mother, who is viewed as a different person. Thus, the fairy tale suggests how the child may manage the contradictory feelings which would otherwise overwhelm him at this stage of his barely beginning ability to integrate contradictory emotions. The fantasy of the wicked stepmother not only preserves the good mother intact, it also prevents having to feel guilty about one’s angry thoughts and wishes about her—a guilt which would seriously interfere with the good relation to Mother. (2010: 67)

In fairy tales, stepmothers are archetypal images, who can be considered as the reflections of the “bad mother”. These negative female figures are destructive and dark sides of the mother, described by the Jung as “anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate” (1990: 158). Therefore, in order to avoid the dark and the dangerous, the fairy tale heroines adopt sleep as a kind of protection, creating a cocoonlike state, necessary for the frightened heroine before she crosses the next threshold of adulthood. In this respect, Joan Gould explains that “sleep is the

refuge in which an adolescent girl can absorb the new sense of herself that she gains from the prick of the spindle, and changes from the girl to woman” (2005: 108).

This period of sleep, fright and passivity is explored mostly by the vicious stepmothers in fairy tales. The heroine walled up in a tower or locked in a crystal coffin gives an opportunity of relief to the wicked mother, who enjoys her last time as a queen, which would later become the old crone, immediately as the awakening of the young princess takes place. Hence, the stepmother-witch clings fiercely to her last position of power, unwilling to yield in front of a younger and more beautiful stepdaughter that has her whole life ahead, waiting for a myriad of choices and suitors. In fairy tale, the heroine awakens, after a long period of sleep, now transformed and ready for the confrontation with her antagonist.

#### **4.2 Formidable Mothers and Daughters in *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil***

As a popular feminist novelist who portrays the realities of being a woman and the significance of female identity, Fay Weldon in her novel, *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, focuses on the theme of motherhood. Contrary to the maternal images depicted so far, Weldon shows unpleasant truths about motherhood. Though all characters have biological mothers and they are raised by them, the lack of maternal love shapes their relationships with others and influences their sense of motherhood. The characters in the novel fail to establish a healthy bond with their mothers and their children.

From the beginning of the novel, it is obvious that the monstrous appearance of Ruth prevents her mother to love her. As Ruth states, “My mother is pretty enough and ashamed of me I could see it in her eyes” (Weldon, 1983: 7). When she moves to Australia, she takes half-sisters of Ruth, Miranda and Jocelyn, who are delicate and pretty and writes to Ruth for the last time because her new husband asks her to put her past behind her. The disturbed relationship in this family is also clear when Ruth is forced to abandon her home because of the lack of the room. Shocking is the acknowledgement that Ruth’s father’s train set is more important than herself.

Though she couldn't experience an intimate relationship with her mother and suffers from maternal deprivation, at the beginning of the novel Ruth appears as a stereotypical mother who repudiates her own self and her femininity and identifies herself only with a mother and a wife. Besides being trapped in her gigantic body, she gets entrapped in motherhood too. Only after her transformation into a She-Devil, Ruth gives away her children to her husband Bobbo and his mistress and abandons her role of a devoted and self-sacrificing mother in order to gain her freedom. Even though Ruth's decision is a difficult one, since she still loves her children very much, she is aware that this love is not mutual, primarily due to her bodily deficiency. As she says, "I'm sure I miss them more than they miss me. They have been the meaning of my life: I have merely served their growing purposes, as old Mrs. Fisher once served her daughter Mary" (Weldon, 1983: 77).

Ruth gradually turns from a devoted and self-sacrificial mother into a ruthless and merciless woman. She experiences the perturbed feeling of estrangement on the day when she sees her grown-up son, and declares "I knew he was my son, but I felt nothing. He is nothing to do with me (...). My children have been sucked back into the sea of ordinary humanity, swirled down and under, and are back where they belong (...)" (Weldon, 1983: 229). Ruth's indifference toward her own children reminds us of fairy tale wicked mother, who, though not malicious toward her children, is unfeeling and often cruel, since she does not guide them through their adolescence to adulthood. Ruth's callousness toward her children can be also associated with the fairy tale wicked mothers who feel jealousy and envy of their children's talents and potential freedom that they could not enjoy during their age.

Ruth also resembles a fairy tale witch that devours anything she can not control when she ruthlessly offers Vickie to sell her own children in order to provide them a better life. The parody of the maternal instinct is attained in Vickie's troubled statement, "But they'd miss me. They'd suffer. What about 'the bond'?" (Weldon, 1983: 180). However, the other deficient parental relations revealed in the novel are far away from the ideal, as no one misses anyone. Weldon trivializes the mother-daughter relationship, presenting it as a merely bureaucratic procedure rather than a heartily bond. As it is told in the novel, "There was much talk of 'the bond' down at

the clinic and a good deal done to foster it. It was less taxing on welfare funds it have mothers looking after their own progeny than leaving the state to do it”(Weldon, 1983: 180).

The traditional fairy tales have replaced the cruel mother image by that of a stepmother, so that maternity would be preserved in the realm of benevolent and benign. The wicked stepmother is a more bearable burden that community has to endure. Nevertheless, in her novel, Weldon creates maternal images that constantly challenge traditional mothers. The lack of maternal altruism, sacrifice or mother love is devastating, and the multitude of examples presented in the novel does not make this situation a fantasy, but a reality.

For instance, Bobbo’s mother, Brenda, is another mother figure that can be encountered in the novel, who rejects her maternal identity and the role given to her by social conventions. She is depicted as an unmaternal character, who lacks maternal altruism and avoids the responsibilities of motherhood. When her son, Bobbo, gets hepatitis, Brenda says: “They’ll have to get married. I’m far too old to be nursing an invalid” (Weldon, 1983: 29). Undoubtedly, the marriage implies a loss for the parents, as their children are usually seen as an extension of their own selves. The dismemberment does not cause any pain to Brenda. On the contrary, she feels relieved, avoiding the responsibilities simplified by maternal role. In fact, like a wicked witch of fairy tale, she imprisons the children Bobbo and Ruth in the tower of marriage, letting them indifferently to devour each other. Brenda’s callousness is obvious when she insists on Bobbo’s marriage to Ruth, since in this manner she will transfer the pain and sacrifice implied by this position of caregiver. The narrator of Weldon’s novel tells the reader that “Bobbo’s mother Brenda, did not envy Ruth’s being married to Bobbo. Brenda did not love Bobo and never had. She quite liked Bobbo, and quite liked her husband; but even there feelings were elusive” (Weldon, 1983: 16).

Brenda’s incapacity to love and the constant lack of affection in the family background lead to later Bobbo’s failure to experience true love. The deprivation of maternal love leads Bobbo to infidelity in his relationships with his wife and his



mistress. In this respect, Birkhauser mentions: “In a man with negative feelings toward his personal mother the maternal anima often produces cold, destructive thoughts and feelings about himself, his work or his best friends, so that he metaphorically freezes to death” (1988: 95).

As quoted in Luce Irigaray’s *Thinking the Difference For a Peaceful Revolution*, Freud claims that the mother-son relationship represents the perfect model of desire and love between a man and a woman. The ideal relationship between man and woman is possible only if a woman can transfer to her husband what she feels for her son. (1994: 9) Due to lack of emotional and physical needs a mother can provide, Bobbo fails to establish healthy bonds with the women around him and is also affected in his relationship with his own children. The ambivalent emotions are revealed in his relationship to Andy and Nicola. It is seen that “Bobbo blamed Ruth for having got the children wrong. He felt their mother had done it on purpose. His heart bled for them. Children open up exquisite nerves and twang them daily, painfully. He wished they had never been born, even while he loved them.” (Weldon, 1983: 22)

As an extension of their own parents, children always reflect the image of them, revealing to the world the beautiful and the ugly side of the parents. In their children’s insufficiency, the parents see their own lacking, but it becomes always easier to blame the other than accept their own deficiency. The parental rejection of the child and the suppression of feelings toward the child equal to the fairy tale motif of walling the child up in a tower, hiding him/her from the world, thus hiding their own incompleteness from the community. Fay Weldon attracts the attention of her reader to the fact that such situations do not happen only in the fantastic realm of fairy tale, but are a constant part of the real world with its child-parent relationship.

The connection between the pretty and sexy novelist Mary Fisher and her mother is another example of the problematical mother - daughter bond. When Mrs. Fisher is back home from nursing house, in an unhealthy physical and mental state, the doctor advises Mary to love and take care of her. Mary replies, “It is hard to love a mother who has never loved you”(Weldon, 1983: 106). Mary’s mother holds her

daughter in contempt, calling her “a bitch who stole her man” (ibid.: 88). The rivalry between the mother and her daughter is again obvious in Weldon’s novel, the competitive spirit subverting completely any emotional bond and preventing the daughters from feeling complete in their later maternal relations.

In fairy tales, sleep represents the place of safety for the protagonist who hides from the anger or jealousy of the damaging mother. But this period of sleep is not simply a period of passivity. It may equal to a period of gestation in which the child transforms into an adult. Weldon’s daughters also metaphorically awaken after a long sleep, in order to give birth to their own selves, to escape from their mother’s tower and from their mother’s control and, thus, to attain an individual sense of self. In Weldon’s novel, daughters awaken, but their awakening subverts completely their own completion. Deprived of the affectional maternal guiding, these daughters fail to choose the right opportunities that will lead them to their personal freedom. Instead, they imprison themselves in some constructed concepts that completely thwart their individual awakening.

By portraying indifferent and selfish examples of mother images, Weldon subverts the belief of the sacredness of motherhood. Instead of creating a stepmother fantasy or placing a substitute figure, she depicts negative natural mothers, thus challenging the mothering roles which are constructed by society. While reversing stereotypical mother images, Weldon also deconstructs the ideal and societal expectations about unconditional and absolute love a mother should feel towards her children. Weldon’s female characters, who lack maternal altruism and reject their gender roles, debunk the cultural and social expectations and socially constructed mother images. Weldon caricatures the Freudian constructions of motherhood and rejects the patriarchal marginalization of women, questioning once again women's roles as mothers.

## 5. Happily Ever After?

### 5.1. Fairy Tales and Marriage

It is a known fact that most of the fairy tales conclude with the same sentence: “and they lived happily ever after”. As an impressive and powerful cultural expression, fairy tale has been used to shape the expectations, perceptions and understanding of society about social values and patterns. In fairy tales, marriage, which is regarded as a sign of social success and achievement, is presented as the main goal of a woman. Lieberman remarks that “[m]illions of women must surely have formed their psycho-sexual self- concepts, and their ideas of what they could or could not accomplish, what sort of behaviour would be rewarded, and of the nature of reward itself, in part from their favourite fairy tales” (1972: 385).

Lieberman also insists that “[m]arriage is the fulcrum and major event of nearly every fairy tale; it is the reward for girls, or sometimes their punishment” (1972: 385). Many of the tale princesses must abandon their identities in order to marry and accept the one of her husband. Medea leaves behind her father’s land and her legacy to follow Jason; Queen Esther of the Bible departs from her Jewish heritage when she marries the king; Snow White, who is a heir to her father’s kingdom, sets off on the horse with her prince. Lieberman mentions that in traditional fairy tales marriage is portrayed as a prize for the innocent and pretty heroine who has suffered for a long time. However, without the right man who would offer the heroine what she is missing, the heavenly marriage with a “happily ever after” is doomed to failure.

But the goal of every fairy tale heroine is to live happily in a successful marriage. Therefore, every princess figure tries to transform herself into an ultimate anima for the men around her, by adapting herself to prince’s wishes, making herself attractive, allures him, but also pleases him. In her search for felicity, her self-awareness is completely reduced, the princess concentrating mostly on how to best accomplish his wishes. In order to be rewarded by marriage, the beautiful heroine must wait patiently, passively and virtuously, until the prince charming comes and rescues her from her troubled situation. Without any volition and identity, the

heroine surrenders to the prince's decision when she is chosen, a fact which again emphasizes the passivity of female character. Marriage is presented as a necessity to be accepted and approved in society and it also enables women to define themselves.

In fairy tales, marriage is also presented as the only salvation for the submissive and hopeless heroines. Zipes claims that:

If the mother, queen, or fairy godmother appears in a more active role than the male, she still acts in favour of a patriarchal society. Whether she be good or evil, her actions lead a young woman to seek salvation in marriage with a prince ("Cinderella," "The Goose Maid," and "Snow White"). To prove her worth, the young girl must display through her actions such qualities as modesty, industriousness, humility, honesty, diligence, and virginity. Moreover, she must be self-effacing and self-denying. (2012:150)

Though the details about marital life are scarce, marriage is presented as the source of happiness. Neikirk claims that "[i]n several instances, the prince and the heroine have never spoken but the female beauty is enough to ensure that their marriage will be happily ever after. The message this send to girls is that the cultural expectations that they settle down and marry is of utmost importance."(Neikirk, 2009:39) There is no surprise than to see that the lady of the tale creates some chimerical illusions about the perfect man and when she meets a brave one she falls instantly in love.

After marriage, which is generally based on the male supremacy, heroine loses her individual identity when she is devoted to keeping matrimony alive. Even though many obstacles emerge and destroy the heavenly alliance, the princess exhibits her devotion, and as Lieberman states, "she derives her status from her husband and her personal identity is thus snuffed out" (2012: 200). In *The Wild Swans*, the prince considers Eliza guilty of witchcraft and sets to burn her up, but Eliza earnestly and lovingly forgives him. Only then their happy ending is resumed. Psyche and Persephone, though abducted, are able to feel love and accept marriage. Whenever a king exiles a queen, the quest of the loyal wife constantly ends up with her return and rehabilitation.

Traditional fairy tales also reinforce the repressive circumstances of patriarchal society by displaying marriage as a final that should be desired earnestly.

The only female characters of tales, who do not need a man, in order to feel complete, are witches and fairies. Due to power they display and the lack of woman attributions as submission, obedience and meekness, they came to be seen as threatening the feminine ideal. Rettl states that “[i]n the Grimms’ time many women were still rumoured to be witches, usually old maids and spinsters who embodied both the idea of true virginity and at the same time rejected patriarchal expectations for women” (2001: 190).

In order to avoid the stigmata of a witch, like Medea, the princesses of fairy tales often become victims, and thus these passive and loving heroines are easily blamed for everything that befalls them. Even though they pass through many ordeals, the heroines must always prove wifely devotion. Lieberman claims in this respect that

[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. (1972:384)

Fairy tales support the belief that for women social advancement can be possible only by marriage. Heroines gain wealth, social status and a privileged life through their marriages.

Marriage is presented as a path to happiness; therefore, many of the fairy tales conclude with matrimony. However, by defining matrimony as a criterion for female fulfilment and depicting female characters as dependent and submissive, who require the existence of a male in their life, it clearly encourages gender hierarchy. As Rettl claims, “Accepting the traditional happy ending as defining criterion of the genre also means accepting and acknowledging patriarchal values as universally true” (2001: 185). Nevertheless, the prince continues to elevate the princess to the position of the queen, and if the married couple is presented after the wedding, inevitably, they will experience some unexpected and disturbing twists.

## 5.2 Marriage with a She-Devil

In *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, Fay Weldon focuses on the domestic landscape, capturing especially the episode after the marriage, thus questioning radically the “happily ever after” formula. Even in fairy tales the marriages that continue before the story’s end have some problematic and unpredictable turnings. Persephone’s husband is gloomy and sullen, committing some indiscretions. Bluebeard’s wife discovers that her charming and wealthy husband plans to slay her. Moreover, in Grimms’ *Sleeping Beauty*, the heroine’s ogre-mother-in-law devours Beauty’s children and accuses her for the crime. However, the great majority of stories suggest the happy ending and make everyone ignore the gruesome examples which reveal the matrimonial experience.

This might be one of the reasons that made Fay Weldon concentrate on the domestic front and reveal the image of “happily ever after” without any marvellous adding. The novelist subverts the fairy tale scenario from the very beginning, presenting the marriage of Ruth and Bobbo as a compulsory act, rather than the result of some romantic aspirations. The two of them are obliged to marry due to Ruth’s accidental pregnancy, the depressive and hopeless mood of Bobbo, caused by hepatitis and the pressure of Bobbo’s family. Unlike the fairy tale antagonistic in-laws, Bobbo’s parents want to help Ruth marry their son. For this reason they place the desperate young girl in Bobbo’s room and even in his bed while Bobbo studies at the university. When he returns home, he finds his room and bed invaded and he takes literally his parents message. However, none of these acts could be considered altruistic. Bobbo’s mother, Brenda, a freak of motherhood, wants to place him into the hands of another woman, so that she will get rid of the responsibilities implied by maternity, like being a caregiver for him.

Bobbo, on the other hand, uses Ruth’s presence in his bed in order to prove his parents and himself that he is an adult now and to find relief from suffering of an unrequited love for Audrey Singer. Any romantic expectation is completely subverted, as Bobbo makes clear from the very beginning that he doesn’t love Ruth and he accepts her there only for sex. The novelist stripes off any sentimental

anticipation, as she tells the reader that “[t]he great advantage of Ruth was that she was there” (Weldon, 1983: 31.) Ruth’s representation as a commodity is shocking, her only value being her youth and virginity. Any traces of Ruth’s self-worth are obliterated when she tries to do her best to please Bobbo. As the reader is told in the novel, “[h]e loved to sleep with her because she was warm, dark eternal sanctuary and if the light was on he could always shut his eyes” (Weldon, 1983: 29).

The fairy tale frame is subverted again as Ruth, the heroine, does not reveal her love for Bobbo. What attracts her in this relationship is the fact that she could finally find a man, willing to make love with her and that there is someone to nestle up to. Weldon’s narrator says that “Ruth was happy enough with the arrangement. She hugged the knowledge of her secret love to her heart, and felt healed, and a great deal more like everyone else, just taller which wasn’t noticeable when she was lying down” (Weldon, 1983: 28).

Neither Bobbo nor Ruth take their affair very seriously. Ruth is delighted for having found a man to accept her with her awkward body. She feels even gratitude to Bobbo and in a very submissive manner Ruth accepts Bobbo’s arrangement of an open marriage. He says that “[m]arriage must surround our lives, not circumvent them. We must see it as a starting point, not a finishing life” (Weldon, 1983: 31). Since Bobbo lacked maternal affection throughout his childhood, he fails to experience trust or love for his new family. The fact that he was forced by his parents, Brenda and Angus, to get married, aggravated Bobbo’s distrust in any family bonds.

Ruth, who gives birth to Andy and Nicola, tries to carry off both her maternal and wifely roles properly. She also is aware that she has no choice, since as Dubino states, “The marriage plot was a narrative many women had to enter in order to have a place in society at all” (1993: 104). Therefore, for Ruth with her formidable looks, marriage with the handsome and successful Bobbo seems to be a chance to get accepted and gain a place in society. She imagines that to love and admire Bobbo is her duty. When she tries to question her real love for Bobbo, she says “I assume I

love Bobbo because I am married to him. Good women love their husbands” (Weldon, 1983: 14).

Throughout her married life, Ruth follows the “Litany of Good Wife” in order to correspond to an ideal:

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 build up my husband's sexual confidence, I must not express any sexual interest in other men, in private or in public; I must ignore his way of diminishing me, by publicly praising women younger, prettier and more successful than me, and sleeping with them in private, if he can ; for everyone's sake.  
 I must render him moral support in all his undertakings, however immoral they maybe, for the marriage's sake. I must pretend in all matters to be less than him. 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)

This “Litany of Good Wife” displays women’s roles in marriage, gender hierarchy and the double standard applied in matrimony. For Ruth, marriage is an institution in which she has to sacrifice her own emotions and passions and in which she has to privilege the desires of her husband who doesn’t even believe in monogamy. In tales, marriage is presented as a way to reach perpetual happiness. In real life, however, no matter how much Ruth strives and plays the role of devoted wife, she fails to achieve it. She is aware of the unhappiness and misery marriage brings to other women in Eden Grove. After years of marriage, she is inquisitive about the heavenly life they live in:

What I think is that the other women up and down Eden Grove are better than I am at telling themselves lies. Their own husbands are away often enough. How otherwise but by lies do they live, do they keep their self-esteem? Sometimes, of course, not even lies can protect them. They are found hanging in the garage, or cold and overdosed in marital bed. Love has killed them, murderous in its own death throes, flailing and biting and poisonous. (Weldon, 1983: 6)



In this respect, Reisman states that “[t]he mantra repeated by good wives (women like Ruth at the start of the novel) ultimately does not protect them against their discontent” (2011: 651).

Like the angry Hera, Ruth is spiteful and vengeance-driven, tormenting her Zeus/Bobbo on every occasion. In mythology, Hera is often depicted as Zeus’ diminished wife, who ranges with jealousy and is extremely nagging. However, not many remember that originally Hera was a primal ruling goddess, queen of the earth and also the guardian of female sexuality. Only after being raped by Zeus, Hera marries him in order to re-establish her dignity. It is no wonder that as a goddess of marriage she does not tolerate her husband’s affairs, which seem appropriate for a god, but not a wedded goddess. Humiliated frequently by her husband, Hera turns hostile.

Ruth initially struggles to embrace motherhood, domesticity and marriage in her hopeless existence. When she realizes that she is nothing but a “She-Devil” for Bobbo, she makes a revenge plan that destroys all traditional values she has been imposed upon so far. The new Hera/Ruth persecutes Mary Fisher on every occasion and tortures Bobbo. Moreover, her anger with the patriarchal order goes so far that she indulges even in some lesbian relations. Weldon subverts the perception of heterosexual order, which is one of the basic concepts of fairy tale tradition, through the affair Ruth experiences with Nurse Hopkins, another invisible and socially unaccepted woman as Ruth. These two apparently monstrous women dispose of the limitations and restrictions applied to them in heterosexual framework by their relationship. Russell states that “Weldon repeatedly offers lesbianism as a possible ‘solution’ for her troubled heterosexual protagonists only to reject it for a reasserted heterosexuality” (2006: 172). Weldon employs lesbianism not as a radical challenge to heterosexuality but as an option for women.

In the end of the novel, Ruth has everything Mary once had: wealth, her appearance, her talent, her voice, her castle and her man, Bobbo. Though Ruth does not feel anything for Bobbo, who doesn’t have any power anymore, she resumes her marriage with Bobbo. According to Dubino, “Patriarchy demands that women find

their greatest happiness in marriage, and so Ruth ironically aspires to live the Cinderella plot that she exposes” (1993: 110). In a society, in which self-fulfilment of a woman is based on matrimony and is regarded as a sign of achievement, Ruth feels the necessity of a husband. In the end of her self-transformation journey, she becomes a powerful and self-sufficient woman but instead of leading an independent life, she decides to become an artificial copy of her arch-nemesis Mary Fisher in order to regain her husband. Dubino states that “When Ruth leaves her life as a single woman and resumes her marriage with Bobbo, readers are reminded that society is oppressive and hostile, allowing the highest fulfilment to those who conform to its norms” (1993: 110). Ruth is among those women that are convinced that eternal happiness can be obtained through marriage.

As a postmodernist writer, who plays with the expectations of her readers, Weldon succeeds to ridicule women’s obsession and dependency on men. At the same time, no matter how vicious is the circle of Ruth’s journey, Weldon presents a transformed heroine. From a young and unexperienced woman, for whom the husband displayed a godlike force and an indisputable authority, during her journey she has learned at least the lesson of power. Although she returns to her husband, dispossessed of her own identity, Ruth can see how far she has evolved. At the end of her journey she discovers that her Apollonian handsome husband is a pathetic person, her rival is an illusory shape without essence, and that the magic power is always in her hands. Ruth’s night of glamour is over, in her high tower with caviar and Champaign, with her lover and husband, with her new looks that makes her both Mary and Ruth. However, she has outgrown her husband’s power and influence to become a Great Woman herself, in case she decides on that. And this might be Ruth’s final challenge.

## CONCLUSION

Fairy tales play a crucial role in shaping and reflecting the norms, values and ideologies of a society. These eternal products have served for centuries as a vehicle of spreading the desired virtues and manners in young people and they have also reinforced the dominant patriarchal discourses by portraying appropriate role models. However, since the second half of the twentieth century, the power and fascination of fairy tales have awoken the attention of writers, especially women novelists, but they also tried to challenge and deconstruct the prescribed scenarios implied by fairy tales. Benson claims that the contemporary fiction deals with “collapsing of barriers and the dismantling of hierarchies, both aesthetic and ideological, and with the admittance of otherness, or at least the uncovering of an otherness already working within” (2008: 3). Thus, along with the influence of postmodernism, these novelists challenge the conventional fairy tale themes, characters, images, and motifs and they deconstruct the norms and standards that these tales have created so far.

Fay Weldon is not only one of the most productive writers of the postmodern period, but she has been also known as a novelist who embeds fairy tale images and motifs into her novels. In an extremely ingenuous manner, Weldon depicts some of the most recognizable fairy tale patterns and motifs, recombines them and presents completely new meanings, thus showing to her readers that these eternal patterns and motifs are based upon some constructed ideas, and, at the same time, she tries to create some new meanings which are pertinent and valid in her age.

This study focuses exactly on the ways in which Fay Weldon’s popular novel *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* subverts the fairy tale motifs. Weldon separates from her contemporaries by her successful employing of wit and humour in her extravagant plots. In the novel, Weldon does not limit herself only to tales such as *Beauty and the Beast*, *Cinderella*, *Little Mermaid*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Rapunzel*, but she also adds some motifs from the myth of *Pygmalion* and *Eros and Psyche* and even from some literary representations such as Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass* or

*Metamorphoses*, Chaucer's 'Patient Griselda', Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and even Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margareta*, among others.

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 addition to this, by moving her heroine, who is marginalized in society due to her appearance, into a pivotal status, Weldon subverts the fairy tale plot again. While demolishing conventional patterns, characters and themes of these traditional tales, Weldon also caricatures women's obsession with certain norms, as constructed by a male dominated society, by portraying a protagonist who has her legs shortened in order to become an object of desire. In her novel, Weldon touches upon some motifs of fairy tales such as beauty, mother-daughter dyad, transformation and marriage, which is presented as happy ending in classic fairy tales, and she succeeds to invert each of these patterns wittily, while adjusting them for contemporary reader.

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