

INTRODUCTION

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i. Life and Works of Fay Weldon

Fay Birkinshaw Weldon, a English novelist, feminist, short story writer, dramatist, journalist and script-writer, was born on 22 September 1931 in Alvechurch, Worcestershire, England. Her father, Frank Brinkinshaw, was a doctor and her mother, Margaret Joseph, was a writer of commercial fiction. Her maternal grandfather, Edgar Jepson, edited *Vanity Fair* and wrote popular romance adventure stories, and her brother, Selwyn, authored mystery thrillers and plays for screen, television and radio. As she was born in a literary family, her literary ability is genetic. Her parents divorced in 1937 when she was just five. Then she moved to New Zealand with her mother, sister and grandmother; she was raised in all female household. She was educated at Girl's High school, Christchurch and then attended South Hampstead High School. In 1952 she received her M.A. in Economics and Psychology from St. Andrew's University in Scotland.

Fay Weldon became unmarried mother in 1950. Then she married Ronald (Ron) Bateman, a headmaster who was 25 years older than her, but her marriage lasted only six months. To support her family, she worked as an advertising copywriter, a copywriter for the foreign office as well on the problem pages of the *Daily Mirror* and *The Daily Mail*. Then in 1962 she married Ronald Weldon, an antique dealer and a jazz musician and she had three more sons.

In 1967, she published her first novel, *The Fat Woman's Joke*. In her successful career as a writer, she has published lots of novels, collection of short stories, films for television, newspapers and magazine

articles and become a well-known face and voice on the BBC. In 1988 she received a Ph. D. in literature from the University of Bath and a subsequent doctoral degree in literature from the University of St. Andrews in 1992. Ronald left her and went with his new-age therapist who had convinced him that they were astrologically compatible. He divorced Weldon in 1994 and died in the same year by a stroke. Then she married Nick Fox, a poet, also her manager, who is fifteen years junior to her and with whom she currently lives in Dorset.

Weldon wrote about thirty three novels, seven collections of short stories, eight books on non-fiction, sixteen plays, three children's books etc. Her well known novels includes *The Fat Woman's Joke* (1967), *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1984), *The Heart of the Country* (1988), *Worst Fears* (1996), *The Bulgari Connection* (2001) etc. *Watching Me, Watching You* (1981), *Polaris and Other Stories* (1989), *Moon over Minneapolis or Why She Couldn't Stay* (1991), *Angel, All Innocence and Other Stories* (1995), *A Hard Time to be a Father* (1998), *Wicked Women* (1999), *Nothing to Wear and Nowhere to Hide* (2002) are her collections of short stories. Her best known work *The Life and Loves of She-Devils*, filmed as *She-Devil*. She published '*Auto da Fay*' an autobiography of her early years in 2002.

Weldon focuses the state of women's lives in modern culture in her novels and short stories. She portrays oppressive condition of women in social institutions. She is a feminist so her work is coloured with feminism. Her writing has provoked contradictory reactions such as praising and criticizing. She can make the most conceited proposals in a very reasonable way. It is powerful when she doesn't shrink from detailing the faults of individual women, or the way women exploit what advantages the system yields them.

Weldon was a winner of many awards, such as, SFTA (The Slovak Film and Television Academy) award for the Best Series for Episode I of *Upstairs, Downstairs* in 1971, Writers Guild Award for radio play in 1973, Giles Cooper Award for the Best Radio Play *Polaris* in 1978, *Praxis* in 1979 shortlisted for the Booker Prize; Los Angeles Times Fiction Award for *The Heart of the Country* in 1989; and Silver Pen Award for *Wicked Women*, a collection of short stories.

Weldon worked as a Chairwoman of the Booker Prize in 1983 and Sinclair Prize in 1986. She was also a member of the Royal Society of Literature, Management Committee of Society of Author, and Writers Guild of Great Britain. She was on the Video Censorship Appeals Committee, and was a member of the Arts Council Literary Panel. In 1996, she was a member of the jury at the 46th Berlin International Film Festival. She has judged literary prizes like the Whitbread Fiction Prize, the GPA Irish Prize, the Peninsula Prize, and the Mail on Sunday first-paragraph-of-a-novel award. She was appointed as a professor of creative writing at Brunel University, West London in 2006.

Fay Weldon's own experiences, such as a child of divorcee raised mother, her later struggle as a single mother, etc. are reflected in her characters. Her major subjects are marriage, infidelity, divorce, contraception, abortion, motherhood, housework, sexual initiation, thwart career etc. She provided another unique profile in 1997 on women in *Wicked Women*, a collection of short stories taking place in the 1990s. In this broad collection of stories, Weldon shows both amusement and disappointment as well as such characters who intersecting with variations on themes such as, betrayal and loss, truth and scandal, etc.

Fay Weldon who is considered one of the leading writers of fiction is still writing novels, short stories and non-fiction.

ii. Review of the Literature:

Many critics responded to Weldon's works by writing full-length articles on her work and some reviewers have also commented on her works. Her astute social observations and outrageously inventive plots have earned her both critical praise and a loyal popular readership. Lucy Boardman remarks: "Fay Weldon is one of the best British female writers of my lifetime, second only to the late Angela Carter. Her latest achievement, *Wicked Women* is a stunning collection of short stories. Weldon's writing comes from an instantly recognizable place. In this respect she makes use of stereotypes in these stories. But she develops them in such a way as to explode the sense of security into which her reader has been lulled, almost like a shock tactic except her style is more subtle than that. The joy of her writing is that it is easy to read but her art is to really make you think."

Judith Handschuh says, "*Wicked Women* features complex short stories about wicked men, women and their naughty children. Weldon gleefully explores the evil that lurks within us all through her cruel characters . . . This collection of twenty stories takes on the never-ending battle of the sexes and chronicles the many pitfalls of family life with wit and wisdom. It will leave you wondering about the stability of the nuclear family in the modern world."

Deborah Mason says, "Weldon's heroines . . . deal with cheating spouses and struggle to protect the family nest. But now they also use a bit of wickedness to contend with insecure househusbands who punish their wives for surpassing them, self-absorbed adult children who can't see beyond their own muddled lives and the culture's communal hand wringing over sexual identity."

Judy Cooke remarked that the war between the sexes is carried on apace in Weldon's rapid-fire short stories; challenges reverberate across a

no man's land of broken promises and self-deception. The material suggests a doctrine of marital original sin. To marry a man is wilful enough; to bear his children leads irrevocably to losing him, together with a hefty chunk of real estate. With marriage come affairs, with affairs divorce, with divorce the selling of houses. Like property, the institution of marriage has boomed and bust (38). According to Picks and Pans Review, "A latter-day Aesop of wronged women, Fay Weldon specializes in satiric moral tales, in which divine justice is granted to the abandoned wife or forsaken daughter. In this collection of 20 often-caustic short stories, she goes a step further: Her heroines become downright malicious while making sure their betrayers get their just deserts—and then some. . . . Weldon's wit is sharp as ever, though her theme does get a bit repetitive and her New-Age England is morally very bleak. There is little comfort to be found, even for those women who manage to get revenge and live well."

According to Atlantic Monthly Press, "With *Wicked Women*, Fay Weldon has created an incisive collection of stories, turning her sharp eye on love, men, therapy, and the myriad of self-deceptions we depend on. . . . Weldon's world is peopled with therapists who blithely destroy marriages and family ties, husbands and lovers whose greatest cruelty is their detachment, and clever women navigating the perils and pitfalls of domesticity. Her wicked humor and seasoned wisdom are as evident here as always—and tempered by great compassion for the foibles of the human heart."

Laura Hammond Hough says, "In *Wicked Women*, a 1997 New York Times Notable Book of Year and her most celebrated collection of stories ever, critically acclaimed Fay Weldon brings her bracing wit to

bear on men, love, therapy, marriage, parenting, and the myriad self-deceptions and half-truths that oil the wheels of "civilized behavior".

Editorial review of *Wicked Women* states that these 20 saucy tales have variety of human pretension and evil, and Weldon makes it entertaining. "Weldon skewers a cross section of despicable yet grimly fascinating types: the spineless husband, the talentless yet self-adoring artiste, the parasitic therapist and those who presume their sexual confusion is interesting to others. Each is held up to Weldon's strip-search scrutiny and ribald wit. The few sympathetic characters are generally women who mistakenly think they can pursue a career, raise children and have a loyal spouse. While hilarious, this story is also very poignant and, like all these juicy tales, acutely observant of the newest strategies in gender affairs."

According to *Kirkus Review*, "The antagonists who populate these 20 stories are indeed very wicked but they're not always women. Both sexes and all ages come in for some merry tweaking by this master of sexual satire--making this outing a familiar pleasure for old fans and a thoroughly satisfying introduction for newcomers. . . . Every kind of evil that lurks in the heart is gleefully explored in all its permutations here, and somehow it all ends up very cheering--wherein lies Weldon's tremendous talent. Though the stories date from as far back as 1972, and in one or two cases their age shows, there are far more hits than misses in this unsentimental education in the war between the sexes."

ARK Bok Handel reviewed that *Wicked Women* consists of brilliant stories from the hyper-real, self-deception rule world of Weldonia, where a bully can believe himself as a victim, a blackmailer sees herself as a healer, and an artist's slave be sure she is free. "Fay Weldon's fiction attracts wide press coverage, ranging from broadsheet to

tabloid to magazine. A high-profile Flamingo author, her novels always excite controversy.

According to Amazon.com Review, “Fay Weldon is a writer who understands the value of holding a grudge. In *Wicked Women*, a collection of short stories, Fay Weldon continues her one-writer crusade to ensure that bad people get exactly what's coming to them.” Her stories are dark and satirical. She has a clear-eyed view of right and wrongs not for her are the concepts of no-fault divorce or infidelity without consequence. The victims of her fiction receive fierce brand of justice.

Patrick Keilty says, “Weldon’s satire of postmodernism and fluidity of sexuality and gender may seem merely an informal aesthetic observation, one cannot assume that Weldon would take such efforts in satire merely for unintended purposes. Weldon is deliberately poking fun at postmodernism and its fluidity of sexuality and gender.”

In this way various critics have reviewed her works. Taking into account the above cited multi-dimensional critical views on Weldon’s work, it will become easy to assess this study.

iii. Aim and Objectives of the Study:

The present research work aims at making an analytical study of family relationships in *Wicked Women*.

Objectives:

- To understand the concept of the short story as a form of literature
- To understand the concept of family relationships
- To analyze family relationships reflected in Weldon’s *Wicked Women*.

iv. Hypothesis of the Study:

Wicked Women prominently explores various types of family relationships dominated by betrayal, loss, truth, scandal, and hypocrisy.

v. Scope and Limitations of the Study:

It is not possible to incorporate each and every collection of short stories of the author as it will widen the scope of the thesis so to limit the scope of the study; it aims at analyzing the respective representative work in the light of the family relationships in *Wicked Women*, a collection of short stories. Thus, the other collections from the same author are not considered for the analysis.

vi. Methodology:

For the present study, emphasis is laid on a very close reading of the collected data (primary and secondary sources). A keen analytical and interpretative method is also used for the present study. The secondary sources are made available by visiting various libraries.

The chapter scheme of the dissertation is as below—

Chapter Scheme

Introduction

- i. Life and work of Fay Weldon
- ii. Review of Literature
- iii. Aims and objectives of the study
- iv. Hypothesis of the study
- v. The scope and limitations of the study
- vi. Methodology

Chapter I Theoretical Perspective

- I. i. Generic Features of the short story
- I. ii. The concept of family relationships

Chapter II Husband-Wife Relationship

Chapter III Parent-Children Relationship

Chapter IV Other Relationships

Chapter V Conclusion

Bibliography

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