

**How to Perform a Beautiful Woman:
Female Body and Heterosexual Order in Fay Weldon's
*The Life and Loves of a She-Devil***

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Master of Arts Thesis
May 2008

Tiivistelmä

Tampereen yliopisto
Englantilainen filologia
Kieli- ja käännöstieteiden laitos

MÄKINEN, SALLA: How to Perform a Beautiful Woman: Female Body and Heterosexual Order in Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*

Pro gradu-tutkielma, 69 s. + lähdeluettelo 4 s.
Kevät 2008

Graduni aiheena on englantilaisen kirjailijan Fay Weldonin romaani *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1983). Tutkimuskysymyksinäni ovat miten naisen vartalo ja heteroseksuaalinen järjestys esitetään romaanissa sekä miten nämä tuottavat ja ylläpitävät sukupuolta. Weldon kirjoittaa usein valtasuhteista miesten ja naisten välillä, naisista jotka suorittavat kotoisia velvollisuuksiaan ja joiden aviomiehet eivät arvosta heitä eivätkä heidän panostaan. Naisten ongelmat ulkonäön suhteen on myös keskeinen teema Weldonille. Kirjassa *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* Weldon kuvaa miehensä pettämäksi joutuvaa Ruthia, joka ryhtyy äärimmäiseen koston ja muuttaa omaa ulkonäköään radikaalisti päästäkseen haluamaansa asemaan.

Tarkastelen romaania queer-teorian ja sen taustalla olevan poststruktuurismin perusajatusten avulla. Queer-teoriassa keskeistä on sukupuolen ja heteroseksuaalisuuden luonnollisuuden ja ongelmattomuuden kyseenalaistaminen. Analyysissäni lähestyn kulttuurisesti hyväksytyä kauneutta ja heteroseksuaalista järjestystä yhteiskunnallisina normeina, jotka tuottavat sukupuolta yhteiskunnallisesti tunnistettavan koodiston toiston avulla.

Tarkastelen gradussani sitä, mitä ulkonäköseikat eli toisaalta Ruthin rumuus, toisaalta Maryn kauneus merkitsevät, sekä miten Ruthin kosmeettisen kirurgian kautta saavutettu ulkonäkömuutos muuttaa hänen ja muiden hahmojen elämää. Pohdin myös miten heteroseksuaalinen järjestys ja erilaiset instituutiot kuten äitiys, koti ja avioliitto vaikuttavat kirjan hahmojen elämään ja miten Ruth kostoretkellään sekoittaa ihmisten oletuksia ja tapoja, usein vaikuttamalla heidän yksityiselämäänsä. Weldonin romaanista on selvästi luettavissa sukupuolen keinotekoisuus sekä yhteiskunnallisten konventioiden normatiivisuus suhteessa sukupuoleen.

Avainsanat: naisen ulkonäkö, heteroseksuaalinen järjestys, queer-teoria

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1. Fay Weldon and *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*

In my masters thesis I will analyse Fay Weldon's novel *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1983) from a gender perspective, focusing on how the heterosexual order and female body are presented and how they produce and sustain gender. Fay Weldon (1931-) is a British author, whom Alan Massie refers to as a writer who never doubts that “the relationship between the sexes is primarily a matter of power politics” (Massie 1991, 38). According to Eve Patten, Weldon typically describes the lives of women who are trapped within domestic duties and demands of children and who have adulterous or neglectful husbands (Patten 2003, [www-document](#)). According to Eila Rikkinen, Weldon's heroines are often women whose dreams of eternal love and domestic bliss turn out impossible (1996, 95). Though Weldon clearly has feminist sympathies, her writing also challenges and confuses the guiding principles of the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s. The characters in her novels do not, for example, often show very much solidarity towards other women but rather aim at individual survival (Patten 2003, [www-document](#)).

To summarize the plot of *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* shortly, at the beginning of the novel Ruth Patchett is a bitter, tall and large housewife living in the suburbs, and her husband Bobbo is having an affair with an attractive romance novelist Mary Fisher. During an argument with her husband Ruth has an epiphany: she sees herself no longer as

a loving, patient, mistreated wife and mother, but decides that she is in fact a she-devil. Ruth and Bobbo separate and Ruth starts to pursue her revenge and a change in her life. Through complex manipulations she sends her two children and Mary's elderly mother to live with Bobbo and Mary, and embezzles money from Bobbo's clients making it look like his deed. Bobbo then goes to prison and Ruth organizes a lengthy sentence for him. Ruth begins a dramatic physical alteration through plastic surgery to eventually look like Mary Fisher, and by the time she reaches this goal, Mary is already a tired housewife dying of cancer. At the end of the novel Ruth not only looks like the young Mary Fisher, but lives and acts like her, using her power over the men in her life, including Bobbo.

Eila Rikkinen refers to *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* as Weldon's most famous novel, which has been evaluated both as quality literature dealing with the problems of society and as calculated entertainment. In the novel there are references to the romantic novel, Gothic novel and fairy tales. Next I will elaborate shortly on these genres and their connections to the novel in order to point out what a versatile and complex novel this in fact is. Romantic novels revolve around the relationship and romantic love between two people and present a hero and a heroine. Generally romantic novels reward characters who are good and penalize those who are evil and emphasize features of 'courtly love', such as faithfulness in adversity. (Jackson 1995, passim.) These features are indeed present in Weldon's novel. One of the main themes of *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* is Ruth's love for her husband and also the illicit love affair shared by Bobbo and Mary. Bobbo and Mary are also penalized for their love affair: Mary dies of cancer and Bobbo

returns from prison a broken man. I read this as a critique towards the adultery they have committed.

In Weldon's novel Ruth considers herself to be a sort of a female Devil, who lacks all traditional female virtues like subordination and resignation to her life as it is, and this connects the novel with the Gothic genre. Gothic fiction is a genre which combines elements of romance and horror. Its prominent features include mystery, the supernatural, death, madness and secrets, and its stock characters are villains, maniacs, femmes fatales, werewolves, ghosts and the Devil himself. (Kilgour 1995, passim.)

The Life and Loves of A She-Devil presents features of the fairy tale genre as well. Fairy tales are a combination of so many genres that it is difficult to classify them simply, but they can be defined as fictional stories that feature characters such as fairies, witches and giants, and that include fantastic and magical elements like enchantments. The characters and motifs in fairy tales are simple and archetypal: there are princesses, wicked stepmothers and false heroes representing the two sides in the battle between good and evil. (Harries 2001, passim.) *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* starts with some seemingly simple characters: there is the housewife, the beautiful mistress and the husband who is torn between duty and pleasure.

Weldon, however, makes very clear that none of these characters are simply straightforward examples of different genres, but are in fact capable of changing and have

many sides to their personalities. Thus *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* can be considered a realistic novel and a part of the literary canon. The literary canon refers to a collection of books that are considered especially important for the shaping of the Western culture. Nowadays the literary canon is a concept much debated and questioned; it is debated who has the authority to decide which books are worth considering as classics. Rikkinen sees these webs of literary genres and values as crucial in interpreting Weldon's novels, because Weldon uses them to create a versatile and interesting novel that can be interpreted in multiple ways. (Rikkinen 1996, 95.)

The question whether Weldon is a “serious author” is not, however, essential in this thesis. In my opinion, Weldon's style of writing is particularly fascinating precisely because of her skilful way of combining satirical, unconventional humour and realistic notions about both men and women. The production of gender is an essential theme in *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, because it is full of subversive acts and accurate descriptions of various societal institutions. Ruth's manipulations have something in common with Weldon's way of manipulating the dominant cultural myths that produce and sustain power relations in the society (Waugh 1989, 192). The female body and the heterosexual order are central themes in most Weldon's novels, including *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*. My main interest is to find out how the female body and the heterosexual order produce gender in the novel. I find this an interesting and important research question because of the connections that the production of the female body and the heterosexual order have to power relations in society.

But how exactly do different bodies and heterosexual order relate to power? And what, in fact, does the concept of power entail and how can it be understood? Next I will elaborate on the context of my study, which lies in women's studies. I will look into gender production in connection to the themes of heterosexual order in society and recreating identity through body manipulation. I have chosen this particular aspect on the novel because the research of heterosexual order is, in my opinion, one of the most important topics in women's studies because of the major influence it has on nearly every aspect of people's lives. Living in heterosexual relationships as men and women organizes people's personal and professional lives, their finances, social lives and sexuality. Living in heterosexual relationships, such as a marriage, is considered to be a free choice and decision, but heterosexuality is strongly institutionalized. This can be seen for example through the fact that even those who have no intention to marry are assumed to do that and are often asked about plans to marry. (Okin 1991, *passim*.)

Although marriage and romantic relationships are often considered to be voluntary and contractual relationships, they are first and foremost social institutions with powerful traditions. People rarely make actual contracts about how to live in a heterosexual relationship, but base their actions on assumptions about gender roles. This often means that women are assumed to be more dedicated to family life, more caring and loving and less concerned about her own personal interests. (Landes, 1998, *passim*.) The institutional nature of heterosexuality is well presented in Weldon's novel. She portrays

women who find themselves in relationships with men because of romantic emotions and who have assumptions about romantic love and how it should be, and find themselves surprised when they experience the reality of married life and face the duties they are assumed to fulfill and the roles they should play. One of the elements behind the socialization into this romantic involvement is romantic fiction, and Weldon acknowledges this and makes fun of both the writers of romantic fiction novels and the readers of them.

The other major theme in Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* that I am going to analyze is the issue of body manipulation and plastic surgery. Since the 1970s the body has begun to be understood in feminism as well as in other social sciences as cultural and political rather than just biological. This has meant recognizing that differences between men and women are not fixed in the character of the species or in biological destiny but arise from specific histories and specific division of labor and power between the sexes. In another words, there are no universal, transhistorical masculine and feminine bodies that exist outside culture. (Schiebinger 2000, 1-2.) These ideas have been developed by such thinkers as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, whose theory I will look into more closely in the theory section of this thesis. Understanding the human body as a cultural and political surface has also meant that changing one's body is quite normal and even expected of people to some extent.

Body manipulation has to do with pursuing a outward appearance that is considered to fill

the criteria of a beautiful or worthy body. The criteria for beauty is a question of power and control: especially women have historically been seen as objects of beauty and symbols of what constitutes beauty. The criteria of a beautiful body has varied a great deal, but according to the feminist philosopher Susan Bordo, for example, the pressure for women to become thinner and thinner has been the prevailing tendency ever since the 1960s. Bordo reads considerable social significance into the fact that a smaller body size is proposed to women at a time women have achieved remarkable changes in their social roles. (Bordo 1995, 74-5.) The increasing amount of plastic surgery done to women in the Western world in the last decades reveals the growing need of women to pursue a socially accepted body in order to be “appropriate” as women. In *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* Ruth goes through massive plastic surgery in order to attract men, especially her own former husband, and to achieve a place in the social order she has never had. Thus body manipulation in this novel seems to serve the heterosexual order – though Ruth also criticizes this order, she desperately wants to improve her own place within it.

Fay Weldon's novels have been analyzed previously in a couple of masters theses in Finland, mostly from a gender perspective. Marja Tulokas has looked into the female characters in Weldon's novels *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* and *Down among the Women* in her second subject thesis in 1993. Marina Berts has written a thesis called *Supernatural in Fay Weldon's Novels and Short Stories* in 1991. Although these studies analyze Weldon from a gender perspective, their aspects are quite different from mine, because I will analyze the novel through questioning heterosexual order, and I also intend

to look into the problematics of cosmetic surgery more deeply. Eila Rikkinen has written about Weldon in the midst of different literary styles. Theorists such as Kathy Davis and Naomi Wolf refer to *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* in their books on plastic surgery, but neither of them analyzes the novel further. They consider the novel an extreme example of the influence of plastic surgery, and I think that Ruth's transformation into a woman who is socially defined as attractive is worth a deeper analysis and it will offer important insights into the dilemmas of cosmetic surgery and into the logic of heterosexualized order in the society.

2. Theory: performing gender/sex

In this section I will elaborate on the theoretical frame which I will be using in my analysis. The theoretical field of this study is gender studies and more specifically queer studies. My purpose is to use Judith Butler's thinking as a theoretical tool in analyzing this novel and its numerous meanings given to gender. Firstly, I will use Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) because in it she outlines her basic theoretical ideas and introduces her most influential thoughts. I will also use *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993) because in that book Butler specifies her ideas on the body, based on the criticism she received on *Gender Trouble*.

Judith Butler's theoretical position is located within poststructuralist feminism. According to Chris Weedon, the central idea of poststructuralism is that people do not just describe the world through language but also create and define it; in another words, everything is culturally defined by language instead of existing objectively (Weedon 1987). Judith Butler uses the term "heterosexual matrix" to denote a binary heterosexist framework which entails two genders, masculine and feminine. The heterosexual matrix assumes that the two sexes are opposite to each other, they complement each other and can only feel sexual desire towards each other. Reason, mind and the ability to control have traditionally been associated with masculinity, body, nature and controllability with mute femininity. (Butler 1999, 48.) This means for example that issues considered masculine have been labelled as important and neutral, whereas issues seen as feminine are labelled

petty and specific instead of generally meaningful. According to Jill Matthews, the ideology that perceives women as weaker than men was strengthened especially by discourses of the psychological medicine of the 1970s and onwards. These discourses presented attitudes that considered normal women as distinctly inferior to and less capable than normal men. This suggested that for a woman to be a woman and not labelled as unfeminine, she needed to be inferior to men by definition. (Matthews 1984, 114-115.)

In the following sections I will first discuss Butler's views of the material body as a culturally produced entity as well as the critique she has received for ignoring the materiality of bodies. Secondly, I will contextualize Butler's thinking by elaborating on queer theory and compulsory heterosexuality. I will explain what queer theory stands for and what its relationship to feminism is, and how queer theory and the questioning of the heterosexual order has influenced the basic assumptions of feminism.

These themes are relevant to my study, because I am interested in finding out what it is that Ruths' metamorphosis and her life style before and after her change reveal about the heterosexual order and the production of "the right kind of body".

2.1. Body politics

Two of the most central terms in Judith Butler's thinking related to the materiality of

bodies are genealogy and performativity. Genealogy means that Butler refuses to see sex or gender as something "natural" or "original", but instead assumes it has evolved during time and is the result of the use of power. (Butler 1990.) The concept of genealogy comes from Michel Foucault who applied it to sexuality and looked into the ways sexuality has been constructed, denying it as a simple force of nature. Butler was the first to look at sex and gender from a genealogical point of view and ask how gender has come to be what it is now. (Pulkkinen 2000, 43-48.)

The idea of genealogy is not far away from traditional feminist thinking which assumes that people are raised into being either feminine or masculine, and this process involves power. This way of thinking was expressed by the word *gender* in the English speaking feminist theory from the 1960s onwards, emphasising that people are not designated to a certain identity simply because of their anatomy. The term *gender* began however to be used more and more together with the term *sex*, and this division suggested that in addition to the socially constructed gender people also have a biological, natural, anatomical sex. (Butler 1990, 1-7.) Sex was seen as a biological, unchangeable and unquestionable certainty and gender as a changeable, social role in which one must act appropriately according to societal norms – in another words, gender follows from sex. In Butler's view the distinction between gender and sex is pointless, because sex was already gender to begin with: there is no precultural, prediscursive, politically neutral concept of a biological body. It is impossible to separate the cultural from the biological. In Butler's view, sex and gender do not exist purely but are both performed constantly

through everyday routines. (Butler 1990, 1-7.) This brings us to the second important concept in Butler's thinking, performativity.

Seeing gender and sex as a performance relates to genealogy: since gender and sex have no origin and they do not just simply exist as such, they must be produced somehow. According to Butler, gender and sex are performed by repeating culturally familiar gestures over and over again. Thus gender exists not because of anatomies of bodies but because repeatable gestures, places, roles as well as language exist. (Butler 1990, 1-7.)

Thus Butler sees that gender is produced by repeating gestures, roles and words that represent that particular gender, and not by an automatic connection between certain physical features, behaviour and feelings. Butler avoids presenting and renewing the division between materiality and spirit in her thinking and instead uses expressions which reflect the ways all being is connected to language. Because she likes to speak about the way gender differences are produced and constructed through language, she is often criticized for losing the body altogether. (Butler 1993, *passim*.) As Susan Bordo points out, "when bodies are made into mere products of social discourse, they remain bodies in name only" (Bordo 1995, 35). Butler's approach is rooted in her philosophical background, which suggests that we can never truly gain access to reality as such, but only through our concepts and language. She has been criticized for being too theoretical and writing in a confusing manner mostly by those feminists who emphasize practice, the body and female experience. (Butler 1993, *passim*.)

The production of gender relates to the question of subjectivity: how subjects are produced and which of them are meaningful according to heterosexual norms. The question of the subject is important in Butler's thinking in two ways. She is interested both in how individual subjects come to be and also how the category of "women", the subject of feminism, is produced through various political structures. I will discuss Butler's thoughts on women as the assumed subject of feminism briefly here, because subjectivity is an important topic in the novel as well: Ruth is on one hand a subject in her life, on the other, she is an object of major societal pressure to become the right kind of woman who is acknowledged. At the beginning of *Gender Trouble* Butler points out that the subject of feminism, "women", is too generalizing and does not take notice of the important differences between women, such as class, ethnicity and sexual orientation. This has meant that feminist politics has too often represented only white, middle -class, heterosexual women and their values. Although Butler criticizes feminism for its one-sidedness, she however does not declare herself as an anti- or postfeminist, but sees feminism as a political field of debate. (Butler 1990, passim.)

The postmodern approach to beauty deals with it in terms of cultural discourses. In this framework beauty practices belong to the disciplinary and normalizing regime of body improvement (Cranny-Francis et al 2003, passim). The body is seen as a text upon which culture writes its meanings, and even though the theoretical perspectives of understanding women's beauty practices vary in their emphasis on beauty as oppression or as cultural

discourse, they all focus on how these practices control or discipline women. Nowadays men are also inflicted by norms concerning one's outward appearance, but not to the same extent as women are (Davis 1995, 50.)

In my analysis of the novel I will combine Butler's thinking with various theorists' ideas about the female body in the pursuit of understanding those multiple ways through which sex/gender is produced in *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*.

2.2. Queer theory and compulsory heterosexuality

Queer theory is not easily defined, as indeterminacy and defying rigid definitions are said to be its charms. Queer originates in lesbian and gay studies, which are relatively recent orientations in the history of scientific disciplines. Much of contemporary lesbian and gay research has turned into queer theory, as solid and essential lesbian and gay identities have been questioned. (Jagose 1996, 2-3.) Queer theory differs from lesbian feminism in its rejection of lesbian separatism and woman centredness (Barry 1995/2002, 143). The issues queer theory is interested in are, for example, lesbian and gay subjects, cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery. The 'queering' of lesbian and gay studies has evoked much debate. For some queer radically omits traces of an oppressive gender coherence, but others criticize it for being unfeminist. Broadly speaking, queer questions the incoherences in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire. Queer looks into these terms which stabilise heterosexuality and denies all 'natural' sexuality. (Jagose 1996, 2-3.)

Queer theory has drawn particularly from the poststructuralist work of the 1980s, which set out to deconstruct binary oppositions and aimed at showing that each opposite can only be understood and defined in terms of the other and that it is possible to reverse the hierarchy in such pairs (Barry 1995/2002, 143). This means questioning hierarchies and oppositions previously considered natural and self-evident. As a queer theorist Butler is particularly interested in how language helps to construct the fictive categories of sex (male and female) which organize society's heterosexual order and are linked to power or the lack of it. Ever since a person is born (or even before that) they are labelled as female or male, and this label defines them not only biologically and anatomically, but also socially and institutionally. Female and male are categories seen to complement each other, because each has its specific, "natural" features. This assumption produces also the idea of the naturally existing heterosexuality. One of the central issues queer theory is interested in is questioning normative and culturally central heterosexuality, also referred to as "compulsory heterosexuality" (Vänskä 2006b, 33). Compulsory heterosexuality refers to the ideology according to which men desire women and vice versa, thus producing homosexuality as abnormal.

According to a dictionary the term heterosexuality refers to the normal relations between the sexes, although there is no definition of 'normal' offered. The term heterosexuality is, however, quite new. It was first used in a medical text in 1869 as opposed to homosexuality. Homosexuality is, in fact, eleven years older as a concept. In the early

20th century sexuality became a way of classifying human beings as normal or abnormal, as members of the society or outsiders. Since then sexuality has been placed in a critical point of contact between the genders and it is used to regulate them (Cranny-Francis et al 2003, 17-18). The heterosexual order is constructed through the use of power by closing out homosexuality as a viable option (Barry 1995/2002, 144). This power has traditionally been used by institutions such as medicine and churches and homosexuality has been labelled as sin and illness by, for example, medical, legal and religious discourses. Since heterosexuality does not exist independently but needs such a "negative" term as homosexuality as its opposite, it is not simply an unproblematic term. (Butler 1990, *passim*.) As Cranny-Francis et al point out, "heterosexuality is not a biological state or orientation, but socially and historically constructed category which positions some people as good and others as bad" (Cranny-Francis et al 2003, 19). The glorification or enhancement of compulsory heterosexuality is called heterosexism.

Heterosexism refers to the set of values and structures which assume heterosexuality to be the only natural form of sexual and emotional expression (Zimmerman 1991, 118). Heterosexism dichotomizes sexuality into two opposite categories, but it is not merely about the gay/straight-division. Heterosexism is about idealized heterosexuality (content of which varies) versus everything else. (Adams 1994, 37-38.) The poet and feminist writer Adrienne Rich (1980) was one of the first radical thinkers who pointed out that heterosexuality is compulsory for all who want to participate in human society. In her view heterosexuality is a compulsory system which keeps women under the control of

men and masculine institutions and works against connections between women. Heterosexuality manages to make itself appear as "natural" and "self-evident", although it is a complex web of ideologies and practices. (Rich 1986, passim.) In *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* sexuality is an important factor and it divides people into categories. I will return to this theme in chapter 4 *Heterosexual order in the novel*.

3. The female body in the novel

In this section I will focus on the female body and its role and place within heterosexual relationships as depicted in the novel. The context for this analysis is feminist literature concerning the heterosexual order in the modern Western society, the role of institutions such as marriage, and female body in this order. According to Patricia Waugh, the body is essential to the historical positioning and defining of femininity, and this makes the female body a site of complex social meanings. Patricia Waugh agrees with Michel Foucault's ideas, stating that the body is a discursive construction produced through regulating social practices, and the meanings of the human body are connected to power relations. (Waugh 1989, 172, 174.)

Like Eila Rikkinen points out, woman's outward aspect is a major theme in *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, like in other Weldon's novels as well. Appearance brings either fortune or misfortune to women, and how they are defined and how their destinies shape up is strongly influenced by how they appear. Ugliness causes traumas that can only be fixed by changing the outside. By cosmetic changes women in Weldon's books aim at fixing inner damages as well. (Rikkinen 1996, 96.)

I am basing my discussion in this chapter mainly on the ideas of Naomi Wolf and Susan Bordo, who have studied the female body and the Western culture. Wolf focuses on what she calls 'a beauty myth', a political constrain for the modern Western woman. Wolf states that despite women's liberation and the major legal and reproductive rights women

have gained since the 1970s, women do not feel free; in fact, they probably feel worse about their bodies than their unliberated grandmothers. The pursuit for beauty, youth and slimness has become a compulsory and time consuming part of women's lives. By giving women unrealistic aims in regard of their looks, images of female beauty are used as a political weapon against women's advancement, and the results can be seen in various areas of life, such as work, culture, nourishment and (hetero)sexual relationships. Women can be, for example, discriminated against at the workplace if they fail to meet certain norms concerning their looks; this has happened to, for example, air hostesses and sales people. Cultural images controlled by market forces pressure women to buy cosmetics and to always stride towards perfection. Thus women may deny themselves proper nourishment and suffer from feelings of inadequacy in their intimate relationships. (Wolf 1990, passim.)

Because beauty and meanings given to it relate to power in society that women do not have too much of, the content of “beauty” is not defined by women themselves and thus it manipulates women. (Wolf 1990, 1-4, 229.) Wolf says:

“The Beauty Myth tells a story; the quality called 'beauty' objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. ... The Beauty Myth is not about women at all. It is about men and power. ... A cultural fixation on female thinness is not an obsession with female beauty but an obsession with female obedience.” (Wolf 1990, 2, 4, 153.)

Susan Bordo points out that what she calls “tyranny of slenderness” has rarely been seen by feminists only as a matter of arbitrary media images, but rather as a complex issue

requiring cultural and historical analysis and interpretation. Bordo criticizes the way popular culture conveys a discourse which is changing women's conception of their body, making them perceive it as a place of infinite improvements and possibilities and close their eyes of limits and consequences. The size and shape of the body are increasingly seen as symbols for the emotional, moral or spiritual state of the individual, slenderness representing detachment, self-containment, self-mastery and control in women. Bordo reads slenderness (the management of hunger) as a metaphor for the management of sexual desire, which has historically been an important object of control (Bordo 1995, 33, 39, 193, 209, 206).

Susie Orbach states that women have often used their bodies as an avenue of self-expression when their spirits have been threatened, and because a woman's body is the site of her protest, then the body is also the ground on which the attempt for control is fought. In Western history women's bodies have been seen both as beautiful objects and symbols of what constitutes beauty. (Orbach 1986, 19, 70.) Bordo suggests that the massive amount of emerging eating disorders among women in the late 20th century correlates culturally to the epidemic of hysteria in the Victorian era. Bordo argues that the symptoms of female hysteria reflected the ideal femininity of the Victorian era: sexual passivity, dreaminess, and delicate emotionality of a lady were all seen as hysteria when taken to the extreme. Similarly, nowadays it is considered normal that all women worry over their weight and pursue a slim figure, but extreme states such as anorexia are considered a problem. (Bordo 1995, 169.)

In the 1960s, when the current ideal of a slim look for women started to emerge strongly, thinness represented freedom that could be taken up by people coming from various class backgrounds. As feminism gained foothold and families started to become smaller, fashion and beauty industries increased their volume. It is hardly a coincidence that a smaller body size is demanded of women at the same time women have achieved considerable changes in their social roles. (Orbach 1986, 70-75.) The beauty myth functions as a way of controlling women, when many other ways of control have disappeared.

Theoretically, although she sees “beauty” as a cultural construction, Wolf tends to see the sexes as essential and the problems she discusses as somewhat universal. I, however, try to interpret her ideas from a poststructuralist perspective, and I understand the beauty myth as one of those social and political structures which construct and reproduce gender. Bordo sees, for example, eating disorders as culturally produced, but she also criticizes the concept of social construction as the ultimate explanation. The ambivalence between essentialism and constructed gender puzzles Bordo and she ends up defining the female body as both construction and material resource, which in itself bears knowledge of pleasure, information and power. (Bordo 1995, 36-37.) In my opinion, which is the same as Butler's, it is impossible to separate the biological and cultural aspects of the body, because all meaning is created through language in any case. There is no “pure” female body outside political norms to look at, and it is only possible to assess the ways female

bodies are culturally produced.

3.1. *“The ugly duckling”: Ruth, the graceless housewife*

At the beginning of the novel Ruth describes herself as a prisoner of her own looks. She is a large, tall woman, and her size and appearance seem to define her life very much. The limits of Ruth's body present the limits of her world (Waugh 1989, 171). As Ruth says about herself at the beginning of the novel:

“I am six foot two inches tall, which is fine for a man but not for a woman. --- [I] have one of those jutting jaws which tall, dark women often have, and eyes sunk rather 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 nature and my looks do not agree. I was unlucky, you might think, in the great Lucky Dip that is woman's life.” (9)

“And I am fixed here and now, trapped in my body, pinned to one particular spot[.]” (7)

“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 tough and cold as a crocodile's.” (11)

According to Wolf (1990, 189, 7) the beauty myth makes fully physically functional women feel deformed and monstrous, because “a man's thigh is for walking, but a woman's is for walking and looking 'beautiful'. Beauty is replacing virtuous domesticity as a woman's primary social value. Ruth's mother was ashamed of her already in Ruth's childhood; Ruth was big and clumsy compared to her two charming younger stepsisters. Ruth's mother disliked Ruth because of her ugliness and her discordant personality and

that made Ruth's life difficult from early on. It is also possible that Ruth's personality was not particularly discordant, but she developed such a feature as a result of being labelled as clumsy and large. Similarly her sisters' personalities might have been seen sweet only in the light of their pretty appearances. This is one example of how people are labelled and characterized and how convincing people's performances of their sex and gender are. According to Patricia Waugh, Ruth's largeness is a sign of uncontrollability and neediness, being the opposite of contained and controlled femininity valued by the society (Waugh 1989, 192). Ruth realizes her place in society and heterosexual relationships all too well, but dreams of real love in a fashion Weldon pictures similar to romantic fiction:

“[M]y chair at the edge of the great ballroom where the million, million wallflowers sit, and have done since the beginning of time, watching and admiring, never joining the dance, never making claims, avoiding humiliation, but always hoping. One day, we vaguely know, a knight in shining armour will gallop by, and see through to the beauty of the soul, and gather the damsel up and set a crown on her head, and she will be queen.” (56)

Ruth and Bobbo meet each other when Ruth is staying at Bobbo's parents' house as a lodger. When Ruth becomes pregnant, Bobbo's parents pressure Bobbo into marrying her. Bobbo gives into the idea of marriage as a arrangement of reason: Ruth is pregnant and he has to do what is expected of him and take his responsibility. Ruth is in love with Bobbo, but Bobbo soon realizes he might have made a mistake thinking any woman makes a suitable wife in a marriage of reason and starts to have affairs. He thinks that as his right and shares his extramarital intimate experiences with his wife. Thus Ruth's expectations of a happy marriage based on romantic love do not become fulfilled much because of her size and lack of attractiveness (Rikkinen 1996, 96). At least this is what

Ruth is lead to believe by her husband and people who know the couple. Nobody blames Bobbo's character for the problems the couple have, least of all Ruth.

“It was obvious to both of them that it was Ruth's body which was at fault, for what she saw as difficulties and he did not. He had married it perforce and in error and would do his essential duties by it, but he would never be reconciled to its enormity, and Ruth knew it.” (32)

Bobbo is considered a good-looking, professionally successful man and he is also somewhat shorter than his wife, and Ruth and him are seen as a mismatch, and this seems to make Bobbo's infidelity understandable :

“The neighbours often remark upon it. 'You are so lucky, having someone like Bobbo.' Not surprising, their eyes go on to say, that he's away every now and then.” (10)

Ruth tries to adapt to her appearance, but she feels misplaced as a woman and throughout the novel she makes bitter remarks about the lives of beautiful women:

“In Mary Fisher's novels ... little staunch heroines raise tearful eyes to handsome men, and by giving them up, gain them. Little women can look up to men. But women of six foot two have trouble doing so.” (24)

As a housewife Ruth also benefits of her big size; she washes her own windows and cuts the grass. Cutting the grass is seen to be husbands' duty in Ruth's neighbourhood, although many men leave this to their wives. In Bobbo and Ruth's house Ruth hits her head on the ceiling because of her height, and when she runs in the house Bobbo feels like her weight makes the house tremble. Ruth's size questions her place in heterosexual relationships; she cannot look up to men admiringly, but she is capable of performing household chores which demand much strength and which are not conducted by the other, shorter and weaker housewives in their houses in the neighbourhood.

In Ruths' world, in the suburbs, men and women share homes but seem to have fairly separate lives and interests. Women are the physically weaker homemakers and men the stronger breadwinners, and each groups' physical features differ greatly from the other. Susan Bordo discusses the sharp cultural contrast between the female and male form in the 19th century, when women wore corsets and bustles to create an hourglass shaped figure. This symbolized the division in social and economic life into clearly distinct male and female spheres; the male and female body were meant for completely different purposes, and this ideology was reinforced through demands of sharply distinct appearances. (Bordo 1995, 181.) It was also important to know straight away who is a woman and who a man in order to ensure proper treatment to both sexes. Because of her big size Ruth seems to take up more space than is normally allowed for women (Orbach 1986, 14). According to Butler, the heterosexualization of desire requires the polarity of the feminine and the masculine, when these concepts refer to women and men (Butler 1990, passim). Ruth's strength is suitable to her household managing tasks, but at the same time it seems to make her an inappropriate wife with her tall and strong, somewhat masculine figure and make her and Bobbo's marriage into a mismatch.

The heterosexism rooted in our Western culture make us see things culturally in gender-polarizing ways and lead us to classify alleged physical difference. Thus men are supposed to be tall, broad-shouldered and strong, whereas women should be shorter, thinner and weaker than men. In other words, couples tend to be framed of men and women whose individual physical dimensions symbolically portray male superiority and

a corresponding female inferiority. In this setting the man is physically superior (with intellectual superiority close at hand) to the weaker and more delicate woman who looks up to him. If couples disobey these roles assigned to them it is an attack on middle-class values and rules, and a woman who is not shorter and thinner than a man is threatening, because she does not fit into the place that is preserved for her but poses a threat of claiming the masculine position. (Gieske 2000, 377-381.)

Naomi Wolf (1990,1) states that modern Western women are sometimes embarrassed by worrying over trivial things, such as how their bodies and faces look like, and they feel neurotic and alone with their concerns. Wolf is of the opinion that these issues are not in fact trivial, since women are basically deprived of choices when it comes to looks. Wolf does not judge using cosmetics, enjoying wearing attractive clothes, etc., but states that “the problem with cosmetics exists if women feel they are invisible without them”. Women feel they must hide their aging and imperfections under makeup in order to be proper women. (Wolf 1990, 229.) Ruth is labelled through her appearance and has been since her childhood. Weldon makes it clear in *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* that Ruth's appearance is by no means a trivial issue and thus makes the theme of female beauty/ugliness an important part of the book.

3.2. The charming Mary Fisher

Mary Fisher is described in the novel through Ruth's bitter notes about the woman with

whom her husband is in love, but there are many universal thoughts said about beautiful women in general as well. Ruth introduces Mary saying how Mary has always had men around her to love her and how she has grown used to being loved, supposedly as opposed to Ruth. Mary fits perfectly into the physical ideal female mold, and thus she is admired and pursued by men. Although she is single and has no children, she is recognized as a proper woman, probably because of her romantic and heterosexist writing. At the same time Ruth describes her as financially independent and having earned her own money, although originally Mary's money has come from a much older lover. Ruth presents her as a liar, too:

"Mary Fisher lives in a High Tower, on the edge of the sea: she writes a great deal about the nature of love. She tells lies. ... She is a writer of romantic fiction. She tells lies to herself, and to the world. " (5)

"Mary Fisher is small and pretty and delicately formed, prone to fainting and weeping and sleeping with men while pretending that she doesn't. " (6)

"Fastidious, impossible Mary Fisher! 'A little smoked salmon,' she'd say, 'really costs no more than a large quantity of tinned tuna. And it tastes so much nicer.'

It was half a lie and half the truth; it was like so much that Mary Fisher said, and wrote. " (19)

Mary is a writer of romantic novels, she lives at an old lighthouse by the sea with her servants and is quite wealthy. Mary is size four and she is fifteen centimetres shorter than Bobbo. Her diet consists of tiny amounts of smoked salmon and champagne. In the context of hunger and desire management refusing food signifies will and moral fortitude; women who eat only little have achieved a state beyond craving (Bordo 1995, 68, 102). Ruth implies that Mary hides her sexual encounters under the label of love, thus

hiding her carnal desires under sweet romantic emotions. Mary does not do any household work, only free writing, and her everyday life differs greatly of Ruth's homemaking duties. Mary has her first sexual encounter with Bobbo when she asks him for a lengthy ride home from a party after her own car has been towed away. Ruth, who avoids asking for favours like rides in the car from her husband, is surprised at this arrogance and the fact that it does not bother Bobbo one bit:

"How did Mary Fisher dare? And why did her presumption charm him, and not offend him? A lift to the *coast* while Ruth would walk in the rain, rather than delay Bobbo fifteen seconds." (33)

Ruth very soon realizes that the dynamics of an extramarital relationship are completely different than a marriage's. Ruth, as wives in general, is useful to Bobbo as the mother of his children and the tender of his house, but it seems she cannot be the object of Bobbo's erotic interests not only because of her looks, but because of her role as his wife, and this Ruth admits freely, although sourly:

"A man cannot be expected to be faithful to a wonderful mother and a good wife – such concepts lack the compulsion of the erotic." (9)

"I am quite sure at some time or other Bobbo would have said, in the manner of husbands, 'I love her. I love her but I'm not *in* love with her: not the way I'm in love with you. Do you understand?' And Mary Fisher would have nodded, understanding very well." (9)

Weldon presents here the issue of mothers and wives in sexual roles and how it seems difficult in Western culture to combine these aspects of life. Motherhood has historically been seen as a women's special calling which makes women important, whereas sexually active, independent women have not been seen fit to be mothers. The role as a wife, mother and a nurturer has distinguished women from being sexual objects and made it

difficult to combine sexuality and motherhood. This relates also to the institutional role of marriage: married women have long been seen as a private property of their husbands, and as mothers of their children, the heirs, it has been necessary to control wives' sexuality. (Kappeler 1996, passim.) Michel Foucault points out also that in marriages sexuality is only for reproduction and nothing else (Foucault 1979, 3).

Towards the end of the novel Mary finds herself tied into domestic duties, and her new understanding of the needs of others who depend on her combined with her sexual slavery to Bobbo prevent her from going back to her previous life style. She realizes that with a commitment to a man come many other responsibilities that complicate her life severely. She begins to lose her looks: "She is just another scurrying, ageing woman, holding on to what is left of her life. Eyes slip past her." (212) Mary must do what Ruth did before: serve both the generation older than her and the one younger than her, instead of focusing on herself like she did before her relationship with Bobbo.

"Mary Fisher must renounce love, but cannot. And since she cannot Mary Fisher must be like everyone else. She must take her destined place between the past and the future; limping between the old generation and the new: she cannot escape. She nearly did: almost, she became her own creation." (107)

Ruth, however, does not want to settle for her place as a unattractive, deserted housewife, but changes her destiny strongly, as if she wanted to do what Mary Fisher almost did – become her own creation. At the same time Ruth also ends up becoming a personification of a female ideal of the patriarchal society.

3.3. *“A comic turn, turned serious”: the transformation*

Ruth's transformation into a she-devil can be interpreted as a desire for utopian change, a move away from patriarchal society (Waugh 1989, 170). It is also notable that while Ruth lets go of many of her patriarchal values, such as loyalty to her husband and her self-sacrifice, she also aims at becoming a physically ideal woman.

At the beginning of the novel, alienation from the female body and dissatisfaction with it causes a desire for transformation that also affects Ruth's physical appearance:

“I look at my face in the bathroom mirror. I want to see something different. I take off my clothes. I stand naked. I look. I want to be changed. ... Peel away the wife, the mother, find the woman, and there the she-devil is.” (44)

When Bobbo abandons his wife to live with Mary Fisher, he refers to Ruth as a physically strong person who will be able to manage without a husband as well:

“Ruth,’ said Bobbo, ‘you have very good, very solid feet. You’ll be okay.’” (48)

“Ruth had come to the marriage with nothing. Except size, and strength, and those she still had.” (47)

It is interesting that also other characters in the book start to see Ruth's size more as a sign of her power than weakness or inferiority after her inner alteration into a she-devil. It seems her size implies force that can be defined as masculine; the threat of the use of violence lingers about her. Mary's butler Garcia is mesmerized by her appearance at the High Tower when he opens the door:

“She stood upon the steps like a figure carved in stone: a giant chess piece, a clumsy black rook come to challenge the little white ivory queen. The dogs whined and fell silent. ... He stood aside to let her pass. He was both frightened and challenged by her. “ (68)

At the Restwood old people's home the owner Mrs. Trumper is afraid of Ruth because of her size:

“She was also frightened of Ruth; Ruth was too big. She could snap Mrs. Trumper between forefinger and thumb. Her eyes glittered. “ (88)

Both of these quotes refer to Ruth's supernatural presence after her mental transformation into a she-devil. It seems that Ruth's passion to do what she desires is so strong that it colours her presence. Strong passionate characters are a common feature in the gothic genre of literature (Clery 2000, 13). I will return to this theme more closely in chapter 3.4.

When Ruth begins her physical change through plastic surgery, she gives the doctors a picture of Mary Fisher explaining she would like to look like her. The doctors consent to her wishes at first, but when she declares she wants to be as short as Mary Fisher as well, they are at first appalled and tell Ruth she is about to go too far:

“He [the doctor] tried one last gambit: 'The other thing that occurs to the cosmetic surgeon,' he said, 'is that though you can change the body you cannot change the person. And little by little – this may sound mystical, but it is our experience – the body reshapes itself to fit the personality.' ... 'I have an exceptionally adaptable personality,' Ruth observed. 'I have tried many ways of fitting myself to my original body, and the world which I was born, and have failed. I am no revolutionary. Since I cannot change them, I will change myself. I am quite sure I will settle happily enough into my new body.'” (202-203)

Before the surgeries Ruth has one final look at her body and fantasizes about her future as a beautiful woman:

“She said goodbye to her body[.] ... She looked at the body which had so little to do with her nature, and knew she'd be glad to get rid of it.” (209)

“Ruth closed her eyes for sleep with the comfortable thought that for a pretty woman the future lay in refusing men rather than submitting to them – or, indeed, hoping for their advances.” (231)

Ruth knows that after she has become a slim woman who is culturally considered attractive, she will be able to choose the men she wants to have contact with, rather than just hoping that someone will become interested in her. Waugh states that the cultural obsession in Western societies of making female bodies smaller reflects a cultural fear of a mature woman as a reminder of mortality and also of the all-powerful mother of infancy. Slimness represents women as little girls, thus fading the maternal side of women. (Waugh 1989, 176-178.) Susan Bordo (1995, 205) says that being slim and losing weight signify ultimate control over one's own desires and a capacity for self-management. Waugh agrees with Susie Orbach who says that nowadays women's bodies are seen as commodities, as parts and not wholes, and these commodities are always up for improvement. (Waugh 1989, 176-178.) Ruth's way of adapting to the heterosexual order through the use of cosmetic surgery is a highly controversial decision, albeit sort of normal: most women these days are doing things that affect their looks (for example, they try to lose weight, spend money on expensive cosmetics, take excessive exercise), or would at least like to change their appearances. Ruth's way of going about it is, however, fairly radical and extreme.

Cosmetic surgery as a method of manipulating one's looks in by no means a simple issue.

In her article “‘A Heroic Male and a Beautiful Woman.’ Teemu Mäki, Orlan and the Ambivalence of the Grotesque Body” Annamari Vänskä discusses the French artist Orlan, whose art consists of going through facial cosmetic surgery as a part of a performance conducted in an operating theatre. During the performance the artist is fully conscious and able to communicate with her audience. In her act Orlan exposes the open body instead of the result of the surgery, and according to Vänskä, Orlan wants to make visible the madness of pursuing physical perfection and stress the social constructedness of femininity. Orlan's goal is not to liberate women but to illustrate the relationship women nowadays have with their bodies and problematize commercial ideals of female beauty. (Vänskä 2006a, 75- 86.)

Orlan's art is somewhat ambiguous. On one hand, Orlan is an active agent who recreates herself, not a passive victim of the beauty industry; on the other, the grotesqueness of the surgery images make it evident that her art is far from risk free. Orlan herself has stated that she does not want to look “more beautiful” or “younger”, but to become more herself, and rather paradoxically, look more like a woman. But is Orlan independently constructing herself or just conforming to norms concerning women's looks? It is difficult to say where the line between individual desires and the concept of the ideal is. Vänskä points out that many surgeons refused to operate on Orlan, because they did not think her appearance would improve by surgery. This evokes the question of medical ethics: who decides what is improvement? For Vänskä Orlan's act's main achievement is the visualization of usually secretive cosmetic surgery and forcing people to see what

actually happens in it. (Vänskä 2006a, 86- 90.)

Orlan's art and Vänskä's discussion about it relate to the themes of *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* in many ways. Ruth takes a very active part in her own recreation as well as in her life entirely after assuming the identity of a she-devil. She is not interested in the emancipation of other women, she only wants to free herself to act selfishly and promiscuously like only attractive women seem to be allowed to act in the novel, saying she only wants to adapt to the world. Ruth says her appearance has never matched her personality very well, and thus justifies her need for change; thus her motives are similar to Orlan's need to look more like herself, more like a woman. The surgeons first refuse to shorten Ruth, and tell her she should settle for being “a statuesque beauty” (220) after her face has been made to resemble Mary's. Ruth however insists on becoming a short, ordinary woman, and wins the debate with the surgeons. Ruth goes through the surgery and heals after it at a private clinic, and when she is finished recreating her looks, she appears in front of her confused husband at Mary Fisher's funeral.

Whereas Naomi Wolf discusses cosmetic surgery in her book under the title “Violence” thus making her view of it clear, Kathy Davis presents more ambivalent ideas concerning modern women's alterations on their bodies. Wolf says that there is a clear difference between healing doctors and cosmetic surgeons: healing doctors have respect for the healthy body and they invade the diseased body only as a last resort, whereas cosmetic surgeons label healthy bodies sick so they can invade them. This makes cosmetic surgery

a form of political torture: there is no other name in Wolf's opinion for the cutting open and stitching together of able female bodies for the purpose of social acceptance. (Wolf 1990, 198, 215). Davis (1995, 1-5) argues that cosmetic surgery is not so much about the beauty system than about how women manipulate the beauty system to meet their own needs. Based on her analysis and interviews with female patients, women who go through cosmetic surgery are not necessarily victims of ideological manipulation. Davis analyzes cosmetic surgery through three themes: identity, agency and morality. The theme of identity has to do with the problem of ordinariness and how a person's subjective sense of self is negotiated. The second theme, agency, deals with cosmetic surgery as a resource for empowering individual women, and the third theme of morality has to do with the problem of suffering: to what extent cosmetic surgery can be seen as a legitimate solution for emotional pain. (Davis 1995, 11.) Davis talks about *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* as an example of what a tricky and complex issue cosmetic surgery is, and states:

Ruth is both a victim of the feminine beauty system and one of its most devastating critics. Her decision to undergo cosmetic surgery supports the status quo of feminine inferiority, while, at the same time, it shifts the power balance – temporarily, at least – in her own relationships. (Davis 1995, 65.)

Davis points out that Ruth knows the enormous price she has to pay for her recreation which takes years; cosmetic surgery is not the perfect solution, but it is the best one under the circumstances she is in, in the context of structured gender inequality. When it comes to the theme of identity, Ruth feels she is invisible without any improvements, and she sees cosmetic surgery as a way to achieve her goals. Even though Ruth can not make her choices entirely freely, she makes them at least knowledgeably and is an active agent in

her own life. (Davis 1995, 67.)

According to Davis, Weldon shows how ambivalences can be embraced rather than dismissed or avoided and goes on to say that feminist analysis of cosmetic surgery needs to begin: “We need to find ways to explore cosmetic surgery as a complex and dilemmatic situation for women: problem and solution, oppression and liberation, all in one.” (Davis 1995, 67.)

Cosmetic surgery is clearly a complex topic to which Fay Weldon offers no simple answer in her novel. The recreation of her body following the change in her very nature seems to liberate Ruth to live the kind of life she wants to live, but at the same time it keeps her in the same cultural value system she so bitterly (and amusingly) analyzes throughout the novel – only this time her place in the heterosexual order appears to be one of power, and she enjoys her life performing the part of a beautiful woman.

3.4. The monstrous body

“I do not put my trust in faith, nor my faith in God. I will be what I want, not what he ordained. I will mould a new image for myself out of the earth of my creation. I will defy my Maker, and remake myself.” (159)

Next I will consider the connections between Ruth's character and her metamorphosis and the Gothic genre. According to Patricia Waugh, *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* can be called “a feminist recapitulation of the Frankenstein story”. In Weldon's novel the

structures of Gothic fantasy displace realism as Ruth recreates herself. The elements of fantasy and Gothic have subversive potential which can question the concepts of gender and identity. (Waugh 1989, 189-190.)

E.J.Clery has written about the origins of the Gothic genre and women writers. According to her women writers in the Romantic period were expected to keep to the domestic sphere and focus on personal relations in their writing, but those female writers whose genre was Gothic, wrote about wild passions, the sublime, supernatural phenomena and the minglings of history and fantasy. This style of writing showed women writers at their most pushy and argumentative. It was not out of the ordinary for women to write about emotions in sentimental fiction, but Gothic took both its characters and readers to new extremes of feeling. This was accomplished by representing scenes and events that were well beyond the normal range of experience. (Clery 2000, 1-3, 13.)

Female Gothic texts are read as heightened representations of patriarchal society. In most Gothic novels, however, the essential passion appears only as something that threatens “the security and happiness of the conventionally passionless sentimental heroine” (Clery 2000, 14.) In another words, it is the villain of the story who is passionate, not the heroine.

Ruth is pushed into changing her basic character from nice and subordinate to evil during a disastrous dinner party when she has an argument with her husband, and he calls her a

she-devil. Ruth starts to feel powerful hatred instead of shame and guilt which have directed her behaviour in her life so far. Ruth starts to see herself as the person who has gained power over her own life:

“I want to give hate its head. I want to drive out of love, and I want to follow hate where it leads: and then, when I have done what I want with it, and not a minute before, I will master it. --- Glitter-glitter. Are those my eyes? They're so bright they light up the room.” (43-44)

“---I have no place, so I must make my own, and since I cannot change the world, I will change myself.” (56)

It is difficult to say whether Ruth is a villain or a heroine in the novel – it seems she is both. Her plotting and scheming lead to her revenge which appears justified; after all, Ruth suffers a lot because of her husband's negligence and affair with Mary Fisher. Ruth's metamorphosis into a she-devil means that she begins to act as a subject of her life and passionately aims only at her own good.

Ruth does not, however, change herself into a beautiful woman all by herself. The cosmetic surgeons who alter Ruth into a Mary Fisher-lookalike see themselves as creators as well. Dr Black's wife calls her husband Frankenstein because of the alteration work he does at his clinic. When Ruth is having one of her biggest operations, the shortening of her legs, the situation turns critical and the doctors fear for their patient's life:

“There was an earthquake, a nasty rumble, the crust of the earth yearning to split along the line of its weakness, the San Andreas fault. That was the day after the major operation to her femur was performed: life-support systems had to be switched over to the emergency generator. They thought they would lose her in the seconds it took. Ruth observed their pallor, their distraction. When she could speak she said, 'You needn't have worried. An act of God

won't kill me.' 'Why not?' asked Mr Chengis. 'I don't imagine he's on your side. ' 'He has the Devil to contend with,' said Ruth, before lapsing back into unconsciousness.” (232)

“ A violent electrical storm on the eve of the second major operation fused the power supply again. ---'God's angry,' said Mr Chengis, suddenly frightened, longing to go back into obstetrics. 'You're defying Him. I wish we could stop all this. 'Of course He's angry, ' said Ruth. 'I am remaking myself. ' 'We're remaking you,' he said sourly, 'and in one of His feeblers and more absurd images, what's more.' He had come to hate the photograph of Mary Fisher.” (233)

Even though the professionally ambitious doctors start to have second thoughts about Ruth's surgeries and see themselves less as magnificent creators than at the beginning, Ruth herself is sure she will prevail. Ruth survives the storm and her massive operation miraculously and Dr Black compares her to Frankenstein's monster, a creature that needs electricity in order to awake and get going.

The original *Frankenstein* was written by Mary Shelley, the daughter of women's rights advocate Mary Wollstonecraft, and the novel was published in 1818. The novel represents a conflict between passion and sentiment: ruling passion elevates and torments, gentle sentiment features nurturing and comforting feelings that bind individuals to others. The novel's main character is a scientist Frankenstein who discovers how to create a living, non-human being. The monster Frankenstein creates chaos by committing crimes and is abandoned by his maker and unable to receive any human sympathy. The creature is hardened with despair and the novel ends up with Frankenstein's death and the monster's disappearance towards a funeral pyre. (Clery 2000, 126-130.)

Doctors Black and Ghengis resemble Frankenstein in many ways; they are both ambitious scientists, seeking glory and new worlds and expecting gratitude and obedience from their creation (Clery 2000, 130). Especially doctor Chengis expects romantic gratitude from Ruth because of the work they have done for her, and are disappointed when Ruth wants to keep the relationship between the doctors and patient professional:

“I am her Pygmalion,' he cried. 'I made her, and she is cold, cold! Where is Aphrodite, to breathe her into life?’” (223)

“She danced with Mr Chengis in the dew of the morning, as the sun rose red and round over the escarpment, and with every step it was as if she trod on knives; but she thanked him for giving her life and told him she was going.” (238)

Pygmalion is a character in Ovid's play “Metamorphosis” . Pygmalion is a sculptor who is not interested in women, but falls in love with a female statue he is sculpting out of ivory and begs Venus (Aphrodite) to breath life into the statue. Venus takes pity on Pygmalion and brings the statue to life, and Pygmalion then marries the statue transformed into a real woman. (Gross 1992.) In *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* doctor Chengis refers to himself as Pygmalion, and is bothered by the fact that Ruth refuses to act obediently but insists on being her own creation. Like Frankenstein's monster, Ruth's skin is toughened with her negative experiences, but, unlike in the story of Frankenstein, her transformation leads her into a better life as an admirable and beautiful woman.

4. The heterosexual order in the novel

Heterosexual order refers to the male and female genders as different and completing each other. But heterosexual order as I understand it is much more than the relationships between individual men and women. It is an entire system of practices and institutions which organizes everyone's life significantly. Heterosexual relationships and the family are gendered institutions, which organize people's lives in many ways: their social lives, sexuality, work life and finances. While heterosexuality seems to offer a place for everyone as men and women, it leaves little room for other alternatives. It seems to be borderline impossible to live outside the system of heterosexuality, because often also people who are homosexual are first and foremost assumed to be straight. This is because heterosexuality has long been assumed to be the natural and unproblematic way of living, whereas homosexuality has been perceived as its opposite, as otherness. These views have been questioned through queer theory. (Butler 1993, *passim*).

In the traditional thinking there was only one legitimate expression of feminine sexuality and that was within a heterosexual, monogamous marriage. The three issues that constituted the feminine ideal were heterosexuality, legality and monogamy, and feminine sexuality was virtually synonymous with marriage. (Matthews 1984, 111-112.) Before the content of heterosexuality was questioned by lesbian and queer theory, feminist theorists became interested in the division of private and public spheres in the society and the apolitization of the domestic sphere. Heterosexuality is linked to the

domestic sphere, especially to marriage, intimate relationships and raising children. Although these phenomena are powerful social institutions and are coloured by many norms and conventions, they are still largely seen as personal and private choices. This is due to the separation of the private and the public spheres in society. The family, relationships within it and bringing up children are seen as a private issues, whereas for example work, public laws and political decisions are perceived as public ones. Feminists pointed out that issues of people's personal lives, such as relationships between men and women are not without the dynamics of power, which is traditionally seen as a central hallmark of the political. (Okin 1991). Thus the slogan of this second wave feminist thinking was “the personal is political”.

Because marriage and other issues of the domestic, apolitizised sphere have usually been seen as personal and individual choices, it has been difficult to see them as social institutions with loads of norms and regulations. It is assumed that since, for example, a marriage is an individual and free choice, also the problems that might appear in it are personal. This means, for example, that if a woman such as Ruth is unsatisfied with her married life, she can pin the blame on her or her husband's personal features, but is left feeling convinced that somewhere there are perfect marriages – with perfect participants – instead of assuming that there might be certain rules and regulations in marriages that direct them.

There are also directives that regulate other family issues besides the actual marriage.

Also the natural demands of nurturing that often take place in the family are often assumed to be women's responsibilities. Traditionally women tend to do the majority of household work and child raising. These phenomena can also be redefined as socially and politically constructed entities that reinforce the gendered division heterosexuality is based on.

In the following chapters I will look into the logic of marriage and affair as places for women to be in: what is expected of a good wife or a mistress, how these positions differ and change – and how they, none the less, operate under a similar value system. I will also analyze the way women work within the domestic sphere and outside it and how these lines of work are valued by society.

4.1. Tables turning: marriage and affair

“I cast off the chains that bound me down, of habit, custom and sexual aspiration; home, family, friends – all the objects of natural affection. Not until then could I be free, and could I begin.” (159)

When Bobbo has left his wife and moved into Mary's lighthouse, he sometimes feels guilty about the decision. Mary then emphasizes how Ruth has her children and Mary has got no-one but Bobbo. Thus she uses her position as a single, childless woman as a way to gain sympathy, although it is also an asset to her: Bobbo is clearly attracted to her lifestyle as an independent woman. When Ruth brings the children, Andy and Nicola to live with their father and Mary, Mary describes herself as not the maternal type and her

house as inappropriate for children, but at the same time dreams of an appropriate, perfect heterosexual bliss with Bobbo:

“Look at me. Do I seem the maternal type? Besides, if I ever had children they would most certainly be my own. Wouldn't they, Bobbo?’ She looked lovingly up at Bobbo and he looked lovingly down, and both envisaged their mutual children, as unlike Andy and Nicola as could possibly be.” (72)

Mary's life becomes much more complicated after the children, their pets and Mary's own mother move into the tower, as part of a plan orchestrated by Ruth. The children act out and break Mary's expensive possessions, gradually turning Mary's previously peaceful and tasteful home into a wreck. Mary is sexually under Bobbo's spell, and Bobbo both wants her to be more maternal and urges her to keep her old habits and Mary finds it difficult to fill his needs:

“--- Bobbo would not have the children confined, or restrained, or discriminated against, as he saw it. He thought they had suffered enough. ---He had become a very concerned father, now that they had no mother. 'This is their home now,' he said, 'and they must feel it. And you are their stepmother, in the eyes of God if not the law.’” (98)

“'This place is magnificent,' said Bobbo. 'It would be a shame to turn it into something ordinary. You must be careful, Mary, not to turn into a suburban housewife!’” (101)

“[S]omeone had to be practical, so it was Mary Fisher. That, she began to understand, is what love does to a woman. The material world surges in: tides of practical detail overwhelm the shifting sands of love.” (99)

After Ruth frames Bobbo for money embezzlement and he is sentenced to prison, the romantic relationship between Mary and Bobbo fades away, and it seems like it never was very strong or personal in the first place:

“Bobbo builds a new life in the prison library and suffers from --- the absence of Mary Fisher, or that part of her he remembers most clearly, the bit where the legs split off from the body. Sometimes, I imagine, he tries to think of her face. But Mary Fisher's features are so regular and so perfect they are hard to remember. She is all woman because she is no woman.” (158)

Towards the end of the story Mary is no longer the independent, extraordinary person she once saw herself and was seen by others as, but she is criticized for many faults (or at least she thinks she is), mainly because of her lack of nurturing skills as a childless woman, and she is compared to a vicious step-mother, which is a familiar character in many fairytales:

“ Down in the village, or so Mary Fisher believes, they say that the owner of the High Tower is willfully childless – that is to say selfish, that is to say hardly a woman at all. They say she is brutal to her poor mother, and keeps her locked in a room. They say she is cruel to her lover's children; a really vicious step-mother. They say she is a marriage-breaker. “ (160)

In fact this is only Mary's guilt talking, reflecting the changes in her personality: she can no longer only think of herself and ignore others. The pressure to be a proper, nurturing and caring woman has caught up with Mary and she cannot escape it. Joan, the girlfriend of Mary's butler, is pregnant and makes Mary feel like she is not a proper woman without children:

“... Joan walks insolently about the High Tower, with her belly swelling, snickering in corners with Nicola, making Mary Fisher feel inferior, hardly a woman at all, because she never had a baby, and now, she realises, never will.

Once Mary Fisher thought she was blessed in her childlessness, spared the degradation, the ordinariness, the pointlessness of motherhood: no more. She needs something, anything.” (161)

Thus Mary's role as an independent, single woman turns against her, and she seems to regret not living like a family woman. Weldon points out here the difficult decisions women have to make: on one hand, women are assumed to still be nurturers and caregivers, on the other, they are expected to adjust to the male values of financial independence and to have a successful career. Weldon presents Mary as a successful woman whose life is quite easy and pleasant until she has to assume hard nurturing responsibilities often assigned to women. Bordo points out that there is a double bind that legislates contradictory ideals and directives: women are both expected to be chief emotional and physical nurturers and to assume the hard values of the professional world. Women are torn between these demands of personal and professional lives. (Bordo 1995, 171.) Mary Fisher does not want to give up his relation to Bobbo, and so she is forced to cope with the complicated situation and all of her new duties.

4.2. Differences between women

In *Life and Loves of a She-Devil* Weldon shows vividly and humorously how different women are and how difficult it can be to feel solidarity towards other women. Women's lives are completely different depending on whether they are married, single, wealthy, poor, mothers or childless women. Weldon does not refer much to ethnic differences, but class is essential to her writing. This is an issue essential to Judith Butler, who claims that the subject of “women” is a tricky concept, because women cannot be considered as a single entity simply because of their shared anatomy – which Butler questions as well

(Butler 1990, passim). In this part of my analysis I will discuss the various class positions Weldon shows women in and the meanings given to these positions.

At the beginning of the novel Ruth is one of the housewives who live in the suburbs, in a place called Eden Grove. The name Eden refers to a biblical paradise. Women living there do not have jobs outside of the home, but they are homemakers and focus on creating their homes as safe and welcoming places for their husbands to return to. These women are friendly towards each other, but their main loyalty seems to be directed at their husbands, and not at each other. Their friendships are quite superficial and they try to close their eyes of unpleasant details:

“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 the marital bed. Love has killed them, murderous in its own death throes, flailing and biting and poisonous.” (10)

According to Jill Matthews, women who are married report about their happiness in studies, although the statistics show that married women suffer more from mental as well as emotional problems than unmarried women. She concludes that this is because women are convinced by gender ideologies that married women are happy: a truly feminine woman must be both married and happy. (Matthews 1984, 142.) While the housewives in *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* lead a sheltered life, they have to come to terms with the fact that their roles of motherhood and wife label them strongly and they must live according to the norms of their husbands and the surrounding society. They gain the

protection of their husbands as long as they act like proper women and mothers and accept their roles as “mere” homemakers and stay within the domestic sphere both concretely and mentally. Their labour is not really considered as real work, but rather as a “natural” part of being a woman (Matthews 1984, 151.)

When Ruth has had words with her husband about his indifference towards Ruth and his family and is struggling to make a normal appearance in front of her visiting in-laws, Ruth silently recites the “Litany of the Good Wife” she has learned to repeat to herself during her married years:

“ I must pretend to be happy when I am not; 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 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 undertaking, however immoral they may be, for the marriage's sake. I must pretend in all matters to be less than him.”
(24-25)

These principles have guided Ruth through her marriage to Bobbo, which has turned out to be a disappointment, because it contains no romantic, erotic love Ruth craves for. The Litany of the Good Wife reveals some of the traditional values associated with being a housewife, for example, the fact that Ruth feels obligated to be obedient and sweet towards her husband regardless of his behavior. This is largely due to her financial dependence: Ruth's work taking care of the children and the home is clearly not

perceived as a real job, but rather as serving Bobbo, who works outside the home. As a wife Ruth's place is symbolically lower than her husband's and she is responsible for making sure that Bobbo has a comfortable place to come home to, a place without problems and arguments.

The ideal woman has traditionally been a loving, sacrificing and forgiving and willing to adjust her own needs to those of the family. Making and keeping the family happy and satisfied has been seen as a natural task for women, one that women's characters are especially built for. Women are then to act according to the traditional logic of care taking and love, putting their own personal interests on hold (Elshtain 1981, *passim*). These values are clearly seen in Ruth's litany of the good wife.

Mary Fisher earns her own money in *Life and Loves of a She-Devil*. Ironically, her profession is writing romance novels which are aimed at a female audience and are read mostly by housewives. Mary's novels tell stories of romantic relationships between beautiful women and handsome men, celebrating heterosexual love, presenting predictable happy endings and maintaining romantic fantasies. Housewives read Mary's books to reassure and remind themselves of the importance of romantic love between men and women and to gain excitement into their domestically focused lives, which lack romance.

Mary's novels and her relationships to rich men have made her reasonably wealthy, and she is financially independent. Although Mary works at home, her work is “intellectual”

instead of manual labor. Mary is single at the beginning of the novel, and she enjoys affairs and flirtation with men who admire her. Though Mary's and Ruth's lives are significantly different, in a way they live under a similar value system. They both, in their own way, enhance a heterosexual, binary oppositional system in which women and men are irreversibly connected to each other, and men are considered better, stronger and smarter than women. Ruth does this by living as a dutiful wife and mother, keeping her growing resentment towards her unfaithful husband Bobbo under control and pretending to be happy in her domestic bliss. Mary enhances binary oppositions between men and women by writing her romantic stories about heterosexual love which makes everything perfect. Her stories represent strong men protecting helpless and vulnerable women.

When Ruth begins her vendetta and gets a job at the old folk's home in order to get to Mrs. Fisher, she works for Mrs. Trumper, the manager of Restwood. Mrs. Trumper works in the line of nurturing, which is a traditional area for women both in personal and professional lives. It is stated that women accessed the professional working life (for example, in Finland this happened in the 19th century) through their nurturing skills. Minna Piispa says that since women were seen to be in their natural role at home taking care of others, they could do that professionally as well, outside the home. That is why the first professional women who worked outside the home were nurses and child minders. (Piispa 2004, 54.)

Mrs. Trumper is not considered someone who performs a terribly important job; the

families of the elderly people who live at Restwood only acknowledge her when they feel that the care given by her institution has not been sufficient. At those times Mrs. Trumper feels the relatives are being unfair: they do not care enough of the elderly to take care of them themselves, but expect a nursing home to do everything at a low cost. Mrs. Trumper is not particularly interested in her nurturing role or dedicated to it, as indeed are not many others either. When Ruth applies for a job at Restwood, she is hired instantly:

“She [Mrs. Trumper] always had such vacancies. There are far more helpless old people in the world than there are young ones prepared to look after them.” (84)

Ruth also stays briefly at a separatist feminists' commune with women who call themselves the Wimmin and who accept her as part of the group with no questions asked. These women have abandoned life in the regular society and reject also their duty to take care of men: they have only daughters and refuse to breed sons. Ruth is happy to stay with them, but she is not content with their lifestyle:

“She did not want to live in their world permanently. It lacked a glitter at the edges: it was denim-coloured and serviceable: sodden by the muddy flood of purgatory wastes, not flickering and dangerous with hell-fire.” (199)

“She wished to live in the giddy mainstream of the world, not tucked away in this corner of integrity.” (200)

These lesbian women have chose to live outside compulsory heterosexuality entirely, and they have also said goodbye to certain “feminine issues” such as fashionable clothes, make-up and haircutting. In traditional heterosexist thinking, which assumed monogamous heterosexuality to be the scientific standard of normality, lesbianism was

considered a medical anomaly. Since an ideal woman was a wife and a mother, to classify oneself as a lesbian meant ultimate failing as a woman. (Matthews 1984, 113.)

To summarize this chapter, in describing the housewives of Eden Grove Weldon paints a picture of good, devoted and self-sacrificing wives who put their husbands' and children's needs before their own, but who are usually not very happy with their lives. These housewives try to perform as happy and perfect wives and mothers, and in doing so, lie about the true states of their marriages quite often. Mary Fisher, however, is single at the start of the novel, but she makes her living by writing romantic stories that make the housewives believe in heterosexual love. Mrs. Trumper is one of the professional women in the novel, and her nurturing work is not valued very highly; it is almost seen as her natural duty, like taking care of children is a duty for the homemakers. The lesbians Ruth briefly stays with live completely outside of normative heterosexuality, and they are not considered as proper women by other people.

4.3. Going places: gender and institutions

“Out there in the world, ' said Ruth, 'everything is possible and exciting. ---We can get out there to exciting world of business, of money and profit and loss [.]' ---
'I thought all that was supposed to be very boring,' said Nurse Hopkins. 'That is just a tale put about by men to keep the women out of it,' said Ruth. 'And there waiting is that other world of power - of judges and priests and doctors, the ones who tell the women what to do and how to think – that's a wonderful world as well. When ideas and power go hand in hand – I can't tell you how exciting they find it!'” (118)

In this part of my analysis I will discuss the way Weldon presents various institutions and how Ruth's character stirs their order. Weldon points out problems in various areas of the society, such as the care of the elderly, mental institutions, courts, parishes, and shows how women fit in to the working life.

Ruth first enters the paid working life when she works at Restwood taking care of the elderly. Weldon describes Restwood as a dreadful place, where the habitants lie forgotten and are being treated like parcels. Ruth befriends Mary Fisher's mother and makes her realize that the elderly have rights, too: right to have her own room, two baths in a week and so forth. This new doctrine catches on and makes the visitors of the home demanding: they start asking for improvements to their relatives' living, instead of being quiet and grateful, like before. Thus Ruth starts a kind of a revolution at the home.

When Ruth has accomplished her goal at Restwood and sent her husband's mistress' mother to live with the couple, she finds another job at a prison for the mentally ill, Lucas Hill. The residents of Lucas Hill are described as people who are pushed aside from the normal society for one reason or another – they are people without power in the society, people whose voices are not heard. Some of them are murderers or arsonists, some are sentenced to prison by mistake, but they are all similarly controlled and patronized by the staff. The staff is also described as a collection of people who are better off being invisible in the society. Nurse Hopkins, whom Ruth works and shares her room with, was

“four feet eleven inches high and weighed fifteen stone” and she “enjoyed the security and regularity of working at Lucas Hill Hospital, amongst people more peculiar than she” (111-112). As for the other staff members,

“For the most part, staff worked here whom no one else would employ. They were too fat or too thin or too stupid or too vicious or too black or too white or for one reason or another would simply never look good in any front office anywhere.” (110)

While working at the prison, Ruth starts to frame Bobbo as an embezzler by removing money from his clients' accounts to Bobbo's account. At the same time she proposes a business plan to her fellow worker, Nurse Hopkins. Nurse Hopkins is first reluctant to use her savings and her inheritance, but Ruth convinces her of the idea:

“ ---'We can become different women. We can tap our own energies and the energies of women like us – 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.” (118)

Ruth and Nurse Hopkins' office is a job centre for women who have expertise in secretarial skills, but who lack self-confidence due to the years they have spent in the home. What is remarkable about the Vesta Rose Job Centre is that it offers services to the employees to help them to combine the work outside the home and inside it:

“The agency also organised crèche facilities for the babies and young children of those on its books, and a shopping and delivery service for their convenience, so that workers did not have to shop in their lunch hours, but were able to rest, as male workers are expected to do, and even go home on the bus unencumbered by shopping bags. For these privileges they paid dearly, but were pleased to do so.” (119-120)

Although the job centre offers these services to lighten the women's double burden and the expectation to excel in both the home environment and the professional arena, it does

not question the heterosexual order further. Women are still assumed to be the primary caretakers when it comes to the home and the children; they are only given some assistance by a company that understands the demands directed at married women who have to work outside the home:

“There was no suggestion that they should claim their rights as Women with an upper case 'W', and insist that their menfolk take an equal share in child-minding and household chores – merely an understanding that this end, though laudable, was for most women too remote to be attainable, and that in the meantime practical help was essential, if the woman was to continue with her traditional role of home-maker and also earn. Their husbands would come home from work, dinner would be set before them, clean shirts laid out for them, the television set to the programme of their choice, and the flow of the household continue as it had always done. That way contentment lay, if not justice, and the turning of the man to the woman in the peace of the marital bed, and her to him, was perhaps all the compensation required for the evident injustices of married life in the modern world.” (121)

The system promoted by the Vesta Rose Job Centre assumes nothing wrong with women being responsible for the household work and accepts the ideology according which the home for men is a place of relaxation and contentment instead of conflict and duties. Women are then at ease to function in the professional world without having to give up their role as an emotionally comforting homemakers.

Although women are allowed to be, and even to some extent expected to be emotional and vulnerable as wives and mothers, their assumed emotionality can be used against them in the workplace. This comes across in the novel through an incident when Bobbo is having an affair with a typist he has hired through the Vesta Rose agency. Ruth has of course planned the affair by choosing an attractive young girl who is dissatisfied with her

marriage to work with Bobbo. Bobbo and Elsie Flower have an affair, and Elsie falls in love with him. Ruth then encourages her to tell him how she feels about him: “Tell him you love him or he may think this is the kind of thing you do all the time. He may not know it's important to you.” (124). When Elsie does reveal her true emotions to Bobbo, he instantly fires her and asks Vesta Rose for another secretary:

“The next day Bobbo himself rang through and asked for a replacement for Elsie, under the agency guarantee. 'Certainly, sir, ' said Ruth, in the voice of Vesta Rose, one of extreme gentility and rather high-pitched. 'Might I ask what the trouble is? Her speeds are excellent. She is very well recommended.' 'That is as may be,' said Bobbo, 'but she is over-emotional. And under the terms of your guarantee, may I remind you, no questions are asked but a replacement provided.’” (124-125)

This situation reveals that while Bobbo does not mind having a sexual relationship with one of his employees, he does not want to become emotionally attached to her, and is appalled when deeper feelings are brought to the table. This tells about the polarity of sex and emotions in Bobbo's thinking. Bobbo fires Elsie and demands another secretary on grounds of Elsie's inappropriate emotionality in the workplace. The affair takes place in the office, and Bobbo takes advantage of his role as the boss, but when things do not go the way he wants and that Elsie is able to shake his power position, he pins the blame on female emotionality.

In conclusion, Weldon points out many noticeable things about the institutions she writes about. She describes old folk's homes, prisons and mental hospitals as places where those without power in society are put so that the “better” members of society do not have to see them. Also the staff in these places is unwanted elsewhere. When Ruth and Nurse

Hopkins start a business of their own, they knowledgeably do not demand rights for women workers when it comes to their double work shifts at work and at home, but aim at making the lives of these women easier.

4.4. Working in the domestic sphere

On several occasions in the novel Ruth finds employment within the domestic sphere, that is, she works in other people's homes and helps with their familial duties. Ruth of course does this in order to plot against Mary Fisher and Bobbo, and she is able to pull many strings by working in people's homes. Weldon is thus showing how the personal is political: Ruth affects people and their professional decisions by using the power she has gained and achieved by entering their private lives. Weldon also makes clear that women who work in the domestic sphere are not all alike and they have different reasons for their lifestyles.

To achieve her next goal – to meddle with the trial and imprisonment of Bobbo, now arrested for financial fraud – Ruth moves on again, this time to work as a maid at judge Bissop's house. Judge Bissop is the judge who will handle Bobbo's case, and befriending with him enables Ruth to pull some strings again. Judge Bissop has a wife and two children, and his household is a clear example of the traditional heterosexual norms. The judge is very strictly the head of the family and the rest of the family have to be wary of him. This is explained to be due to his profession: he has to make important decisions on

people's lives every day, and in order to do that, he dictates what the home life is like. His wife and children are mere dependents and thus their rights are less important, which is ironic considering the judge's profession as a defendant of justice:

“The judge's family had to play their part; it was the penalty exacted by fate for their closeness to so exceptional a man. They had to be careful not to wake him in the night, not to overtire him with their demands or irritate him with chattering. They had to exist – for a man functions best if he ventures out into the world from a domestic setting in which his restless sexual and procreative energies are given liberty. But they could not be seen (or heard) to exist too much.” (136)

“Lady Bissop had been brought up to believe that a woman's function was to adjust herself to the times she lived in and the household she dwelt in, and that God worked His purposes out through the consent of the humble and the faithful, and there was to be no arguing about these things.” (144)

Ruth and judge Bissop become friends and lovers, and Ruth makes quite an impression on him. After having judge Bissop sentence Bobbo to prison for seven years, Ruth leaves again. She needs a place to stay while she begins the process of altering her looks, and she rents a room from a young single mother, Vickie. Vickie has two small children and she is pregnant with the third one, and she has always been a single mum. Vickie started to have children in order to have a meaning for her life, and the state supports her and her children, although it is hard work for Vickie to go around bureaus to ensure her bills are paid:

“Vickie wriggled and protested and insulted and derided the State, her provider, in much the same way as wives will insult and deride their husbands who provide for them, care for them, love them.” (168)

In a way Vickie lives outside of normative heterosexuality because she is an unmarried woman with children, but she does, however, dream of being a better mother and somebody's wife. The reality of being a single mum has disappointed her, and unlike the housewives of Eden Grove, she is also able to say that out loud:

“Vickie had lived in a state of discontent and general surprise that saucepans should be so thin, beds so broken, debts so worrying, and the children not just prone to sore throats and chilblains, but so obstreperous. It was not what she had meant at all. This was not motherhood, as she had dreamed of it, but she had a valiant nature and kept trying. --- [B]ut that child, the fourth, might be a genius, might be the perfect child to which Vickie might be the perfect mother!” (170)

Vickie thus lives under the norms of the heterosexual system as well: she believes in certain kind of divine motherhood as an essential content of a woman's life, and aims at being the perfect mother for the perfect child. She is also anxious to find the true love of her life, and is upset when the fathers of her children all leave her, “because you're always pregnant” (169) as Ruth points out to Vickie.

The state and its social agencies are institutions that contribute to the confinement of sexuality into marriage. This way husbands are at least assumed to take care of their wives and kids, instead of the state. This comes across in the novel when Vickie complains about her latest lover's disappearance to a Sister at a health clinic:

“Vickie,' said Sister sadly, 'either you have your children inside the system devised by society for the protection of women and children, namely marriage: or you live outside it and put up with the consequences.’” (168)

While living in Vickie's house Ruth meets father Ferguson, a Catholic priest, who encourages young women like Vickie to continue to have children. His justifications for

having children are based on religious opinions:

“Father Ferguson said that Vickie was very wise and a daughter of God, and that the clinic, who kept recommending terminations and sterilisations, was very wrong, and indeed wicked. Women's happiness and fulfillment lay in increasing the flow of souls to God.”
(170-171)

This ideology offered by Father Ferguson represents religion as another method of controlling women and their sexuality. As Jill Matthews points out, the role churches have played in establishing and praising compulsory heterosexuality has involved regulating fertility and presenting ideologies that make motherhood women's primary function (Matthews 1984, 111). Father Ferguson himself lives alone, has vowed on celibacy and lives a very scanty life. He thus represents mind and higher values in comparison to those poor, uneducated women he meets and whom he encourages to have more children. Father Ferguson needs a maid to cope with everyday necessities, and because Ruth has to lose a lot of weight in order to start her massive cosmetic surgery operations, she wants to stay at a household where life is meagre and simple.

As Ruth becomes smaller, she also convinces father Ferguson that life can be pleasant without being sinful. As father Ferguson and Ruth start having a sexual relationship he starts to doubt his principles about not allowing birth control and sexual relations outside of marriage. Ruth convinces father Ferguson to think that romantic authors diminish moral in the society, and that he should do something about it. Father Ferguson starts a public rampage against romantic novelists, Mary Fisher mainly, and leaves for Mary Fisher's place to talk to her and to change her opinions, making Mary's life even more difficult, adding to her feelings of guilt.

It is remarkable that most of the jobs Ruth takes on during her vengeance are situated in the domestic sphere. It seems quite easy for her to find employment in the area of nurturing, whether it is tending to the elderly, the mentally ill or children and households. Weldon points out ironically that there are usually vacancies for those who want to take care of other people's children or homes or have other jobs that are not usually regarded very highly. This is typically work assumed to be women's duty. As judge Bissop ponders on where Ruth has come from and why, he concludes:

“Her looks, no doubt, mitigated against her in the labour and marriage markets, which was why she was reduced to nannying. Or perhaps, as did so many women, she simply longed for a home, for sofas and beds and fires and doors locked at night against intruders, and a daily ritual of work and leisure, and the soft purr of the washing machine renewing and restoring, and since she could not achieve this for herself - for it has to be done in the lower reaches of society with a man's money and consent – did the next best thing, and entered someone else's home as servant.” (138)

Since at least the 19th century, domestic service as a paid occupation was considered appropriate for women. Even by the most traditional views concluded that working in someone else's home did not contradict to the correct pursuit of femininity, precisely because it was conducted within the domestic sphere, and it did not threat the gender division of work. (Matthews 1984, 158-159.)

Ruth mimics a devoted, feminine hired help as well as she can, and her working in the domestic sphere has some surprising consequences too. It is fascinating that many men Ruth encounters during her plotting end up falling in love with her and want to marry her,

although physically she has not changed into the beautiful woman she wants to become. Ruth is quite persistent and determined in her actions and opinions after she has transformed from an unsatisfied housewife into a driven she-devil, and this seems to attract men who are used to obedient women.

5. Conclusion

Fay Weldon's novel *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* is an intriguing and amusing book. Weldon uses satirical humour when she talks about serious issues: the feelings of a woman deserted by her husband, the woman's need for revenge, her situation as an outcast and feelings of failure. Weldon takes her readers onto a magnificent journey with a woman who has decided to shed the norms of conventional femaleness – only to become the ideal woman and to charm her treacherous husband all over again.

At the beginning of the novel Ruth knows all too well her own value as a woman: she is not considered attractive, she has not achieved much professionally and her husband does not consider her a particularly good mother or wife, either. It is not so much Ruth's unhappy marriage that has brought her down, but the fact that her husband is enjoying a passionate affair with a woman who is Ruth's opposite in every way. Ruth comes to the end of her rope and decides she will get even: she becomes a she-devil who knows what she wants and gets her way. And so Ruth begins her vendetta against those who have made her life difficult. But Ruth wants more than just revenge: she wants to feel admired by men and wants to gain control over her husband.

Ruth's way of going about her plan is quite interesting. She decides to change her entire outward appearance in order to resemble the woman her husband fell in love with. To achieve this she must go through several dangerous and medically pioneering plastic

surgeries. This does take place, and at the end of the novel Ruth looks like the young Mary Fisher and uses control over her husband and other men as well. Ruth has then become almost like the woman she despised as a betrayed and unattractive housewife.

Patricia Waugh states that Ruth remains enslaved to the myth of romantic love even after her painful recreation (1989, 191), but I disagree with her opinion. I think that Ruth's main motive for her alteration is to gain power as opposed to her previous position as a bored housewife and not to be seriously romantically involved with anyone. However, in deciding to alter her looks in order to become a beautiful woman, Ruth does obey the norms of the same society that pushed her aside in the first place.

After her mental alteration into a she-devil Ruth already gains something that helps her along in a major way: she knows what she wants and is not afraid to take it. This change in her attitude makes her desirable to men as well: several men find her attractive and wish to pursue a relationship with her, although she is not considered conventionally pretty. Ruth is not, however, content with being a woman who is appreciated by men; she wants to be desired, to be considered beautiful and to be able to turn men down if she so pleases.

Throughout the novel different characters perform gender and sex in various ways. As a housewife Ruth serves her husband and children, works around the house and walks around in her practical shoes. As a conventionally beautiful woman Ruth attends parties,

has affairs with men and has servants attending to her every whim. Thus she does not act in a similar manner as an overweighted, unattractive person and as a notable beauty, who has got a body that matters. After her surgeries Ruth begins to mimic Mary Fisher and her ways of being an attractive, desirable woman. Mary, on the other hand, takes on the role of a nurturer and stops paying attention to things once important to her, such as looks and clothes. Thus neither of these women are simply or truly what they seem to be at the start of the novel, but they both change the way they perform women.

At the same time as their performances change, their places within the heterosexual order change as well. Mary starts off as a seemingly independent woman who contributes to the heterosexual order through the romance novels she writes: housewives longing for romance and excitement read her books and receive energy to continue with their daily routines. Mary is envied by Ruth who eventually takes her place. But although Ruth manages to obtain a position of power after her alteration, she does not abandon her deceitful husband but reclaims him in order to use her new power over him.

Weldon talks about many institutions in her novel; she discusses marriage, single motherhood, lesbianism, the court system, business life, hospitals, prisons, religion, and old people's homes. There are many other orders Weldon criticizes than just the heterosexual order that can be seen when she talks about marriage and love affairs. She paints a vivid picture about how some people are shoved aside in the society because they do not fulfill certain norms of proper citizenry: this exclusion can be based on, for

example, looks, size, or the lack of wealth. Weldon describes many kind of injustice in the society and makes her main character Ruth see it as well. Although Ruth is interested in changing her own destiny only, she changes the lives of many unfortunate, outcast people as well, by making them seize more opportunities. Thus Weldon's main thought in the novel is perhaps that it is impossible to make the world a completely fair place, but individuals must do what they can in order to survive.

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