

ABORTION AND RIGHT TO CHOOSE

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Abstract

Fay Weldon deals with an important issue which is a private female experience in her novels, that is, abortion. In her novels, Weldon argues over the issue of 'right to abort'. She shows how women fall victim of their bodies and lose their identity due to unwanted childbearing and motherhood. Pregnancy and child bearing, abortion and delivery experiences of women are also discussed in Weldon's novels. Weldon advocates 'the right to choose' for women in terms of the choice of babies. According to her, women should have a right whether to keep a baby or to abort it, or to kill it if it seems abnormal as has been said in Praxis. Weldon's views about abortion become revolutionary and radical in the interest of women.

Key words: *abortion, radical feminism, revenge, motherhood, right*

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Fay Weldon deals with an important issue which is a private female experience in her novels, that is, abortion. In her novels, Weldon argues over the issue of 'right to abort'. She shows how women fall victim of their bodies and lose their identity due to unwanted childbearing and motherhood. Her women like Grace do abortions for the sake of the men they love. Grace in *Female Friends* has had cheap back-street abortions because she wants sex with men without baby. In *Remember Me*, Margot has to abort her first baby from Philip for the sake of Philip's parents. Weldon rationalises her views on abortion in *Praxis* more thoroughly. Miss Leonard gets pregnant after she makes love with three men in a night. She wants to abort her child but no doctor is ready to help her. Those were the days of War and Praxis finds it extraordinary:

It seems extraordinary to me that in a world in which men are killing each other by the million, they should strike such attitude about an unborn foetus.(76)

Here Weldon becomes satirical and compares abortion with the men killed in wars. Nobody cares for the men killed in wars but, on the other hand, women are not allowed to abort their unwanted child.

Praxis takes part in a discussion on the reforms of the abortion laws on the television. Mary who is now a doctor writes to her about her views on abortion which points out the other side of the women who abort for pleasure:

I'd do it happily for the older women, who at least knew what was going on and were as distressed as I was, but I resented having to do it for the girls who used me as a kind of last-ditch contraceptive, because they didn't want their holiday interfered with.(268)

But for Praxis, whether to abort the foetus or not the choice must be given to the mother. She defends her killing of Mary's handicapped baby which might have spoiled Mary's career:

. . . logically there was no difference between contraception and abortion: that termination of pregnancy at any stage, whether the foetus was minus nine months, six months, three months or plus one day, must be the mother's decision.(275)

Praxis puts her argument before the judge:

I see nothing worse in killing a four-day-old imperfect baby than in killing a four-month-old perfect foetus. Except that it's more disagreeable to do.(278)

Thus for Weldon as for *Praxis* 'the Right to Choose' must be given to a mother, whether to keep the child or to abort it, if it is harmful for the mother to keep it.

Like pregnancy and child bearing, abortion and delivery experiences of women are also discussed in Weldon's novels. In *The Hearts and Lives of Men*, Weldon, again, compares abortion with war which is sometimes necessary sometimes not but always sad:

It is to the woman as war is to the man – a living sacrifice in a cause justified or not justified, as the observer may decide. It is the making of hard decisions – that this one must die that one can live in honour and decency and comfort. Women have no leaders, of course: a woman's conscience must be her General: there are no stirring songs to make the task of killing easier, no victory marches and medals handed around afterwards, merely a sense of loss.(59)

In *The Shrapnel Academy*, Mew, a feminist journalist, wants to talk about the new abortion law over dinner. She tells so to Victor but he dislikes her on the issue. Like Praxis, Mew finds it odd because all the people gathered in the academy are going to discuss war and military activities. She reflects:

. . . people who view the destruction of fully grown millions with equanimity should get so concerned about the fate of a wretched foetus or so?(105)

In *Leader of the Band* Weldon adds in the end of the novel three stories. In the first appendix Alison's experience of delivery is narrated. She has twins which she does not want

but, after a lot of discussion, she decides not to terminate but have both and trust to luck. She bleeds so heavily during her sixteenth week that even hospital is surprised. After twenty-four messy, painful hours the punitive twins are gone. No one knew whether it was male or female, good or bad, identical or fraternal in such a flow of blood. Alison's mother comments wittily on the bleeding of Alison:

Blood's the libation the God of Chance requires. Lots and lots of blood. Always has, always will. Afterwards things go better. (173)

Weldon advocates 'the right to choose' for women in terms of the choice of babies. According to her, women should have a right whether to keep a baby or to abort it, or to kill it if it seems abnormal as has been said in *Praxis*. In *Splitting* Dr. Rosamund Plaidy aborts her child by Lambert Plaidy, when her husband Lambert goes to live with Susan, deserting her. But people accuse her of killing her own baby as an act of revenge because they don't agree with her decision to abort the baby. In Darcy's Utopia all babies will be automatically aborted unless good reason can be shown why they should be allowed to proceed term. 'The decision to 'choose' or not to 'choose' will be taken away from the parents and left to an ad-hoc committee of neighbours'(153). The committee of neighbours will decide whether the parents (or only a mother) is capable of loving a baby, as of being worthy of a baby's love. And if the verdict is against them, there can be no baby. When Eleanor Darcy is asked what about the woman's right to choose, forget about the baby's right to life, she denies the very concept of 'right,' and says that 'women would be spared the agony of choice'(160) as it is very difficult for a mother to make a choice.

Weldon, while discussing the issue of abortion, becomes practical and partial to women who want to assert their independence. According to her, if a woman does not find her baby to be born as it is harmful to her existence, her voice should be taken into consideration in the matter of whether to keep the baby or to abort it. In her earlier novels, Weldon's women fall victims to men and abort themselves for the sake of men they love, but, in next phases of her writing, they become more conscious of their lives and careers, and advocate the right to abort for mothers. The women like Praxis even kill a newly born baby when she finds the baby is an obstacle in the career of her mother. Here Weldon's views about abortion become revolutionary and radical in

the interest of women but, on the contrary, she criticises and opposes such women who abort babies for their pleasure.

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