

## AN INTERVIEW WITH FAY WELDON

Carmen Martín Santana



**C.M.S.** I would like to start this interview asking who you really are. I know you have said that you are all your characters in some degree, but I would like to know to what characters you feel closer or, in other words, who is the character who represents, in a truer sense, Fay Weldon as a woman. I say that because although we know that the writer creates his/her characters according to his/her mind, we also know that the author can't avoid feeling a kind of special sympathy towards some of them.

**WELDON** I do write a great deal, you see, so I create a great so many characters, really, not just in novels but on T.V., some which are to be on stage and some which are acted by other people, some which are minor characters and some which are major. I don't think any of them are me inasmuch as you think all women, at least I think really, are the same woman. But they are in different bodies and in different situations with a different conditioning. But since the range of human emotion is, you know, composed of various sympathies and understandings and hormonal disturbances, they live within a very similar range, so I find that a difficult question to answer. Because there are the ones that you sympathize with rationally, and the ones which are slightly autobiographical, and the ones which you understand that they are feeling more closely, but they are all wrapped up in the same character. So if you were

to ask me which was the most autobiographical I would put a mixture of Praxis and Scarlet in *Down among the Women*, and even that seems to me to be very fictional. But even if you remember your past you remember it in a fictional sense and what you see happening is not what the neighbours would see happening at all. So, you know, it is very difficult to get to the real person; I mean, I would not try myself, and then the person as the writer, as author, it also seems to me to be fictional. But the author for the purposes of a certain book, the writer, adopts a character which isn't necessarily the true person. I do not know that the true person exists so I doubt that anybody is a true person. So if you ask me who I respond to, in a way, a kind of woman who surmounts all obstacles and puts up with public ridicule, somebody that I would like to be or that appeals to me to be, Eleanor Darcy is the one I have most fun with, or Sonia in *The Heart of the Country*, who is much put upon by the state and the circumstances but fights back in some way. All these characters appeal to me, but to what extent they are me or not, I do not think that is my problem, I think that it is the readers' problem. In a way it's your problem, it is not a question that I would try to answer.

**C.M.S. Yes, but probably that is the reason why I felt very attracted to Praxis.**

**WELDON** Yes, because she is more like a role model, shall we say, but any of the other women really I would be pleased to meet at a party, but not necessarily have too close a relationship with. So yes, I can understand why you felt that way.

**C.M.S. How or in what way would you place yourself in the stream of postmodernism? I know it is a very complex question, but do you really think of yourself as an experimental writer, or is it rather a question of chronology?.**

**WELDON** But again, you see, I think this is your problem, I just write what I write, and I write what seems to me to fill the gap in the market. I'm really a reader but if nobody has yet written the book, I have to write it, so I write the book that hasn't been written. And sometimes when you see it you think you understand why it has not been written. Why bother? The activity of reading, the activity of writing are not really to me so very different. In one it is true that you have to be sort of one step ahead of yourself and provide the text for yourself, but you tend to write in the same way as you read, you pick up a book in the hopes that it's going to work, or you're going to be involved in it, or that it's going to offer you what you want and it usually does to some degree or other. You provide the book but you cannot really see, it is not quite the book you have noted, you hope that it's you. And nor am I particularly conscious of writing out of a tradition at all, I mean, certainly not a female tradition. I mean, broadly you can say, if you look to the books that you have read and enjoyed or that you remember, or that engaged you, it would probably come out of the tradition of Shaw or Wells or the sort of novels that are associated with Sociology, or I like the notion of Hans Christian Andersen or of a sociologist. He is equally one of the most interesting writers who writes parables, who looks at the world and writes little things about it, and then cries "Ah, me!", "Ah, me!"; it is another aspect of it. And then there is what you do yourself, which is what I do myself, which seems to me to simply take ordinary situations to extremes so you can

look at them and see that they are absurd or the way we all live is in a way... How do you stop a strange obsession or patterns of behaviour which are supposedly rational? —but it is not that you want them to be rational. I do not put myself, and I would be at a loss, to understand what you meant by postmodernism or what division you are making between postmodernist novels and other novels.

**C.M.S. I mean, when you study literature...**

**WELDON** Yes, I know, I never did. I studied Economics, you see, which is a much more rational thing, and I am glad you do but...

**C.M.S. Maybe that is why you are such a good writer.**

**WELDON** Well, I think it's true; yes, I think that if you know what you are doing it's very, very difficult to do it.

**C.M.S. I was referring to the fact that when you study literature you have certain periods...**

**WELDON** How do they make the division?

**C.M.S. Well, if they say postmodernism they are talking from the 1960s onwards, they are talking from the time of John Fowles with *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.**

**WELDON** But what if you wrote in 1959? Then you are not a postmodernist? It's simply dating all the way around.

**C.M.S. It's also a question of features, if you write according to those features. It's a question of chronology and also of some aspects that are clear in the novel, like postmodernist elements, although there is a big discussion on what it is.**

**WELDON** It's back to a kind of history, it's like it. Yes, that you cannot write now without references to something that you have read. But then if you had never read a novel you couldn't have been able to write a postmodernist one, could you?, because you have nothing to relate it back to; undoubtedly you could write at all. But presumably once upon a time somebody wrote the first novel, which is very clever.

**C.M.S. In a way all the writers writing today are, although not all, supposed to be, in a way, postmodernist as it's a sign of our time and because they are now writing according to some features that are supposed to be there, but then again that is not really true...**

**WELDON** But nobody ever asks the writers, we are the last to know. I mean, I do, I used to get quite upset by this kind of analysis thinking it sometimes denigrates the role of the novelist, seeing the novelist simply as the creation of the times, some priest whose duty it was, somehow, to produce the postmodernist novel which reflects the time and have no part in it, almost just like producing something, in a way the kind of "an egg produces an egg" but I suppose to the style so the constitution of the egg would remain, but I don't know. And of course you can't write a novel in a totally abstract way, I mean I don't care, it's obviously a very funny thing to write two hundred or so pages in a cover, it is a very strange thing to do, isn't it? I don't know if that answers your question.

**C.M.S. Yes, it does, thank you. Will you define yourself as a feminist because as far as I know you are not an active member of the movement?**

**WELDON** What movement? Where is my card? They don't issue membership cards, there are no party headquarters. How can I be an active part? Where is it? I have never been able to find it! If there's a party headquarters I would join them. They can have my subscription, they can give me a list of things to believe. If I could get more than six out of ten I might be able to belong to it. It is such a vague strange thing the feminist movement. And who are they?

**C.M.S.** **What happens is that when you study literature you have a tendency to apply labels. You study a writer and then you say "he is a modernist", "she is a feminist"...**

**WELDON** I understand your problems. I think I would say on every third day that I was a feminist. But this doesn't mean to say that in the duration of a novel I would be a feminist. If you take *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, I think in the first half I was a feminist but when I was writing the second half I was not a feminist, I was very angry with the feminists.

**C.M.S.** **Or in *Praxis* when they say that the "New Women are very recognizable".**

**WELDON** Exactly... but that was very much 1977 when feminism was a kind of recognisable thing. What happens is that groups of people live by a certain theory, it's good for them, and then other people come along who, without their theory or without understanding what they are doing, copy a mannerism, which because it has no real basis, becomes irritating and annoying and the product of a kind of neurosis rather than a political set of precepts. So I can answer that in all kinds of ways. I can say yes, I believe that I am a feminist and all the others are not, or if I say I'm a feminist there are a great many women who will jump up and down and say "how dare she call herself a feminist!" And I will say to them: "Well, will you tell me what you mean by a feminist?" and they will then give me a whole different set of definitions, and I would agree with some of them. But if you find yourself with other people who are, if you like, traditional, women will say you are a terrible man-hating feminist; and it really does not matter to me whether I am a feminist or not. You see, I just have a set of principles or beliefs, some of which you manage to define and some of which you don't. So again I fear that the decision as to whether or not I'm a feminist or a postmodernist can only be yours. I will leave it completely up to you. My reply is that I am just the writer and the writer doesn't have to be any of these things. What I write will be about the times I live in, so if I am not sufficiently feminist for some, then I can only blame them for not being active enough.

**C.M.S.** **Well, the following question is very much related to what you have just said and it is that I find a contradiction in your novels: in a way you support the independence of women and in that sense you can be called a feminist, but at the same time in *Praxis* we find a strong criticism towards them, or in *Puffball* we find a kind of tenderness towards pregnancy in the character of Liffey.**

**WELDON** Oh, totally! You see, feminism changes. When I wrote *Puffball* it was very unfashionable in feminist circles for women to believe that they had hormones, and to believe that they were these biological machines which had been set up by Nature to produce the next generation and that a kind of temperament went

with it; and you weren't even allowed to consider that it might to some extent be true. Women on the whole who saw themselves as feminists behaved as much as they could as men, which always seemed to me to be rather a mistake because you are then supposing that the male was the superior sex. They wore big boots and they wore jeans and they weren't allowed to have periods and none of that would be allowed, and at that time to be pregnant was something sort of old-fashioned and which you should not do. Then within about three years there was a terrible betrayal of the feminist movement, because you were suggesting that a woman who you were going to take seriously was actually going to have a baby, wanted to have a baby, wanted to suffer that sort of whole business, and it was a male baby; it was very unpopular. Then within three or five years they swung round the kind of whole Mother Goddess: pregnancy, realizing yourself by having babies. Lesbian women are infertilising themselves because to have the baby is the great thing. Fortunately it swung from rather bad to something rather more moderate in the middle. But feminism changes around you and in a way I only have my own experience and the experiences of my friends to go by, which is that having babies for men and women is the most extraordinary thing they ever do and why should you deny it? And yet you know that to have a baby takes a small part of your life and you must understand that and not live your whole life. It's quite pragmatic but it seems perfectly sensible to me. You make the most of it while you have it but you don't depend upon it for the rest of your life. That is the same as love and sex, you make the most of it while you can, understanding that you will probably have to support yourself and the baby any minute now. But you cannot deny those emotions, why should you? They are very strong and powerful and that's contradictory because the strong and powerful emotions are the ones that get you in that trouble. Life is not easy, not meant to be, so what you see to be contradictory seems to me to echo contradictions and paradoxes that run through people's lives anyway.

**C.M.S. This makes me think of your novel *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* which is considered to be a feminist novel. The character, Ruth Patchett, is a good prototype of what a feminist woman should be, but then in the second...**

**WELDON** She runs in the other direction!

**C.M.S. She sets herself to the male chauvinist principles of how women should be.**

**WELDON** Yes, she does, but I meet an awful lot of women like that. So I am not writing role models, I am not writing facts, I am writing fiction which relates in the closest way to the real world, of a world as I experience it now. Other women may very well say that it's not the real world and they may well be right. So they have to write their own novels. You can only do what you do and come to your own conclusion about how people are, and in fictional terms it works. If you take the terrible film they have made with *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, did you see that? Well, what they did, in order to be sound, because in the States now you have to be ideologically sound, or as they say, politically correct, was that they did the first half of the novel and left out the second, which seems to be disastrous, unless you are in the *Terminator* or in that world which is so ideologically unsound people like going to. But it's

terribly boring if you just have the first because to watch somebody doing what theory says they should do is boring, if that is all it is. But you can have some fun with it because it only becomes interesting when you have to consider that this is actually what makes women happy and what they want, or the possibility of writing the other thing. I mean thinking the other thing as well, which makes the novel work because this is what you do, you are not in the business of reinforcing people's prejudices but of actually confusing them of what is right and what is wrong.

**C.M.S. So how do you feel about the film?**

**WELDON** I don't feel very much at all, I just think well, I just look at it and observe it with amazement and think: "Well, you see, I was right, they are wrong". You know, if you try and make something fit your belief of what the world ought to be, not of what it is, people aren't interested really, and you make a bad film which people do not really want to go and see because it's not really even what you might want and sometimes you may get away with it, sometimes not, but it's not fundamentally interesting. So why see it and why waste your life seeing it? Fiction or films need to offer people something these days. They can actually consider and see some way of focussing the world so that in some way or another they know it. If you do English literature you always end up thinking that writers know what they're doing. You see, they do what they do and afterwards they look at it and see what they have done and then they can talk about it. But you don't sit down and think: "Now, I am going to write a book about this, I am going to write a postmodernist novel which is going to be this and that, it is going to be feminist...", because a novel is a long thing and it goes on, it goes on for six months and you can change during those six months, and your ideas and views change, what influences you changes, so you have to write as fast as you possibly can. I think this study of English literature is extraordinarily interesting because the process of invention is so peculiar anyway, but it is very good to try and decipher what's going on. It is in the same way as very religious people long to discover the mind of God and they will get witnesses from all over to try and define or determine what this sort of inventive capacity is. It's fascinating to do it but I don't think there is an answer. I have just written a novel which seems to me to be really postmodernist because it's sort of a voice within a voice, within a voice, within a voice! The title, the person and the author. The person on the title page, on the cover, has no relationship at all because what is written inside the covers is written by one of the characters in the book. It isn't a first-person novel in which, obviously, in which you can see that the person in the title page has stepped into what we believe to be the consciousness as something else, and write the world as seen by this person. So it's an "I" novel and very difficult to sustain but the author is still, you are still conscious, that the author is pulling the strings of the "I", so the author is there. If only by the inadequacy of the author the bits get wrong, if you like, when doubt creeps in, but if you then move the "I" on so that the "I" is then in the third person, occasionally gets in the "I" and then will get other "I" through which this person gets into other people. It's quite tricky to keep it so that the reader understands, but you can do it and that's fun to do because it keeps you, the writer, out of it completely. You would be at a loss to discover me there.

**C.M.S. Do you think that there is a voice inherent to women, in other words, do you believe in a feminist voice?**

**WELDON** I think it's very difficult if you remove the subject-matter. And there's a kind of novel written by women without a wide experience of the world which I think is without gender. The subject-matter, traditionally, is of a certain gender; the expectation of the writer as to who is going to write the book makes a difference because the writer, too, has a preconception of what a woman is interested in and so writes accordingly. So in that sense you can believe that if a novel is going to be written by a woman is written differently, but that's a mistake. That is because you are conditioned to believe that the gender of the reader makes a difference. You could say that the whole of feminist fiction is kind of dooming women to second class citizens for this reason. If you take all these things away, i.e. they can put computers onto sentence structure and try and discover a different mind set, but that would be very difficult because there are so many languages—English is not the only language but it's an easier language to be without gender—and the whole world is not divided as it is in French, I don't know about Spanish, up into male and female anyway, I don't see why one should resist. You can't resist it too much, you just try and hope that the female gender has as much value and is on equal terms as the male.

**C.M.S. There is also a strong sense of humour in your works although until very recently women were considered to be less humorous than men. Do you like to be considered a humorous writer because you portray funny situations as in *The President's Child*, or is the humour just a device used to deal with more serious issues?**

**WELDON** I think it's a device. I see it as a device which you know you are going to get bogged down with misery if you continue along this line, so you'd better use your humour as a kind of punctuation to say: "enough of this, now let's get on with the story", because we all know where you have to take the reader into your confidence, because we all know where this kind of thought will take us, and it's too dreary to be considered. Again it's not totally under control. It's a device in the style and that's what you do and you do not set out to write a funny line here or there. You write them and you go back sometimes and take them out and then you think: "Well, this is cowardly". I don't think that that will be relieving the tension, it's the way to make people... and it's a sort of alienation, if you like. But it means that when you laugh you have to wonder why you thought that was funny. It doesn't stop you from enjoying the book, but it takes you out to a kind of magic square if you like. If you laugh you have to remember who you are, you remember that you are reading a book, you are more likely to relate what the content of the book to you in fact deliver, and to decipher, and as a reader to have a point of view as whether you think it is funny, gross or over the top or whether you think it is not funny. Women in humour... You can borrow this book if you like and send it back to me. Regina Barreca is the author of it: she is American, she is an American professor of English Literature and it is about women and humour and their difficulty for women, and not men, to be funny, of male jokes and female jokes and why women laugh or cry, what society allows them to do.<sup>1</sup>



**C.M.S.** Thank you very much. What do you think of the comparison between Margaret Atwood and Fay Weldon, taking the word in a positive way as, I mean, a comparison of your works? Olga Kenyon, as an example, in her *Women Novelists Today* talks of a similarity between your *The Fat Woman's Joke*, written in 1967 and Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, written in 1969, or between *The President's Child* (1982) and *Bodily Harm* from the same year. What is your opinion?

**WELDON** I think that preoccupations run along in the same way, and I think there is a kind of literal unconsciousness, somehow, in which you find it quite a lot, not just in women's writing but in novels written in the same year. And if you judge, as I do, the Booker Prize, sometimes you will find an amazing number of novels in the same year around a kind of theme. They are not themes that relate particularly to items in the news or politics, I mean sometimes they do, but that is not what I am talking about. It is a kind of undercurrent of preoccupations which writers do seem to be in tune with. So the year I wrote *Puffball* there were a number of novels about the consciousness of a baby, of having a baby, and it's not that you know that other people are doing it; it is somehow interesting, it seems a kind of... I don't know what it is but it happens. I don't know that it is necessarily with women; I suppose women are more likely to write about body image because it's more available to them, but I think you kind of pick it up; it is just more interesting and you find it interests other people at the same time so the comparison seems absurd but I don't know that it is particularly with women or the women's movement. The whole reason why people write and read fictions seems to me so strange anyway. I mean, why do they need it? Why there seems to be not enough examples in the real world for them how to start needing a sort of focussed example from fiction which is not what you tend to provide? It does you no good to be conscious of it, and again you find yourself interested and writing about what comes to you to be interested about. There are a lot of writers who do not invent, they describe, but this kind of inventive capacity is not all that common in writers. She —Margaret Atwood— is in Canada and, you know, she is better behaved than I am because she is a Canadian and Canadians are better behaved than the English. I am slightly more anarchic than she is... I have a rather wild husband and hers is a bird-watcher.

**C.M.S.** I have another question. Another element which puzzles me is the contemporary use of realism. I know that in England the realist tradition has never really disappeared, but how would you explain that it works together with the concept of postmodernism?

**WELDON** What do you mean by "realist tradition"? I don't ever see how a novel can be; it's just words on a page: it is not real.

**C.M.S.** Real because you portray real situations.

**WELDON** Oh! But you can't portray real situations. Novels are not real. They are acts of imagination that are contained in words on a page; they are not real. They are not the real world. I mean, why try to reproduce the real world? If you write you put visions into people's heads, shapes, colours and faces, and you sort of make them feel secure in it by references to their world and by references to cups of coffee and

things like that and then they feel... this sort of bored picture that has got a kind of detail in it, in the same way as indeed in the real world, this is not nearer to me than the car I think I have outside. So you do that, that is, you refer to the real world and bring in the details of the real world because it is not, they can't... and I don't see why a novel should be about the world, they could be about social security benefits if you like, and you could write in great length about how they are not enough or they might find it a penny short or what have you. But a novel is not about the social security benefits; it is about the relationship of women to state. It's a question of proportion: you can't do without the real world so it is a world you invent and the worlds you invent are much more real to the people. When you start writing it's very difficult to get people, if you like, in and out of roles because you don't know when to start. Say you are writing about somebody going to a party, and you open the door and they step inside and you do not know how much of her at first you have to describe. What can she see? So you describe everything that she can see, can do that, and you can go on and on and still she has not got inside the door. So what do you do? You describe everything that deviates from what's ordinary. You don't describe somebody's height unless they are very short or very tall, the reader assumes, or the designer of the set assumes, that something is ordinary unless it's otherwise described. But if you write, if you are writing for TV and you say "that living room", they will describe a convention of an ordinary living room which could be here in England or probably in Central Park Lane, and that's it. You don't have to explain all that because you just do it and if you say or remark upon anything it will be used later on. If you say that there's a glass swan that is sitting on the mantel-piece you know that they will put that there to be part of something you need to know, and you do the same when writing fiction, a kind of "need to know" principle. That's what you call "realist". You have a text-book which is about how babies are being born, in *Puffball*, you have a fictional idea which is going on in all those heads and what they are doing, and what I was actually going to do, in two parts. I was going to write the text-book on the left hand page and have the fiction, the story, on the other.

**C.M.S. Is it true that *Puffball* is your favourite novel?**

**WELDON** I think so; yes, I think it is.

**C.M.S. So, who would you recall as your immediate influences as a writer? Is there any author you follow or admire in a special way?**

**WELDON** Again, you see, you think of the books which you have read and you remember them, and you also feel that probably the ones you remember are the ones that feed through. Again I mention the Hans Christian Andersen stories. As a child I thought he was wonderful. Do you remember those stories? They are presented as children's stories but they aren't, they are worth reading. I've done a great mass of reading over the years I think... Wells and Shaw; Dylan Thomas: I had a letter from a reader once, —have you read "Under Milk Wood"?— accusing me of plagiarism I thought: "this man is mad", and then when I read "Under Milk Wood"... he was completely right, but because I heard it from the radio once, a time when I was a child, it's there. But it is not conscious; it is part of a literary Gestalt which you cannot escape from: it's there.

**C.M.S. So from what you have said I am under the impression that you have read a lot. Do you think that you are a writer because you are, or have been, a reader?**

**WELDON** Yes, certainly. Just like people who write films need to have seen films.

**C.M.S. Because for me, one of my favourite writers is Gabriel García Márquez and probably my favourite book is *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. That came to my mind and I thought you probably had a favourite author as well.**

**WELDON** Well, I would not say that is my favourite book. He's a great writer of certain pieces and you have the privilege of reading him in Spanish, but if you translate the books they sound a bit peculiar, I think. It's difficult when you say that because I don't reread anything, so what can I say? You read a book and you think: "Oh! I like that", and then sometimes you think you'd like to read something else from that person. Or you may like a book and that won't be by your favourite writer, or works by other kinds of writers, which make you... so you like a writer who you would trust sufficiently to read various books written by them although some are good and others not.

**C.M.S. I must admit that sometimes I feel in your works a certain amount of existentialism. Is it true? Do you feel close to that ideology or is it just that comes naturally because you are portraying sad situations? But they are in a way real as well.**

**WELDON** Well, again, you see, it may well be, but people come to things in their own ways. Existentialism exists because in a way it's a kind of frame of mind of a way of looking at things, but you can have that frame of mind accidentally, not because you know about it or have worked out a way of doing it, but it is just how you see things. So if you say you perceive an existentialist frame of mind you may well be right, but again it's not consciously done. It's just a mind-set.

**C.M.S. But at the end of your novels there is a sense of dissatisfaction, like pessimism.**

**WELDON** Yes, but then the world is essentially sad, I think. Everybody dies, which is extremely sad, and you can't pretend they don't. I mean, if you believed literally in Heaven, then you would be able to be quite cheerful, but the process of getting there is mournful quite a lot of the time.

**C.M.S. So you do not support the idea that we can't be really free in our society and that it strangles and imprisons us? I say that because of the fact of Praxis being in prison for two years for doing something she considered to be right... At the same time why did Praxis have to tell the truth to the doctor when some time had elapsed since she committed the murder? Do you remember that she came back?**

**WELDON** And she spoke the truth. I think that people get quite obsessive about the truth and won't say black is white and won't say even if they are going to burn to death. This is what happens and some people have a kind of feeling that they have a duty to it. She felt that she had a duty to it. So, if you like, social justice lags always

behind personal justice and social punishment, sort of lingers behind, and the only way that they ever get better is if people present themselves as moral people to whom the law applies but really shouldn't. Thus societies move on a bit. So if she can't put up with being in prison for two years nothing changes and nothing for women, and what she did, whether you agree with it or not, she did it for what she believed to be right. Society has to consider what she didn't or what she did but then... you see, all the things she did all the way through were the kind of things that women used to be called, like "whore" or "adulteress" or "murderer" or "thief", all kinds of things for doing what she was doing, which was the only thing she could do. All those were things that were reasonable to do in the circumstances in which she found herself, so it almost became impossible for her to live without having these labels or those epithets attributed to her and yet it was not her fault. But societies put you more at the situation and it's a great pity that you have to do it. It's a great pity you have to go on the streets. It's a great pity how you begin it.

**C.M.S. Do you think that *Praxis* as the book, and also *Praxis* as the character could stand as a symbol of that myth in literature or that contraposition which is "the virgin/the whore"? We see that first she was a virgin, then she lost her virginity with Philip and later on she will become a real whore. How do you explain that?**

**WELDON** I think this is a very Catholic society and you come from a Catholic society. It's such a concept of purity. It's not really a sexual purity you are talking about anyway; it's a situation of trust and love which is lost by girls at a very early age in this society but perhaps not in yours.

**C.M.S. Well yes, it is more or less the same. But I was really referring to the books, to how you cannot see this opposition in some books. In some novels you find it, as in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*: you have Ernestina who is the virgin and Sarah, who represents the whore, and that is a comparison that works.**

**WELDON** Yes. I think one is conscious of that. I think you probably find it more in male novelists because of the sort of the division of women which men make: good and bad, "woman the mother", and you can't sleep with the mother of your children because she is holy and marriages will fall to bits when they have babies because they can no longer perceive their wives as being sexual objects. It seems terrible. This is very often in men who have been brought up with these great notions of the Mother Mary, the mother, this sort of vision of the angel of the child, and sometimes you are not allowed to have sexual thoughts about her...

**C.M.S. Regarding the style, is there any reason to write the paragraphs as you do? I know it has to do with your job as a scriptwriter but does it have any special significance to you?**

**WELDON** Oddly enough you get used to it. I think it originally started with the typist, Sarah, and her type-writer being so funky that she kept double-spacing by mistake. I thought that it looked quite nice and then you begin to see that poetry lies upon the page with a lot of space around it. According to the space the words have value or not, so in a way by separating the words by space you give them emphasis

or not. Sometimes they print them as you want them to and sometimes not, there are a lot of accidents which I don't believe at all totally intended or printed by some people, and certainly I tend to give up with them. It's a simple technicality.

**C.M.S. That's certainly a feature typical of you and I honestly thought you did it on purpose.**

**WELDON** Yes, I used to think it was, but the reason was that I had small children and I never had any time to write a longer paragraph so you write shorter paragraphs and start again.

**C.M.S. We study your style and we see that it is very precise and concise and then... could I say deception in a way?**

**WELDON** Well, I think you are right. Sometimes it is more like a specific kind of parody and it's true that as the children get older the paragraphs get longer. No, it's a mixture of various things. Well, this is just ordinary wisdom, but not difficult, not difficult really. So you just put a space for no apparent reason, but you learn to use it, you learn to use it properly. In practice I do this without having to be preoccupied with any of the funny things.

**C.M.S. Finally, what is your relationship with other writers like Margaret Drabble, Penelope Mortimer or Angela Carter?**

**WELDON** It's fine, it's good. We meet from time to time at events or at dinner and you have common concerns or common interests. We talk about many things but never about writing because everybody else talks about writing, we really don't want to.

**C.M.S. I just want to add that it has been more than a pleasure to have met you. Thank you so much, this has been undoubtedly a very special event for me.**

**(This conversation took place on 18th July 1991, in Kentish Town, London.)**

#### Note

1. *They Used to Call Me Snow White... But I Drifted. Women's Strategic Use of Humor*, Viking Penguin, New York, 1991