

# Fay wedon's 'weekend' a feminist analysis essay



Weldon's short story 'Weekend' is a strongly feministic and satirical fiction about a weekend of a wife and working-mother in the 70s. The story concerns a well-off English middle-class family, at their country cottage. The central focus is on Martha, and much of the writing represents her stream of consciousness as she struggles to ensure that her family and guests are properly looked after. The misleading title soon proves to be an ironic comment on the weekend that Martha has to endure rather than enjoy, while she also struggles with social expectations of women from her husband and other adults.

The first paragraph alone serves to set the tone of the story, while also demonstrating a predominant theme, of gender inequality. Within the first few lines we are made aware of the catalogue of jobs it is Martha's responsibility to take care of. On first reading this, we could have perhaps, been forgiven for thinking these were the jobs of a maid or house keeper, especially considering the phonetics of her name. Only when Martha has 'everything packed into the car' (Weldon, 1988, P. 309) does her chauvinistic husband Martin stroll outside to 'take the wheel' (Weldon, 1988, P309) as any stereotypical man would.

There is an implication that women shouldn't go out to work if they have children demonstrated in the quote 'it wasn't the best thing for the children, but that must be Martha's moral responsibility' (Weldon, 1988, P309). This partly demonstrates the outdated social context of the 70s, but also hints at Martin's desire for women to be in the role of society that will make him feel better and he deems appropriate. There are numerous examples of sexism

and chauvinism, as well as insults and patronising remarks that Martha suffers at the hands of Martin.

Including 'Don't get like your mother, darling,' or the 'Roars of laughter from Martin' Martha receives when for complaining about his books she'll have to clean. With some things that Martha takes offence to however, it is unclear whether they are directed at her as an insult, or her lifestyle is gradually turning her insane. An example of this is when Martin describes her car as 'too wide at the hips' (Weldon, 1988, P. 311). Nevertheless these continuous sexist remarks serve the purpose of creating sympathy for Martha, and malevolence towards Martin, all creating creating a strong feministic alliance.

Weldon's use of third person limited narration predominantly from Martha's perspective is sometimes unreliable, making it unclear whether Martin is really as unkind to her as she believes. An example of this being, when Martha felt 'she was in danger, Martin implied, of ruining everyone's weekend' (Weldon, 1988, P. 323). This choice of narration could be seen as a reflection of Martha's unstable state of mind, and her tendency to paranoia like her mother. On the other hand it could be seen as having feministic undertones by encouraging women not to put up with controlling behaviour from men under the pretence of the women overreacting.

Another technique sometimes used is omniscient intrusive narration creating a strong sense of irony when Weldon states 'they reckoned themselves fortunate' (Weldon, 1988, P. 309). This also allows for highly sarcastic undertones like when Martha tries convincing herself of what a good

husband he is to her by whisking her off ' for holiday weekends' (Weldon, 1988, P. 313). We are all aware however what a multitude of chores it turns into for her, demonstrated by the emphasised minor sentence ' Wonderful! ' (Weldon, 1988, P. 313).

Through these narrative techniques we are able to sympathise with Martha deeply, which even allow the reader to feel some oh what it may be like to be spoken to by a husband like Martin. The direct speech used when stating '( ' Pork is such a dull meat if you don't cook it properly': Martin')' emphasised how it would make you feel when being talked at like that. The narrative syntax, and specifically the structure of paragraphs are directly linked to the protagonist's lifestyle of being extremely busy and the need to be efficient. This is demonstrated by the very short and regular paragraphs.

When reading the things Martha worries about and the strict ways in which she has to do them from pages 312 to 313, a distinct pattern can be seen. Most paragraphs begin with the name of what is tormenting her, before being repeated after an interjection like ' Food. Oh, food! ' (Weldon, 1988, P. 312). This technique seems to connote the quantity and importance of the things that she has to abide by, but also hints at the critical attitude of the author towards her choice to do it. The punctuation in these paragraphs is also notable ' Martin likes slim ladies. Diet. ' These hort sharp sentences could be reflecting her frustration at his behaviour and of course they reflect the harsh ways in which the character Martin would say them. The use of cacophony in the sentence starting ' Knock, knock. Katie and Colin arrived' (Weldon, 1988, P. 316) serves to connote the shock discomfort anyone would feel being woken up unexpectedly. There is very little difference between the <https://assignbuster.com/fay-wedons-weekend-a-feminist-analysis-essay/>

historical context of the story, and the time we live in now, other than the use of a 'cassette player' (Weldon, 1988, P. 309), which would seem very out of date these days.

There is however, a significant difference between the social context of the 70s and today. There was still a stigma attached working mothers, and society as a whole was significantly more patriarchal. The unsettling ending which shows the book to be very open, could 'lead us to believe that Martha's daughter Jenny will repeat the pitiful existence that she did' (Harrison, 2000, p. 30) for another generation. The character Martha is shown as a slave to domesticity, and there is a sense from her husband that it is a woman's place. These sexist views are far less accepted today.

The monologue of the story is circular so the reader will not know what becomes of the characters, however, the dramatic and thought provoking last paragraphs, where 'Martha cried and cried' (Weldon, 1988, P. 325) could be interpreted as something of an epiphany. Although the reason for her grief is for the fear of her daughter growing up to lead a life as unhappy as hers, a previous remark about Martha's high wages states that 'One day they would overtake' (Weldon, 1988, P. 322) Martin's, suggesting she could make a life of her own and doesn't need Martin at all.

This type of feministic ending is common in Weldon's stories. Her stories women "learn to be strong – or, more accurately, to recognize the strengths they have always possessed." (Barecca, 1994, P. 13). This creates a strong sense of empowerment in the reader and inspires independence in its female readers.

Bibliography. •Regina Barreca. (1994) ' Fay Weldon's Wicked Fictions'. By University Press of New England. •Harrison Harry (2000) ' Monologue and Prose' By Whitmore Publishing, Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. pp. 99-103.