

FOOD OR LOVE? MOTHERING, FEEDING, EATING AND DESIRE IN FAY WELDON'S *REMEMBER ME*

Tatiana GOLBAN

Yrd. Doç. Dr., Namık Kemal Üniversitesi, Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü

Breakfast! Bon appétit! If you can.

The manner of the breakfast declares the aspiration of the family. Some breakfast standing, some sitting, some united in silence, some fragmented in noisiness and some, as in a television commercial, seeming to have all the time and money and good will in the world; and some in gloomy isolation. It is the meal at which we betray ourselves, being still more our sleeping than our waking selves. (Fay Weldon, *Remember Me*)

ABSTRACT: Since the publication of her first novels, Fay Weldon has been continuously acclaimed as a feminist writer whose writings represent an angry retort at the oppressive conditions which trap the contemporary female personality within the traditional boundaries of a patriarchal society. It may be so, but there are many other literary concerns in her novels which, although regard directly the status of women, become independent thematic perspectives and as such deserve to be topics of critical interest. Among them, food and its consumption, which are the central themes of *Remember Me*. The present study aims to disclose the ways in which the novelist confers literary significance to food and employs it as a means of rendering the private and social experience of women, which comprises, in the case of this novel, such issues as self-identity, social interaction, wife-husband and mother-child relations, nourishment, love, desire, and sexuality.

Keywords: food, eating disorders, body, desire, self-identity, mother-daughter relationship, inter-human relationship.

ÖZET: İlk romanlarının yayınlanmasından bu yana Fay Weldon, ataerkil toplumun geleneksel sınırlarında kalan günümüz kadın karakterinin kısıldığı kapanın baskın koşullarını öfkeyle eleştiren feminist bir yazar olarak tanınır. Weldon'ın romanlarında kadınların durumuyla ilgili olsa da eleştirel analiz gerektiren bağımsız tematik perspektifler de yer almaktadır. Bunların arasında *Remember Me*'nin temel izleği "yemek" ve "yemek tüketimi" olarak kabul edilebilir. Bu çalışma, romancının yemeğe verdiği yazinsal önenin etkilerini açığa çıkarmayı ve onu kadının özel ve toplumsal deneyimlerinin -ki romanda bunlar öz kimlik, sosyal etkileşim, kari-koca ve anne-çocuk ilişkileri, beslenme, aşk, arzu ve cinsellik şeklinde ortaya çıkmaktadır- bir aracı haline getirmesinin önemini ortaya koymayı amaçlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: yemek, yemeğe bağlı bozukluklar, beden, arzu, öz kimlik, anne-kız ilişkisi, insan ilişkileri

I. Introduction: Food and Its Symbolic, Social, and Individual Significance

Eating is an indispensable activity. It is one of the first things we learn to do in our life; it is a major source of pleasure and frustration; it is the foundation of our education and enculturation. Food is essential for our survival and it has a social function. On one hand, what is the food we eat, how we eat, who accompanies us while eating, why and what we feel about food are essential questions in the attempt to understand and explain the human relationships in society. On the other hand, "the major significances of eating, however, are not biological but symbolic" (Sceats, 2000: 1). And, continues Sceats, the symbolical significance of eating is great, because, according to psychoanalytic theory, the formative feeding experiences are inscribed in the psyche. The consumption of food represents a fundamental activity in the process of building self-identity and is essential in the definition of family, social class, ethnicity, etc. According to Peter Garnsey,

food is at once nutrition, needed by the body for its survival, and cultural object, with various non-food uses and associations. Food functions as a sign or means of communication. It governs human relationships at all levels. Food serves to bind together people linked by blood, religion or citizenship; conversely, it is divisive, being distributed and consumed in accordance with existing hierarchies. (Garnsey, 1999: xi)

Appetite, taste and ingestion are signs and means of communication, which firmly circumscribe a person within certain cultural context and invest the eating activity with moral, psychological, and affective values. The growing number of eating disorders in Western societies of the last decades is a clear signal of insecurity of the human about embodiment, the nature of being, as well as of the boundaries between the self and the outside world. The physical boundaries are definitively connected to food and eating activity, since the consumed food passes into and out of the body, normally leading to its shaping. However, not only the body is shaped by food, but also the self is influenced and changed by the nourishment and the provider of the nourishment.

II. Fay Weldon and the Concern with Food and Its Consumption in *Remember Me*

Although the relation between food and human identity has been illustrated in various literary works since Antiquity, we become aware of the growing interest in this concern in the contemporary works of such women writers as Doris Lessing, Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood, Fay Weldon, and others. This situation occurs as a consequence of the tradition established in Western culture, in which the woman is the producer and the provider of food, with all the powers and services it implies. Of course women's writings have various other areas of concern apart from the one suggested above, but we cannot avoid the temptation to explore the female culinary sensuousness, her authority in cooking and the exertion of power through food and acts of eating, which are lavishly presented in contemporary female writings.

This article considers the contemporary writer Fay Weldon and her novel *Remember Me* (1976) in its concern with society, power and women's roles and experiences which are coded, among other things, through food, appetite, eating and female body. A prolific novelist, playwright, television and radio script writer, Fay Weldon deals with the subjects of sexual initiation, marriage, infidelity, divorce, contraception, abortion, motherhood and housework. Her novels reveal the difficulties of establishing

self-identity and meaning in a world in which love does not last, marriage is not happy and motherhood is not serene. These subjects are explored in close relation to the issues concerning the female body, desire, food and nurturing activities.

Described by Lynn Schwartz as an “urban tale of middleclass marital reshuffling, proliferating guilt, resentment, awkward diner parties, and left-over children” (Schwartz, 1977: 560), the novel *Remember Me* focuses on the revenge of a jilted ex-wife Madeline who dies early in the story only to return to haunt and persecute her ex-husband Jarvis, the architect, and his new wife Lily through the agency of Margot, who is Jarvis’s part-time secretary and a doctor’s wife. Gentle Margot, unacknowledged wife and mother, gradually assumes the identity of Madeline, the wronged wife, and exerts Madeline’s revenge on the new couple. Somehow Margot, named during this period as Margot/Madeline, absorbs enough of Madeline’s energy and anger to force her family to remember and recognize her and accept her demand to bring Hilary, the architect’s and Madeline’s daughter, into their family. By the time of the funeral, Margot/Madeline achieves an admission of guilt and apology from Jarvis and Lily and the settlement of Hilary with Margot’s family rather than with Jarvis and Lily. Even the spoiled and extraordinary step-mother Lily, who almost loses her son Jonathan to Madeline’s revenge, learns to appreciate the fragility of life and love, promising to be a better mother and step-mother in the future.

III. Food and Nurturing Revealing Motherhood

One of the most important themes in Fay Weldon’s novel is that of mothering, which is made explicit through the motif of food-giving and nourishment. In Western culture, the connection of food to love centers traditionally on mother, since she is the most important figure in an infant’s world, the one who nourishes, fulfills and completes. The mother is the person who forms the child’s appetite and expectations of the world and develops the table manners and other manners and values which would be important throughout adult life.

Along with the food, the mother nurtures to her child love, encouragement, frustration or fear. Considering this power of formation over someone’s self, the ancient matriarchal archetypes present maternity as limitless and unquestionable authority. However, the role of mother in Western world is a confusing one, taking into account the overwhelming and powerful role of mothers, on one hand, and the social and domestic disempowerment by their nurturing and serving role, on the other hand.

Fay Weldon explores and portrays many of the complexities of maternal nurturing, ranging from anxious infantile hungers and difficulties of relationship to the paradoxical demands of the mothering role itself. Madeline, one of the maternal figures presented in the novel, cannot think of anything else but revenge against her former husband Jarvis and his new wife Lily. Poor, divorced, and depressed, she lives in a squalor that announces the world about her victimization: “Oh, I am Madeline, the first wife. I am the victim. I have right on my side. It makes me strong. I feed on misery.” (Weldon, 2003: 16) To be betrayed by her husband and the much younger Lily represents the source of Madeline’s recurrent wrath.

Madeline is forty-four and is very thin: “She eats and eats Sugar Puffs by the jumbo-size packet, and tinned milk (cheaper than fresh) by the dozen cans – but Madeline just gets thinner and thinner.”

(Weldon, 2003: 12) She lives her life structured by consumption: the consumption of food and television. The pastimes as well as the foods are unnourishing and insubstantial. Her excessive eating has less to do with satisfying hunger than with soothing herself: food, similar to drink, sleep, radio and TV, is a drug, a kind of escapist entertainment that demonstrates Madeline's decision to become a consumer par excellence who produces and provides nothing. In her grimy basement flat with barred windows she abandons all efforts toward cleanliness and cooking, leaving her face and body dirty and letting the kitchen be damp and unused. "Why have toast when bread and butter will do?" (Weldon, 2003: 13)

These descriptions of Madeline's carelessness evoke the revulsion that Julia Kristeva describes as "abjection". The process of abjection is caused by what "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" rather than by "lack of cleanliness" per se (Kristeva, 1982: 4). The soiled and constantly eating Madeline, dressed in ragged clothes, exemplifies the grotesque body as described by Bakhtin: both abjection and grotesque suggest a failure of control, a transgression of boundaries. The grotesque body is the body in transition, the unfinished and open body which outgrows itself and which is not separated from the rest of the world (Bakhtin, 1968: 26-27).

Fay Weldon describes her protagonist as following: "Madeline! Madeline the ogre, the vampire, looking not so much dangerous as dirty and depressed (...) Madeline brought down, reduced, humbled by life and Lily." (Weldon, 2003: 52) Feeding continuously on misery and hatred, she laments in her basement flat, leaving her maternal concern to "evaporate altogether in the general depression of the morning" (Weldon, 2003: 11). Having the custody of her only child, Madeline profoundly affects her daughter's appetites and capacity for future nurturing, allowing Hilary to eat herself to huge proportions with Sugar Puffs, adding more and more sugar on the already sweetened cereal. Madeline, having neither energy nor desire to stop her daughter from destroying herself, is absent and ineffectual as a mother: "Hilary is walking witness to Madeline's wrongs, Madeline's ruin. See, says Madeline in her heart, regarding Hilary, see what has become of me. See what Jarvis has done?" (Weldon, 2003: 11). Hilary is fourteen and weighs 154 pounds. With large feet and large bust, Hilary copes with the misery of her unhappy life – being the product of an indifferent father and a vindictive mother – by living on sweets.

The truest victim and casualty in the novel, Hilary silently cries out to her mother: "Mother, do you hear me? I need your help. I am growing stunted, I know I am. If you don't do something soon, I'll fall apart like some dried-up walnut, and you will find me withered in my shell inside (...) Mother, do you hear?" (Weldon, 2003: 91) The hopeless abusive mother drives her child not only to overeating but also to a deep sense of guilt:

I am Hilary. I am the daughter of two houses, at home in neither. I am the girl who should have been born a boy, forcing my parents apart by disappointment. Well, something made this separation, something came between them, entered in, and pierced and tore apart. Me? In all probability. My fault, but not my doing. (Weldon, 2003: 90)

Such an anxiety has partly to do with the absence of a nurturing mother figure that would be responsible for giving food and love to her child and also for comforting and pacifying her fears. Weldon portrays Hilary as an anxious daughter, desperate for food and attention, yearning to be cuddled by her mother,

because she feels alone and frightened. But when she climbs into her mother's bed and "lies there sleepless, cold and lardy, against her mother's hard and feverish side", she remains uncomfited "like any usurper to an abdicated throne." (Weldon, 2003: 2)

The maternal failure in the case of Madeline can be also suggested by the chilly disregard with which she treats her daughter, while preferring the self-imposed state of suffering and victimization. She neither supervises the nurturing nor intervenes in her daughter's periods of distress and unhappiness, and her relief at being spared of Hilary's company – when the daughter goes to school or to her father's house for the weekends – is almost palpable: "Madeline values her peaceful weekends: her Saturday and her Sunday, minus Hilary, marked by nothing more demanding than the change of programme on the radio." (Weldon, 2003: 53) This negative mothering and "failures of nurturing don't have to be associated with malignity"; on the contrary, they may "reflect a mother's own insecurities and inadequacies" (Sceats, 2000: 18). Crushed and disappointed, Madeline's nurturing consists of attempts to mold Hilary into a figure resembling their pet, a guinea pig that lives in a cage and eats every morning the same Sugar Puffs and old cabbage leaves in the evening.

Besides her failure to nurture, Madeline experiences a "sense of embattlement" (Sceats, 2000: 19) originating, partially, in the ambiguities implied by the role of a mother. Viewed through a child's perspective, the mother represents a great authority, an immeasurable power; however, the child, not always willing to cooperate and obey, can confront the mother with a great, powerful will. Madeline's desire to control what her daughter wears and eats leads Hilary to revolt against her mother's impositions: "Then let me find my own way out of it, please!" (Weldon, 2003: 15) To experience domination and powerlessness at the same time is deeply frustrating for Madeline. It is disturbing for her to deal at once with omnipotence and the lack of power, the sense of disempowerment being emphasized in her case by her being abandoned by Jarvis and by her living on his low alimony.

No such disempowerment is presented in the other maternal figure of the novel, who is Lily, Jarvis's second wife, his "lucky ticket in the lottery of life" (Weldon, 2003: 6). Lily spends enormous sums of money refurbishing the house and giving lavish dinner parties. Lily introduces herself as the architect's wife, no longer the lowly butcher's daughter:

It was my mother, Ida, on her wild Australian shore, who taught me how to care so well for possessions, both material and human, there being so little of either about. How pleasant everything is since I became the architect's wife. All things around me ordained, considered, under control. The house is well converted, the plasterwork is sound, the polished floor blocks on the ground floor are both practical and attractive; the carpets upstairs are both luxurious and hard-wearing. Is this not what Jarvis has worked for; what I myself made possible for him? How happy we are – like children. (Weldon, 2003: 30)

The beautiful, young and desirable Lily wishes everything to be beautiful and perfect, like she is. Not only has she achieved perfection in her household, which is, according to Madeline, "a monument of sickly self-esteem" (Weldon, 2003: 51), but she has done so with her husband and son, or so it seems to her. Jonathan, their two-year old child, has learned to climb into his own high chair and to sit quietly

while Lily prepares the meal. Receiving great disapproval when he cries or makes a fuss and gets little affection otherwise, Jonathan has learned how to keep the peace, just as Jarvis has.

The nurturing characteristic of mothering and the pleasures obtained from feeding people is obvious in the satisfaction Lily manifests while preparing the breakfast:

Lily squeezes fresh chilled oranges into the blender, adds honey, and blends for fifteen seconds. She has iced glasses waiting. She put them in the refrigerator the night before, as is her custom. Lily's husband and son wait obediently at the breakfast counter, their faces and hands washed, their hair combed, marveling at such wifely and maternal excellence. The coffee is filtering, newly made from freshly ground, lately roasted beans. Eggs from the health-food shop have been boiled for three and three-quarter minutes: the starch-reduced bread has been evenly toasted, shaken free of crumbs and placed in the little white chine toast-rack. The tablecloth is white and clean: the china blue and white: knives and forks, carefully washed by hand and not in the machine, retain their strength and colour. (Weldon, 2003: 5-6)

The pleasure of creating nourishment and well-appreciated food empowers Lily in her household, while Jarvis "sits, waits, watches and marvels" (Weldon, 2003: 6) at the sight of his extraordinary wife. This aspect of positive maternal nurturing in the case of Lily might suggest the relationship between food and love, a relationship which is almost inseparable in the first stages of an infant's life, "especially for mothers who breastfeed, and women almost invariably express love for their children through food" (Sceats, 2000: 20). However, the satisfaction Lily experiences through her gift of nourishment might have dangerous consequences upon its receiver, Jonathan, which questions Lily's capacity to nurture her child on love through the means of food: "Lily washes Jonathan's silver christening spoon. Jonathan needs it for his egg. Lily cleans the spoon with silver polish every single day (...) The spoon is becoming very thin, almost sharp. If Lily carries on like this, Jonathan will cut his little mouth on its edges." (Weldon, 2003: 6-7) Therefore, Lily's pretence of a careful, loving and nurturing mother supports only her narcissist obsession with self-perfection.

Lily's narcissist fixation as a perfect mother is made explicit in the following fragment: "I even want Hilary, Jarvis's child. I want Hilary to be happy too, to make up for all things she's lost, all the things Madeline has taken from her. I want to show everyone what a truly successful person I am: wife, daughter, mother, stepmother." (Weldon, 2003: 33) In her desire to exhibit to the entire world her care for Hilary, Lily forgets or fails to admit that she is the first reason for the child's deprivations. She runs everything efficiently around Hilary when the latter spends the weekends in their house, aiming to slim Hilary down. It becomes her great preoccupation, her earnest desire: "On Saturdays and Sundays Lily gives Hilary a breakfast of lemon tea with artificial sweetener, two boiled eggs and one slice of starch-reduced toast spread with low-calorie margarine." (Weldon, 2003: 11)

In one of her articles focused on nursing mothers, Stephanie Demetrakopoulos claims that "women who force their children to eat, who stuff them with food/love, may be extending their lactation powers and own fulfillment, forcing the child to act as the replete and filled vessel of her gift of nourishment." (Demetrakopoulos, 1982: 432) Between Lily's satisfaction as a giver of nourishment and Madeline's failure of nurturing, Hilary is revealed as a true victim, with her expanded bosom, a puffy face, a double

chin and a stogy body, since “Lily’s breakfast, followed by equally austere lunches and dinners, cannot, alas, undo the damage done by Madeline on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.” (Weldon, 2003: 11)

The wicked stepmother’s apparent desire to help Hilary has definitely nothing to do with love and care for her stepdaughter, but explicitly with Lily’s empowerment and desire to control and subdue Hilary. The novelist discloses this wish through Lily taking Hilary to the hairdresser to have her long and golden hair cut, the hair being the only beautiful attribute of this otherwise disgraceful child. This action suggests not only the taming and the subdual of the stepdaughter, but also her mutilation, since the child cries and remains frustrated for a long time. In her anxiety to hide her new look, Hilary screams: “Don’t look at it. It’s horrible. I can’t go out of the house for at least six weeks.” (Weldon, 2003: 85)

The cruel and indifferent Lily continues the line of abusive mothers presented by the novelist. It seems that Weldon undermines the potential of a biological mother to fulfill the nurturing and the feeding aspects of motherhood. Instead, she creates a substitute figure, a non-biological mother who is allowed to behave ‘maternally’. This is Margot, the doctor’s wife, who is the mother of two healthy children and later also the substitute mother to Hilary. Margot introduces herself at the beginning of the novel: “Oh, I am the doctor’s wife, waking. I am Margot, housewife, mother, waking to the world I have made; a worm and homely place, in which others grow if not myself. How nice!” (Weldon, 2003: 4)

Margot is a loving mother for her children and her affection and dedication finds a powerful expression through her cooking. She prepares bacon and eggs ‘delicately’, and the fresh meat pies prepared for her family are described in the novel in very comforting terms. The radiant and homely picture developed by the novelist sketches a maternal archetype, but this archetype is an equivocal one. The offering of food and the offering of love are inseparable in the case of Madeline, but she is a passive wife who always puts her husband’s needs first, then those of her children and only at the end her own needs. Concerning nurture, Madeline feels empowered, since she is a powerful provider of food and an irresistible authority.

However, this position, rooted in her nurturing and serving role, enslaves her in the family background. Her husband and children see her only in this inferior hypostasis and for a long time she refuses to admit the mistreatment. Instead, she scrubs and cleans, keeping herself too busy with domestic drudgery to be able to question her position in the family hierarchy. With “her past unacknowledged, her future unquestioned, making herself useful, as women do” (Weldon, 2003: 4), Margot plows through the dullness of her life without complaint. Her husband, Philip, is not openly abusive, and neither he nor the children consciously victimize and enslave Margot, but their quiet expectation of family peace, submission, order, nurturing, and dinner leaves her feelings unappreciated and invisible. Accustomed to self-sacrifice and denial, Margot has a difficult time, breaking the old patterns that seem to have held the family together but have provided little spiritual nourishment for herself as a mother and wife.

IV. The Thematic Juxtaposition of Food and Eating with Love, Desire and Sex

The satisfaction or dissatisfaction with nourishment and the status of the woman as the provider of nourishment should be considered also in relation to human desire. The idea that ‘the way to a man’s

heart lies through his stomach' is widespread in Western culture. Women imitate sometimes the infantile experience of feeding/love in their relationship with husbands, playing the roles of mothers and manipulating them like they do with their children. Not only do women exert their authority and control over food, but they also "are able to take advantage of men's subordination to the powerful maternal figures of their childhoods". (Sceats, 2000: 21) Certainly the nourishment, as an expression of love, could not be limited to the references to maternity and sexuality. Disinterested offering of love/food, as expression of nourishment, could be also considered in relation to friendship, sisterhood, altruistic compassion, responsibility, and religious engagement. However, the sexual love emphasizes most brightly the relation between food and love; the courting and seduction, or the declaration of love, in literature, as well as in life, are frequently accompanied by food and drink.

It can be said that Fay Weldon creates a *qui pro quo* motif in the food relations of actual lovers, or potential lovers, or ex-partners. The adultery of Jarvis and Margot took place many years ago at a party, after both of them having eaten and drunk excessively. Jarvis forgets the incident that has dissipated in the air similar to the drink he had during that night. What else to be expected? "It had been a dimly-lit party, in the days when most people smoked, and the smell of hot punch had filled the air, and one girl had been much like another, tight-waisted and teetering around on stiletto hills." (Weldon, 2003: 39) Margot, on the contrary, holds the encounter as one of the most precious memories; for her, this adultery confers power over her husband Philipp, who ignores her and is indifferent to her, and grants power over Jarvis as well, who has forgotten everything long ago, but she hides this "secret knowledge" that thrills and excites her throughout the entire life.

The correlation of food and sex is a complex one and it is interlocked with the connotation of appetite in the case of the two drives. Even the term 'sexual appetite' refers clearly to the relation between food and sex: "The link is made linguistically, so that what is subject specific language moves freely between the two areas of food and sexuality, people being described as 'tasty', a 'dish' or a 'tart', or people being said to 'feast their eyes' on the object of desire, to be hungry for love." (Sceats, 2000: 22) Madeline in her youth was a very attractive woman, "bright as a button", entertaining and energetic, brave and rebellious. Her boldness made Jarvis desire her a lot: "what an angry little girl she'd been, smearing the walls with far worse than puffed wheat" (Weldon, 2003: 61). Ironically, the fact that she was at the beginning too bold determined Jarvis's appetite and desire for her to cool down. "Neglecting the washing-up on the grounds that it was trivial, housework humiliating, cooking a waist of human energy and world resources" (Weldon, 2003: 60), Madeline fails not only in her role of mother, but also in her role of wife, being ineffective as a nurturer of her husband's desires.

After discovering Jarvis's adultery, Madeline considers sexual fidelity meaningless, returning home "from God knows where but suspiciously late, smelling of drink and sex". (Weldon, 2003: 61) Abandoning every attempt at cooking and every attempt to love, Madeline is not able to nurture the needs of her hearth, which leads to her being abandoned by Jarvis: "Sex is good enough for Madeline, not for Jarvis. Jarvis falls in love with Lily. Who's to blame him?" (Weldon, 2003: 56)

The image of food and eating as a sexual metaphor has a long established tradition, such a connection between food and sexuality being explained by the possibility of food and sex to perpetuate life. Both are associated with bodily needs, act upon body and set the mind towards it. Undoubtedly, food and sex

interweave through the agency of the body and it is important for the continuation of life to stimulate and satisfy both appetites. However, the psyche, more than the body, provides a very persuasive interrelation of these two strong appetites. In his 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', Freud claims that the sexual instinct originates in the infant's earliest experiences of eating. By being nourished at the mother's breast, that is to say, by sucking the milk from the mother's breast, the infant achieves a proto-sexual satisfaction. The activity of sucking and of receiving the milk stimulates the mucous membrane of the mouth, thus generating a sexual pleasure. In this case, Freud considers that lips "behave like an erogenous zone", and continues:

The satisfaction of the erogenous zone is associated, in the first instance, with the satisfaction of the need for nourishment. To begin with, sexual activity attaches itself to functions serving the purpose of self-preservation and does not become independent of them until later. No one who has seen a baby sinking back satiated from the breast and falling asleep with flushed cheeks and a blissful smile can escape the reflection that this picture persists as a prototype of the expression of sexual satisfaction in later life. The need for repeating the sexual satisfaction now becomes detached from the need for the taking nourishment. (Freud, 1961: 181-182)

It is clear that Freud considers the sexual desire to originate and develop out of the fulfillment of the hunger for food. Likewise, in Fay Weldon's novel, food and its consumption are strongly interwoven with sex and power, and her writing suggests the inevitability of this interconnection. In *Remember Me*, the issue of food is presented as the center of desire and eating as a fundamental act. The food preparation and the activity of eating may imply stimulation of desire, satiety and also narcissistic self-contemplation of some characters. It is the case of Lily, in her relation with Jarvis, who manifests a strong sexual behavior through the implication of food: "Lily and Jarvis! What games they play, in bed and out of it." (Weldon, 2003: 30) Lily, beautiful as a 'painted angel', with long and full legs and rounded buttocks, with high and rounded breasts, always going bra-less, holds the control over Jarvis' food and drink, but also over his morning and evening sex. Weldon emphasizes Lily's narcissism in her contemplation of herself, her body and also her perfect food preparation for Jarvis. Her sensuality implies power, especially sexual power. Lily is a woman who likes to hold everything under control: Jarvis's diet (whose waist was thirty-eight inches when he married Madeline but now is thirty inches) and even his digestion or indigestion. Her concern with Jarvis's body is also a part of her narcissistic desire to make him "erect, rouse this pale stiff lovely Lily to passion, flush her cool skin with intemperate desire". (Weldon, 2003: 7) Lily's power is obvious not only in their sexual relation, but also in the food that begins to upset Jarvis' stomach:

Last night's drink and this morning's sex still fuddle his perceptions of the world. Jarvis breathes heavily as he waits for his egg in the pause between orange juice and coffee. The orange juice, so fresh and cold, trickled in a chilly stream down his throat and to his stomach, and now lies there, acid and uneasy. Jarvis does not like orange juice but scarcely cares to say so. (Weldon, 2003: 6)

Lily's particular exploitation of her role as nurturer, her sexuality, and Jarvis's obedience and disempowerment are evident in this fragment. Lily experiences self-contemplation and self-satisfaction generated by her empowerment, whereas Madeline experiences 'abjection', as to mention again Julia

Kristeva's term. Madeline acknowledges her failure as a mother, wife and woman, realizes that she has been thrown away from all these positions, and this determines her feelings of self-disgust and guilt, and a sense of impurity and insecurity. Her last and desperate date and sexual experience with Mr. Quincey proves to be another disaster, since Madeline is able neither to take nor to offer satisfaction, but only feigns excitement and pleasure. Questioning her self-identity, which is highly precarious, Madeline feels vulnerability and guilt. Before her death, she examines once again her situation which seems repulsive to her:

Oh, I am Madeline, I am the first wife, I am the rightful one. My house, my home, my life, gone with my marriage. Myself left walking about the world, striped of my identity. I am Madeline: I am Hilary's mother. I cannot give her what she needs. But what am I to do? I cannot take pleasure in her; as Iris took no pleasure in me. There is a mist over my eyes: the weariness of hating too much, too silently. Hilary will wither in spite of my love, because of it, like a dried-up walnut in its shell: she can take no nourishment from me. I consume myself; there is nothing left over. (Weldon, 2003: 92)

Does this experience signify the total collapse and failure of mothers and women to nurture? Definitely not. As mentioned earlier, Weldon suggests that if the biological mother fails, the nurturing and feeding aspects of motherhood can be transposed onto substitute figures. Margot, after Madeline's funeral, takes Hilary to her house; Margot and her family make the necessary adjustments to accommodate Hilary and eventually the peace and equilibrium of the household are restored. Setting her home once again and re-entering the role of nurturer, Margot reassures the pleasures of servitude and succeeds in reconciling with herself and others, above all with Madeline by means of identification:

I am Margot, the doctor's wife, no longer young. I shall be happier, now that I have acknowledged grief, and loss, and the damage done to me by time, and other people, and events; and the damage that I did (...) I am Margot and Madeline in one, and always was. She was my sister, after all, and she was right: her child was mine, and mine was hers. (Weldon, 2003: 277)

Weldon emphasizes the necessity to establish new and alternative models for caring, nurturing, and responsibility. The prospect to achieve these models might seem utopian; however, the concept of the repetition of certain patterns of motherhood is a vivid one. We know from the experience of life that people who have been abused tend themselves to abuse other people. Nancy Chodorow suggests that "mothering itself is a repeating pattern"; she also claims that mothers produce daughters with definite "mothering capacities" and "evident desire to mother". (Chodorow, 1978: 7) This is exactly the case of Margot and also that of Hilary, the latter enjoying the pleasure of mothering her half-brother Jonathan. This aspect suggests the victory of the nurturing potential and also of the desire to care for others. The victory of Margot, who establishes herself once again as an authoritative nurturer in the house, gives hope of eventually being victorious to Hilary, who is now Margot's daughter and as such would imitate the mother. Hilary's final song of liberation and victory is obvious:

Oh, I am Hilary, daughter of a once-living mother, mother of children yet unknown. I shall never eat Sugar Puffs again, MY MOTHER'S DEATH HAS SET ME FREE. My life, her

death – that's the sum she gave me. Dying was the best thing she could do for me – this was her good and final gift. (Weldon, 2003: 274)

Conclusion

At first sight apparently a narrative of marital revenge, the novel is, as we have attempted to argue in the present study, much more complex than that, its thematic level comprising a large number of perspectives and concerns. Among them, of primary importance stands the idea of food and its consumption, which is presented and developed in relation to the issues regarding family life and matrimonial links, love and sexual desire, nourishment and care, and the status of woman as wife and mother.

The novel ends with a sense of reconciliation and the prospect of fulfillment of a woman's personality, Fay Weldon advocating and confirming by *Remember Me* and her other novels the powerful and eventually the victorious position of female characters and female authorship in the contemporary period despite the repeated declarations about the oppressive situations that continue to trap the female personality in a patriarchal society.

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