



WHY I AM OF TWO MINDS

By Fay Weldon

I like my body. I feel affectionately toward it. It has served me well for eight decades, taken me where I wanted to go, afforded me great pleasures. Let it age as it wants. I don't interfere with the process. I don't try to keep it young with Botox, lasers, peels, waxes—let alone the liposuction it certainly needs—if only because that would seem an insult to a body I like and appreciate. But I am not without vanity.

Indeed, there's a split-off part of me that's extremely vain. I call her Personality B. Personality A, the dominant one, disapproves of cosmetic surgery. Personality B is all for it. She's the one who travels 100 miles to London and back again every six weeks to have her hair colored and cut; who's been taking hormone therapy for the past 30 years (in spite of doctors' warnings), in the belief that estrogen keeps her hair shiny and her eyes bright and

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restores the sense of sexual expectancy that can go missing in women past menopause. She buys really expensive face creams because her grandmother (born 1880) told her the secret of a good complexion was never to wash your face but to use a good unguent. She uses it on her forearms too (what a wicked waste!) because she's used to seeing them smooth and creamy white, and it pains her that they no longer are.

Personality A is too busy writing to pay much attention to her looks. She's a regular

down-home sort of person, doesn't wear jewelry or makeup, shops for clothes on the Internet, relies on friends in New York to send her clothes that look OK on a dais. Personality A dislikes listening to herself on the radio or watching herself on TV, and if she can avoid seeing photos of herself, she will.

But Miss B is still in there lurking. The other day, when somebody phoned Ms. A to tell her there was a review of her book in the *Times*, the first thing she asked was, "Was it a good photo?" not "Was it a good review?"

And Miss B claims she really admires Renée Zellweger for having her eyelids lifted (so one gathers) and presenting herself to the world as the person she wants to be, not the person she was born as. Cosmetic surgery, Miss B insists, is only one step on from using lipstick in the quest for youth and beauty, so why not?

Ms. A, shocked, responds, "All very well, but why do women these days fly to male doctors to have their bits and pieces—noses, eyes, boobs, bottoms—maximized, minimized, filed down, shifted around and then, like Renée, deny they've had it done? What are we so guilty about?" To which Miss B replies, "Well, look at us both: Work it out."

I started out as all Ms. A, not a flicker of Miss B. My mother (born 1906) was a small, dark-eyed, slender beauty, my father a big-boned, blue-eyed doctor. My sister (born 1929) took after my mother. I (born 1931) took after my father, which was something of a disappointment to my mother. But plain or pretty in those days was regarded as God's will: A girl should be content with the cards he dealt her at birth and play them as best she could. I accepted that my mother and sister were beauties and I was not, and just got on with my life. It was easier in those days, mind you, for people looked at the world from the inside out, not the outside in, there being so few cameras about. What one looked like or what one wore hardly mattered, and one grew up unselfconscious.

So it was as a dyed-in-the-wool Ms. A that I grew up to be a mother of four, and motherhood is intrinsically dowdy. It was only when I employed a series of au pairs from various nations, two of whom decided to have nose jobs, that Miss B took root and began to blossom. Esther, a deeply serious and melancholy girl from Israel, had her nose fixed in 1968. Theresa, Irish and very religious, a year later. Due secrecy was observed. Both girls were delighted with the results. A male surgeon had carved their noses to conform to his idea of beauty, and lo! these girls were beautiful—or, once the bruises healed, they thought and behaved as if they were.

When Esther went home to Israel, nobody noticed that her nose was smaller, but her boyfriend proposed.

Theresa met and married a widowed father of six and satisfied her desire to be a mother. Which quite reconciled me to the benefits of cosmetic surgery: Pay enough, and dreams come true. Think you are beautiful, and you are (though I'll swear that with time, their original noses just grew back).

Thus convinced, I wrote a novel in 1983 called *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*: about Ruth, a wife who had cosmetic surgery in order to turn herself into her husband's current mistress. Ruth was large, clumsy, plain, even ugly, but longed to be the kind of woman men fell in love with. It was a novel about envy rather than jealousy, but after a BBC TV adaptation, then a Hollywood version with Roseanne Barr and Meryl Streep, I was dubbed the Queen of Revenge. I had every sympathy with my warty, oversize heroine Ruth: She wanted romantic love, but all she ever got was sex.

In 1986, when I was in Hollywood, Miss B really surfaced, the Beverly Wilshire being no place for the likes of Ms. A. My agent had booked an appointment with Elizabeth Taylor's cosmetic surgeon to discuss various procedures for herself, and I went along to keep her company. The surgeon remarked that he liked my bone structure, but I could do with an eyelid lift—I'd look better in photos if my eyes opened wider. So I stayed on in L.A. for an extra three days and had it done there and then. I told the folks back home I had the flu. I can't remember much about the op itself except that it hurt. My eyes did seem minimally wider—although you so quickly get used to what you're seeing in the mirror that after a day or two you can no longer tell. B-dominant personalities, of course, spend far longer in front of the mirror than do A's.

When I got home to England, all my then husband said, as I came through the door with my suitcase, was, "You do look expensive!" I didn't doubt him. Liz Taylor's surgeon had left his mark. But I didn't get any comments from anyone else, and once back on home ground, I quickly reverted to A-dominant and forgot all about it.

In 1990 that husband of 30 years left me for someone who looked much less expensive than I did. It occurs to me now, writing this article, that the reason might well have been that I was no longer the girl he'd married, cheap date and ordinary eyed, but a high-maintenance, wide-eyed person. I will never know. He died years back. I can't ask him.

Years passed. I grew older. Women now earned their own incomes, made their own choices. I didn't give my eyelids much thought. It didn't seem to me that any particular feminist principle was at stake when it came to cosmetic surgery. Women increasingly paid to make themselves beautiful and/or young for their audience, for their fans or for other women, but seldom now for the gratification of men.

But nothing is for nothing. I told all. The backlash came in the mid-'90s when a popular newspaper sent a journalist to interview me for a series on "women of achievement." I talked to her freely. I mentioned the eyelid lift. Why not? The next day, a banner headline read MY FACE-LIFT SAVED MY LIFE—FAY WELDON CONFESSES, or something similar. Worse, the piece read as if I had written it, and a thoroughly stupid, gushing, hypocritical, self-important person I appeared to be. Other media noticed. For a time I was in the doghouse: "Call yourself a feminist!" "So much for principle!" and so forth.

So my agent billed the newspaper £10,000 for a writing fee, and of course they refused: We haggled, they argued, and then we settled at £5,000, to be paid to the Prince's Trust—a big charity for disadvantaged youngsters here in Britain. A couple of

months later, I got a thank-you note from Prince Charles, bemused as to what I could have done to get money out of the tabloid in question and inviting me and my new husband (see—happy ending!) to dinner at St.

James's Palace. Which was some compensation. Well, probably quite a lot. But last month I had a cataract operation that undid the eyelid lift of some 30 years ago. So it's back to Ms. A, which serves me right.

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BY

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TO NIP AND TUCK—OR NOT?

THAT IS THE QUESTION.

**AND THE ANSWER DEPENDS ON WHOM YOU ASK.
THREE OPINIONISTAS MAKE PASSIONATE CASES
FOR WHY THEY WILL OR WON'T COSMETICALLY
ALTER THE FACES NATURE GAVE THEM**