

# A taste of honey

(*A Taste of Honey* is the first play by the British dramatist [Shelagh Delaney](#))

In 1960s social conditions of marginalised women are oppressive. Their identity is going through transformation, they are often confused in the changing society and they seem to be stuck between the conventional values and the illusion of freedom. The gender as a cultural construction is inextricably linked to concepts of family, marriage and romance, but also class, race and ethnicity. In *A Taste of Honey* (Richardson, 1961) film the gender as a cultural structure is constructed through the narrative, where 'dramatic situations are most often structured by social conditions which define and set limits to how the protagonist can deal with life' (Langkjær, 2011). It is a social realist film and it is part of the British New Wave Cinema.

This film focuses on Anglian women, while most kitchen sink dramas describe everyday life of angry young men. The main character of Saturday night and Sunday morning (Reisz, 1960) is opposite to Jo of *A Taste of Honey* in many things. He spends his time drinking and enjoying life, he is a turbulent, wild and pride and he does not look like a victim of the society. In the meantime he often feels powerless and they both, Arthur and Jo need to deal with similar difficulties related to abortion, sexuality and marriage, but a significant difference between them, that Arthur would squelch everybody to enjoy his life, while Jo cares about others, she is less selfish, refuses abortion and she is trying to find happiness living a straight and a moral life.

*A Taste of Honey* starts with a netball game. Netball is a metaphor, which synecdoche the film. The game represents behaviour, the rules of the society and authority. Jo does not want to play by the rules. She is an outcast individual, daughter of a careless mother and both of them are inconvenient characters. We can see a social discourse when she admits to her

classmate that she can not afford to go out in the evening, because she does not have any proper cloths to wear. In contrast Arthur from Saturday night and Sunday morning film has a good income, he is supporting his family and he is wearing nice cloths.

When she arrives home, overhears her mother talking with the landlady. After that they escape from the flat through the window. They are carrying a bird cage as well. It is metaphor for freedom. Both Jo and Helen are liminal characters and they are always on the way, often hiding from somebody. On the bus travelling to their new home we can see a close up of Helen, then we cut to a point-of-view shot of a church. Point-of-view shots from Jo's and Helen's view encourage identification with them and emphasises the contrast between Victorian architecture and Helen and Jo. Shots are naturalistic and this is a feature of social realism. Their feminist discourse about the marriage acknowledge us that for them marriage is an institution, a cage and a prison. However, when Peter appears on the scene, Helen is thinking about marriage, financial security and status provided by Peter, who is a selfish alcoholic lout; a stereotype. Jo resents him and she seems jealous of him. Through the story we can see Jo's progress and change of her life through relationships with other characters, so the narrative could be considered also as a Bildungsroman. There is repeated motive of romanticism represented by innocence and childhood and it promotes the intension between freedom and authority.

Helen finds Jo's drawings and discovers that her daughter is talented. From this scene sound bridge leads to the class room, where a teacher is reciting from John Keats' Ode to a Nightingale. This scene contains educational and literary discourses. Here we can see a still where Jo is daydreaming or it could be that she is listening intensively the poem, we are not shown what she is thinking about. She is starting a parody of the teacher. The teacher represents authority, and Jo's behaviour makes her angry. The teacher is punishing Jo because she is not respecting rules.

Jo begins a romantic relationship with a black sailor. The non diegetic music rhythm refers to a colonial discourse. He is converting the marriage to a primitive cult. Both are childish characters, while Helen and Peter are opposite. Helen informs Jo that she is going to marry Peter. We can see funfair; there are similar scenes in Dreamland. Funfair represents mass culture. Shot of distorted mirrors may stay for describing relationship of Helen and Peter. Maybe it points a little bit that sex is possible without marriage. They are adult and experienced in contrast to Jo and Jimmy. Jo is working in a shoe shop, Geoffrey comes in the shop. There is a discourse of body language and behaviour that shows Geoff as a homosexual. They go to the funfair. It is now different, more naturalistic than before, because it shows a different relationship between Jo and Geoff. He walks home with Jo. We can see Chiaroscuro effect when Geoff is staying on his own in front of Jo's house, that indicates his alienation or isolation. Since Jimmy has left, Jo lives with Geoff. She finds idyllic domestic harmony with him, but 'the very impossibility of integrating the sexual and the domestic is underlined by Geoff's attempted advances which Jo rejects' (Hill, 1986). Jo discovers she is pregnant. We can see epic shots under the arch with industrial town in the background, then a close mid shot. They are discussing about the baby and abortion. Camera turns to a low angle shot; we can see clouds. It is a natural shot that express her potential for freedom and romantic imaginary far from society. The shape of the arch symbolizes the cage that limits her dreams to become true. Geoff accepts the status of the father and he is going to a baby clinic for advice how to be mother. This medical discourse is a bit ironic when he appears in the clinic asking for information.

Helen has been thrown out by Peter and she is coming back to Jo. She behaves very rudely to Geoff in order to get rid of him. Geoff mentioned to Jo earlier 'I'd rather be dead, than away from you', therefore we can say that he symbolically dies at the end, because he leaves Jo.

The end of the story does not give solution; it is opposite to the mainstream cinema. Most of

the conventional movies would end up with marriage, here we have ending with a mother-daughter relationship. In addition it is an open ending or a new beginning that is characteristic for social realist films.

## **Bibliography**

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