



**Research Article**

## **Escapism in Shelagh Delaney's: A Taste of Honey**

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**Keywords**  
Shelagh Delaney,  
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**Abstract**  
Delaney wrote her play when she was nineteen years old aiming at shedding lights on many social hidden issues in her society at that period. The play was classified as a "Kitchen Sink" genre which emerged in England to present the proletarian's problems so " a reader or a spectator feels that it is directed for the whole world and suit any period of time" (Taher87). Due to the pivotal role of the theater and its impact upon the audience, Delaney wrote *A Taste of Honey* as a play instead of novel as planned by her at the beginning of writing process. "The traditional forms of art have failed to satisfy the wishes and aspirations of the new artists who deliberately look for new forms to express their attitudes towards the new state of life to be lived after grave wars that have caused humanity great losses on many and various levels" (Wale 25). The setting of the play is Sanford, 1950 a two act play acted by five characters. The playwright's main concern is the barren relationship between a mother and her daughter emphasizing the decaying familial bonds in the society between 1950 -1960 and the sense of loneliness experienced by all the characters that leads eventually to escape their reality via different ways of escapism.

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### **1. Introduction**

Delaney wrote her play when she was nineteen years old aiming at shedding lights on many social hidden issues in her society at that period. The play was classified as a "Kitchen Sink" genre which emerged in England to present the proletarian's problems so " a reader or a spectator feels that it is directed for the whole world and suit any period of time" (Taher87). Due to the pivotal role of the theater and its impact upon the audience, Delaney wrote *A Taste of Honey* as a play instead of novel as planned by her at the beginning of writing process. "The traditional forms of art have failed to satisfy the wishes and aspirations of the new artists who deliberately look for new forms to express their attitudes towards the new state of life to be lived after grave wars that have caused humanity great losses on many and various levels" (Wale 25). The setting of the play is Sanford, 1950 a two act play acted by five characters. The playwright's main concern is the barren relationship between a mother and her daughter emphasizing the decaying familial bonds in the society between 1950 -1960 and the sense of loneliness experienced by all the characters that leads eventually to escape their reality via different ways of escapism. "The children absorb the

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positive and negative conversation from their parents. Obviously, they response according to their receiving conversations and feeling”(Saddam39)

*HELEN : Children owe their parents these little attentions.*

*jo: I don't owe you a thing (Act 1, Scene 1).*

The play centers on Jo, a girl of 17, who is totally ignored by her busy mother in the unstable relations with men as a manifestation to escape her shallow life and bitter reality. So in return the daughter's feeling towards her mother is full with resentment and aggression. Delaney tackled new ideas that aroused the curiosity of the spectators like the single mother who carries the burden of her family by herself due to the absence of the husband-figure in the play. She also presents the kind homosexual character who takes care of, Jo, the protagonist's daughter. Moreover, the dramatist hits upon another crucial issue which is racial relations in the sense that Jo's boyfriend is Jimmy is a black person whom at that time used to be scorned by the white race.

The bunch of themes in Delaney's play reflected the plight of modern human being made her play a distinguished and brilliant literary piece of work. Modernity offers the characters a very bad and awful chances in life that may lead them to live a hellish on “In most cases, they will be destroyed in the most tragic manner when they leave their habitat and the problems of the modern city will follow them to their graves.” (Sharif 63)

The dramatist skillfully relates the setting of the play to the characters themselves especially when Jo describes the new flat they are moving to as dark and dump which indicates the gloominess and darkness of their spiritual part. Therefore, when reading the play closely, the reader may easily figure out along with the ideas mentioned above the sense of escapism from reality each character experience in different ways.

*Helen: For God's sake shut up! Close your mouth for five minutes. And you can turn the light off and come to bed.*

*Jo: Aren't we going to clear this lot up ?*

*Helen: No, it'll look all right in the dark.*

*Jo: Yes, it's seen at its best, this room, in the dark*

*Helen: Everything is seen at its best in the dark – including me. I love it. Can't understand why you're so scared of it.*

*Jo: I'm not frightened of the darkness outside. It's the darkness*

*Inside houses I don't like (Act 1, Scene 1).*

The lines suggest the loss of insight deep inside the characters that lost their proper track in life; therefore, they are experiencing darkness physically and spiritually. They do have sight but lost their insight and the sense of humanity. The idea of darkness is also emphasized by Peter when talking to Helen describing the place as “Tenements, cemetery, slaughterhouse” (Act 1, Scene 1). The new neighbor is ghostly, shadowy, and uninhabitable one.

From the very beginning of the play Helen is depicted as an alcohol woman who tries to find an outlet to her meaningless life either by having physical relations or drinking as Joe talks to her mother when moving to their dark and gloomy flat "Why should I run round after you?" (Act 1, Scene 1) in these lines Jo is complaining of her mother's misbehavior when she asks her to bring her Whisky to drink. The daughter is serving her selfish mother who ignored all her responsibilities as a mother instead she spent her times fulfilling her sexual desires.

Escapism is usually used as a way to unwind and remove oneself from the difficulties of daily life. However, facing reality and all its complexities is inevitable. "Drink, drink, drink, that's all you're fit for. You make me sick" (Act 1, Scene 1). Thinking falsely that addiction may help her in solving the problems, Helen refuses to accept her fate and thinks life may appear as it should be rather than as it is. "Escapism is mental diversion from unpleasant or boring aspects of daily life, typically through activities involving imagination or entertainment. Escapism may be used to occupy one's self away from persistent feelings of depression or general sadness"(online).

Through character construction, one may argue that the characters are doomed in the world. The play highlights the tragedy of everyone whose world and whose reality have no relationship with what is real. It is worth noting that through the events of the play Helen watches movies as a means of manifestation to the suppressed desires is to unleash the capacity of her imagination where she would like to be or how she would like to live. The usage of human fantasy is one of the main Freudian theorization in which he deals with the psychological escapism, stating that every human is in desperate need to use his imagination or dreams to uncover his latent content as a way of relief. "[T]hey cannot subsist on the scanty satisfaction they can extort from reality. We simply cannot do without auxiliary constructions" (Freud 419)

As for the daughter, Jo, she sought an escape throughout her physical relationship with a black man. Despite the social discrimination towards the black race Jo gets pregnant from Jimmy, a navy man, who left her for months to work and collect money. He promised her to be back, yet the play ends and he did not show up. Astonishingly enough, Helen has left her daughter during her pregnancy time pursuing her physical desires with Peter, a much younger man than her. So the decline of the family reflects the deterioration of the human morals and values in England at that time. Not only this, but the daughter suffered from "fragmented identity" also that kept her lost and deluded all the time (Khalaf 25). As Robert E. Jones notes: "When the economic system on which this society had been based was destroyed, the society fell with it" (Jones 211).

Helen leaves her daughter and never comes back when she knows that her grandchild would be black. "Are you coming back?" "(Act 2, Scene 2) Jo asking her mother at the end of play when the mother told her that she will go to drink as a sign of her rejection to the black baby her daughter will have within few months. Ironically speaking, Jo was attended by Geof, a homosexual man, who lives with her and pays her rent during the period of her pregnancy. He even proposed to her but Jo rejected. The playwright in her play refers implicitly to the humanity of Geof

who offers Jo help, kind treatment, passion, and warmth that her mother did not give her. In return the mother figure denies her role "And what do you think I can do about it? In any case, bearing a child doesn't place one under an obligation to it." Here Helen reveals her belief towards motherhood and her commitment which she keeps escape from.

Eventually the teenager daughter has to endure and face the cruelty of life by herself unlike her escapist mother. "Through her experience, she also learns how to stoically endure the loss of loved ones and to defend herself in times of hazards and adversity. She also learns to live on her own and to be responsible for other people" (Ismael 531). The play also plainly suggests the impossibility of escaping reality and every individual despite poverty and all harsh circumstances should embrace the present including all its horrors and misfortunes. In writing her play Delaney acted as both a social historian, gathering various facts about the British society, and as a British citizen with deep-seated beliefs about her community. As a result she presented both factual and instinctive works. The negative impact of capitalism led to the falling a part of the social relationships I.e. the rise of industrialization and the increasing number of poor people who are striving to earn their living created dysfunctional families and lost people who escape their destiny by all means "Human selfishness thus has turned the world into a waste land beyond remedy" (Al-Nawas 171 ). As a result even law failed to secure the life of the characters since it is believed that "The law system in each society is the mechanism which society has established to secure its own members. Theoretically and intuitively, the law protects all people: the rich and the poor, the ignorant and the educated, the old and young people." (Segar 403)

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