

the same fashion. We need to have some idea who is responsible for deciding what's to happen to resources. But the institution can't justify our acting in a way which contradicts its whole purpose. We are, so to speak, custodians of what are in the last analysis the resources of mankind at large. If more good would be done for mankind at large by our giving them away, or even by our being expropriated, justice demands that we part with them without any resistance.

Godwin, of course, has an unenviably dotty reputation as a man whose enthusiasm for the control of matter by enlightened mind led him to suppose that even the attenuated sort of family would become redundant when reason equipped us with immortality and made procreation old-fashioned. But in the absence of divine ordinance, unthinking traditionalism, or a revised version of the caste system, Godwin is a more haunting figure than that would suggest. Twentieth century philosophers of an infinitely less utopian cast of mind have found it hard to see what ultimate foundation our duties can have, other than the welfare of everyone whose lives we are in a position to affect. They have found it equally hard to explain why those duties should simply cease at the borders of our family or our country when the actual effects of our various actions do not.

All the analogies are deeply disturbing. If you happened to be driving along and came across an injured child by the roadside, you would not wonder whose child it was, would not think that it was all the fault of the motorist whose first duty was to avoid injuring the child in the first place; you would not unduly worry about the fact that you'd put yourself to a fiver's worth of inconvenience in getting the child to hospital. If you asked why it was *your* task to cope with the child, the answer that it happened to be *you* who'd come across him would be perfectly adequate. If you asked why you ought to look after *him*, the answer that it happened to be *him* whom you'd come across would be equally good. You'd not ask yourself whether he might grow up a perfect beast, so that you'd be causing more damage than you'd be preventing. And so on.

But since it is obviously impossible even to begin to work out what would constitute doing your duty by mankind at large—would contributing money to a research project which *might* make a lot of difference to Third World agriculture be better than handing the same sum to a child whose life it would *certainly* save?—it's not surprising that so many people feel a sort of guilty helplessness in face of so many incalculable demands. The tendency of so many people to confine their aspirations to the welfare of a spouse and two-point-four children is, perhaps, less of an indictment of mass society or of human selfishness than testimony to our need for a finite list of obligations and an identifiable group of people to whom we owe them.



Shelagh Delaney

Arts in society A taste of fame

Tony Gould

Fortune is notoriously fickle. To be well known at an early age may well result in being ignored later on. Yesterday's celebrities are often today's forgotten men—and women.

Take the case of Shelagh Delaney: her play, *A Taste of Honey*, brought her to prominence before she was 20. This was back in 1958, when the "teenage thing" had barely begun. The newspapers took up the girl from Salford—the "English Sagan," as they called her. She was photographed and interviewed, featured on the fashion pages, saying what colour underwear she preferred, and generally put through the hoops.

Her second play, *The Lion in Love*, which was put on at the Royal Court at the end of 1960, was not a success. But Delaney was still news. In 1961 and 1962, her ban-the-bomb activities earned her a new label—that of "Angry young woman." "Angry young men," of course, were now defunct.

By 1963, T. C. Worsley was writing an article in the *Financial Times* entitled, "Whatever happened to Shelagh Delaney?" It began: "The question is not meant to be offensive, nor is it rhetorical. I feel I know what has happened to her. She has been crippled, as a writer, by overpraise. When her first slender little play appeared, she was hailed as a girl genius—I remember at the time begging my colleagues not to overestimate her. But they wrote articles about her . . . with the result I foresaw. Instead of producing the tender, warm, but essentially modest plays of which she seemed capable, she began to feel, I suspect, that she had to produce masterpieces."

In 1964, Delaney produced both a slender collection of prose pieces, called *Sweetly Sings the Donkey* (copyright "Shelagh Delaney Productions Ltd"), and—more to the liking of the press—a daughter, Charlotte. She was now 25—and unmarried. She told the *Daily Herald*: "No, I don't

like the idea of marriage. It ties two people too much."

Since then the press has more or less left her alone. She has been allowed to speak to the public through her work, rather than as a phenomenon. Lindsay Anderson made a film based on her story, *The White Bus*, which she scripted; and she wrote two more film scripts—for Albert Finney's *Charlie Bubbles* and Bryan Forbes's *The Raging Moon* (though the latter was so altered that she insisted her name be removed from the credits). Her first television play, *St Martin's Summer*—about a woman in hospital—was shown on ITV in 1974. And now, just recently, we've seen her six-part drama series, *The House that Jack Built*—which follows the fortunes of a married couple over a period of ten years—on BBC1.

No doubt it's a coincidence that it overlapped with a repeat screening of Ingmar Bergman's *Six Scenes from a Marriage* on BBC2. But it does invite some sort of comparison, not just because of the similar theme, but also because of the fate of two artists who both came to public notice—here, at any rate—at much the same time.

Bergman, of course, had been around for some time, but his work achieved a peak of popularity in England in the early sixties—with frequent seasons of his films at the Hampstead Everyman and elsewhere on the art circuit. By the mid-sixties the vogue was over and, though Bergman continued to produce films at a prolific rate, it was definitely not the done thing to express too great an enthusiasm for his work. For a while he suffered an eclipse. But now perhaps he can be said to have got beyond the reach of fashion. Certainly his *Six Scenes from a Marriage* got plenty of critical attention when the series was first shown.

The House that Jack Built, on the other hand, was largely ignored by the critics. Delaney has produced nothing like the output of a Bergman, of course, and maybe it will take her a little longer to emerge from the trough that follows too enthusiastic a reception of early work.

It is not a question of whether or not the initial enthusiasm was justified (it surely was), but of the effect of that enthusiasm on the development of the writer's talent and on the public's expectation of her work. There may be some truth in Worsley's diagnosis of Delaney's predicament in 1963, but his patronising concern seems unjustified in the event. The public may have expected more spectacular achievements, but Delaney herself always seems to have been remarkably clear-headed about her own nature and talent.

In an interview in 1960, she said, "I tend to be lazy and only work when I have the sort of challenge which is presented by a successful first play . . . I think slowly and only write quickly." Sixteen years later, in a now "rare" interview for the same paper, she said more or less the same thing: "I've got a very slow one-track mind. It takes me years to think. But I write very quickly, I need a deadline. One half of me is a perfectionist; the other is a lazy good-for-nothing."

The House that Jack Built, she said, was about "a cowboy and a madonna." Jack "thinks of himself as a cowboy," and as for Lu: "Aren't all women madonnas if they are married and have children?" Their lives are "hall-marked by their ordinariness." What happens? "Well, I suppose they lose their innocence. That's what the play is really about . . . They are concerned with timeless things like money, food and sex."

The marital bickering of a very ordinary couple—over six half-hour episodes—doesn't sound like the recipe for a successful drama series. Bergman's series at least has several characters; Delaney's only has two (ably played by Duggie Brown and Sharon Duce). Yet it works.

Colin MacInnes wrote of *A Taste of Honey* that it was "the first play I can remember about working class people that entirely escapes being a 'working class play': no patronage, no dogma, just the thing as it is, taken straight. In general hilarious and sardonic, the play has authentic lyrical moments arising naturally from the very situations that created the hilarity; and however tart and ludicrous, it gives a final overwhelming impression of good health—of a feeling for life that is positive, sensible and generous." The same applies to *The House that Jack Built*.

The essential difference between this series and *Six Scenes from a Marriage* is in the underlying attitude to marriage. Both writers present it as a trap; but Bergman is intent on giving us the full horror story of a marital bust-up—the hatred that replaces love, and so on—no holds barred. Delaney, on the other hand, though she doesn't spare us the pain of that estrangement which may come of too great a familiarity, is actually *celebrating* the intimacy of marriage. We identify with Jack and Lu to such an extent that we desperately want them to be reconciled. True, there are no other characters to catch our attention or divert our sympathy.

But that, surely, is the point. So much of the strain of modern marriage comes from the isolation individual couples experience. Life is so compartmentalised: home is one thing, work another. Hence the frustration people feel, and the exaggerated expectations husbands and wives have of one another.

For Delaney, marriage is both sacrament and trap. The ultimate reconciliation of Jack and Lu represents a triumph, albeit a wry and provisional one. Jack's final words—"Well, look at it this way, Lu—if I don't have you, some other lout will . . ."—convey just the right mixture of romanticism and cynicism.

Unlike most of Bergman's characters, Jack and Lu are, first and foremost, likeable. Nowhere is Delaney's artistry more evident than in her ability to create two very ordinary people who are never even remotely boring. Jack is as much poet as cowboy: in the first episode, on their wedding night, he tries to arouse the prostrate Lu by quoting great chunks of John Donne's "To his mistress going to bed." If this were done straight—as in Wesker's

Chips with Everything, where an airman stands up and recites Burns in a crowded NAAFI—it would be merely embarrassing. But Delaney is too good an artist for that. She makes Jack's recitation both comic and touching by having it take place when Lu, who has drunk herself into a stupor, is about to throw up. "I don't think you'll be getting any carnal knowledge of me tonight," she says.

In Delaney's world, reality is always pricking the bubble of romance. Jack's yearnings, for instance, are shown up as pure fantasy. Lu says, "I admit my visions are a bit thin on the ground, but when something does take my fancy I like to see it develop." They are arguing about the possibility of buying a castle in Scotland (their house being due for demolition). It is Jack's idea, but when Lu begins to take him seriously he finds all sorts of objections—as Lu says, "For all your extravagant talk you're just as stuck in the mud as everybody else." So in the end they move into a kind of no man's land—neither town nor country, and not even a proper suburb, it's somewhere adjacent to a motorway, within sight of a field. They're saddled with an enormous mortgage; their lives are dominated by money worries, and their banter loses its sparkle.

Lu says, "I sometimes look at you and wonder what I've done to you . . . What getting married's done, I mean. You reminded me of a cowboy in the old days, the way you strutted about caring for nothing and laughing at everything. I haven't seen you look like that for years. Whenever you're with me you're either asleep in front of the television or suffocating under gas bills—" And Jack replies: "Are you trying to tell me that I've lost my allure?"

His misunderstanding is a telling one. He worries about growing old and jokes grimly on the subject of pensioners. From the way she sees him talking to another girl, Lu knows he is ready to fall in love again. For her the situation is intolerable. As she later tells him, "I started to feel I was being used as some sort of stopgap while you waited for something better to turn up." She goes out to work again and, with the increased self-confidence that comes of being admired, she does what he could never do: she walks out on him. But while they're apart they think of nothing but each other, and this yearning for one another finally overcomes even Lu's dread of a return to the prison-house of marriage.

Delaney has said that everything she writes "could begin with 'Once upon a time . . .'" They're fairy stories . . . or lies." Well, *The House that Jack Built* is a true story, and if Jack and Lu don't exactly live happily ever after, they do come through.

To sit through Bergman's *Six Scenes from a Marriage* is a harrowing experience; to watch *The House that Jack Built* is, finally, a cheering one. That "feeling for life that is positive, sensible and generous," which MacInnes applauded nearly 20 years ago, is as rare now as it was then. The least we can do is recognise it when we see it—and pay homage.



still from Salo/John Kobal

Pasolini's knife edge

Raymond Durnat

Twenty five years ago, the film director Pier Paolo Pasolini, wrote: "I spend most of my life beyond the edges of the city, or, as a bad neo-realist poet imitating the hermetics would say, beyond the city's end-stations. I love life with such violence and such vehemence that no good can come of it. I am speaking of the physical side of life: the sun, grass, youth. It is an addiction more terrible than cocaine. . . . I devour it voraciously. . . . How it will all end, I don't know . . ." On 2 November 1975 he was found battered to death in a wasteland near Rome. His 19 year old assailant pleaded self-defence against sexual advances and assault. His extraordinary last film, *Salò*, based on De Sade, has briefly achieved a London club release, but it was taken off last week and the police are prosecuting.

Pasolini's death was a tragedy for the cinema and for Italian culture. As a film director, he influenced the young more than Antonioni or Fellini did. His skill at opening scandalous themes out onto larger issues influenced Bertolucci (*Last Tango in Paris*) and Liliana Cavani (*The Night Porter*), as well as Fellini himself in his *Satyricon*. Before turning to movies, he had established himself as a major writer.

He was born in Bologna in 1922. For years he thought he hated his father, an army officer from the minor nobility. He described his mother as a *petit bourgeois* who had kept her peasant roots. His father's language was Italian, his mother's Venetian. Pasolini's first poems, published at 17, were written in neither of his parental tongues, but in Friulan, the language of the peasants amidst whom his family lived and with whom he was to live during the resistance.

His literary activities ranged from the political poems of *The Ashes of Gramsci* (1957) to translations of Plautus. He edited anthologies of dialect poetry, and in the mid-1950s founded the para-marxist literary journal, *Officina*. He opposed his own