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Faculty of Arts and Philosophy**

**Kitchen Sink Drama: Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* and  
Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen***

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### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Práce nazvaná Kitchen Sink Drama: Shelagh Delaney's A Taste of Honey and Arnold Wesker's The Kitchen se zaměří na tzv. novou vlnu realistického dramatu. V úvodní části se autor s využitím relevantní sekundární literatury bude zabývat problematikou a specifiky "kitchen sink drama" a zasadí jeho vznik do společensko-kulturního kontextu. V hlavní části se student zaměří na výše zmíněné divadelní hry a vystopuje v nich, analyzuje a srovná prvky, které charakterizují tuto novou vlnu realistického dramatu. Na konci práce autor své závěry přehledně shrne.

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Luboš Nehyba

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## **Abstract**

The main subject of the paper is the analysis of two pieces of 'kitchen sink drama'. The analyzed plays are *The Kitchen* by Arnold Wesker and *A Taste of Honey* by Shelagh Delaney. In the initial part of the paper, historical and cultural background of development of the genre is described and its features are specified. The following part contains the analysis focused on the features of the genre that can be found in the aforementioned plays. The analysis also contains a comparison of both plays and its last part presents that are certain aspects specific for *A Taste of Honey*.

## **Key words**

Arnold Wesker; *The Kitchen*; Shelagh Delaney; *A Taste of Honey*; kitchen sink drama; new wave of British realism; working class; conflicts

## **Abstrakt**

Tato práce se zabývá analýzou dvou divadelních her patřících do tzv. 'kitchen sink drama'. Těmi to hrami jsou *The Kitchen (Kuchyně)* od Arnolda Weskera a *A Taste of Honey (Chut' medu)* od Shelagh Delaney. V úvodní části je popsáno historické a kulturní pozadí pro vznik daného žánru a jsou zde vymezena některá jeho specifika. Další části práce obsahují analýzu rysů uvedeného žánru obsažených ve výše uvedených hrách a jejich vzájemné porovnání. Poslední část práce je věnována prvkům specifickým pro hru *A Taste of Honey*.

## **Klíčová slova**

Arnold Wesker; *Kuchyně*; Shelagh Delaney; *Chut' medu*; kitchen sink drama; nová vlna realistického dramatu; pracující třída; konflikty

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## 1. Introduction

The main subject of the thesis is the analysis of two plays of ‘kitchen sink drama’. This phrase is customarily used as a term for plays that belong to the new wave of British realism. This tendency in British playwriting appeared in the late 1950’s and revitalized the stagnating theatre scene in Great Britain. One of its specifics is a realistic depiction of the conditions ordinary people live in. New wave plays are often set in a domestic environment and therefore the term ‘kitchen sink drama’ is applied to them.

The first play to be analyzed is *The Kitchen* written by Arnold Wesker, an important British playwright, who belongs to the group of authors who are sometimes referred to as “angry young men.” Nevertheless, the term is not used in the paper, since *A Taste of Honey*, the second analyzed play, was written by a woman and the usage of the term thus seems inappropriate. The author of *A Taste of Honey* is Shelagh Delaney and the play is the first piece she wrote.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The initial part gives some historical and cultural context of development of ‘kitchen sink drama’ and defines the features of this genre. Firstly, it summarizes the historical events that caused the appearance of young playwrights on the British theatre scene and then it provides a brief description of the influence of the Education Act 1944 on political awareness of working-class inhabitants of Great Britain. Secondly, it describes the state of the British theatre in the post-war period and explains the influence of censorship on the theatre scene. *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne is also briefly mentioned because it is frequently considered the most significant play of the new wave of British realism. Thirdly, characteristic features of ‘kitchen sink drama’ are concentrated on. The common social background of the majority of the ‘kitchen sink drama’ authors is mentioned as one of the features that distinguish the genre. Then the revolutionary themes these writers were concentrated on and their interest in working classes are examined. The first part of the thesis does not contain biographical information about the authors of the analyzed plays, since providing such information is not relevant for the purpose of the paper.

It should be also mentioned that the second part of the thesis does not deal with all specifics of ‘kitchen sink drama’. Only certain features of the genre were selected for the purpose of the paper. These features re pointed out in both plays and closely



analyzed. The second part of this work also contains a comparison of *The Kitchen* and *A Taste of Honey*. In its last part, there are mentioned certain specifics of *A Taste of Honey* related to the fact that it was written by a female author. At the end of the paper, results of the analysis are summarized and the work is concluded.

## **2. Historical and cultural context, features of ‘kitchen sink drama’**

The initial part of the thesis is divided into two parts. The first part is focused on the historical and cultural background of development of ‘kitchen sink drama’. It contains a summary of the events that led to the appearance of the genre, and it also examines the state of the British theatre before the appearance of the new wave of British drama in the late 1950’s. The purpose of the second part is to describe ‘kitchen sink drama’ and to define its features.

### **2.1 Historical background**

It might be rather complicated to define all historical events that led to the appearance of ‘kitchen sink drama’ on the British theatre scene. Roger Cornish and Violet Ketels, the authors of the book named *Landmarks of Modern British Drama: Plays of The Sixties*, observe that radical changes of form and content of theatre plays of the 1950’s and 1960’s were caused by a number of historical events and processes. These include a general change in national consciousness initiated by the Suez crisis and the preceding failure of the Labour government to deliver the announced and eagerly expected social reforms that were supposed to reduce the class differences. (1985, xiv) Nevertheless, it is possible to find one aspect that helped to form the new British drama in a more significant way. It was the Education Act 1944. Therefore, the following subchapter is focused on the Act, and its influence on the changing opinion of working-class people towards their social status.

The Education Act 1944 changed the education system for secondary schools in England and Wales. It was aimed to remove the inequalities in the system and it granted free secondary education for all students up to the age of fifteen. (Barber, 1994, 352) Peter Clifford and Anthony F. Heath, in their article “Inequalities in Education in the Twentieth Century“, observe that another purpose of the Act was to increase social mobility in the British class system. This should consequently help to improve the economic situation of the country. Given to the newly introduced possibility of achieving higher education, students with the working-class background were supposed to aspire for more prestigious working positions than they used to in the past.

Nevertheless, the educational reform had very little impact on differences between classes. (Clifford; Heath, 1990, 1) Despite this fact, one effect of the plan was evident. Within twenty years since the World War II, the number of students of publicly-provided schools increased from five to twenty million students. (Barber, 1994, 353) Education at least, became more accessible.

One of the consequences of the introduction of the Act was that educated working-class people were gradually becoming aware of their position in the British society. Consequently, their understanding of the disadvantageous situation initiated efforts to change it. This tendency was described by D. Sunshine Hillygus in his article “The Missing Link: Exploring the Relationship Between Higher Education and Political Engagement”. He states that education has been always crucial for further political participation of students. People who achieve higher education gain better awareness of their position in the society and become more involved in politics in order to make some effort to improve it. (2005, 25)

In the case of post-war British drama, this increasing political awareness of working-class people combined with failure of the government to apply the promoted social reforms resulted in the fact the new generation of artists started to search for new ways of expressing their disillusionment. Not all of them finished their secondary school studies, nor had a university degree. Yet, all of them became frustrated by the limiting social status and lack of opportunities and, more importantly, they decided to communicate their anger to the audiences they were planning to attract to the theatre. (Cornish; Ketels, 1985, x-xiv)

## **2.2. Cultural background**

The purpose of the following subchapter is an analysis of the cultural background of the appearance of ‘kitchen sink drama’. It is focused on the state of the post-war British theatre because understanding of its state is crucial for comprehension of the revolutionary features and aspects of new wave plays. This subchapter is hence focused on the British theatre before the year 1956.

### **2.2.1. General state of the post-war British theatre**

Shortly after the World War II, nothing was suggesting that a revolutionary tendency in playwriting might appear on the British theatre scene. Many of the existing theatre buildings had been heavily damaged during the conflict and economical problems of the country were causing often fuel shortages. The British theatre was not showing any signs of progress. (Cornish; Ketels, 1985, xiii) Dan Rebellato, in his book *1956 And All That*, summarizes the bleakness of the post-war period. “By 1956, British theatre was in a terrible state.” (1999, 1)

From the further description provided by Cornish and Ketels it is possible to recognize some more specific features of the early post-war plays. These plays were mostly set in the middle-class environment. A typical place the stage represented was a drawing room with French windows. These plays also featured middle-class characters and, naturally, also the audiences were from the identical background. Therefore the people attending a theatre performance expected to see a rather conservative play that was respecting all traditional conventions and taboos. Their assumptions were in most cases correct. Theatre managers had no reasons for changing this pattern and were constantly staging the same kind of plays that was securing them a stable financial income. (1985, xiv) However, John Russell Taylor in *Anger and After: A Guide to the New British Drama* admits that the theatre managers did not have any other alternatives, since there seemed to be no young and talented playwright on the scene. (1962, 28)

This period is also criticized by Oleg Kerensky in the book named *The New British Drama: Fourteen Plays Since Osborne and Pinter*. He states that “The most provocative and original plays in London came from New York and Paris.” (1977, xv) Cornish and Ketels further add that the post-war theatre was not reflecting actual changes in the society, became dislocated from contemporary problems of the period and excessively predictable. (1985, viii-ix) Authors of post-war drama were hence failing to reflect life realistically. They were focused on too small a segment of the society while the rest was constantly ignored. (Rebellato, 1999, 1)

### 2.2.2. The influence of censorship

When analyzing the state of the British theatre before the appearance of the first new wave plays, it is also important to mention the influence of censorship. According to Cornish and Ketels, in the 1950's "Censorship still prohibited from the stage such ordinary English words as *impotent*, *syphilis*, *abortion* and *miscarriage*, not to mention *queer* and *fairy*." (1985, ix) Obviously, not only these words but the whole plays dealing with controversial topics of a similar kind were likely to not be granted a licence for a public performance.

Dominic Shellard explains the whole process in his publication *British Theatre Since The War*. Theatre managers had to submit scripts to the Lord Chamberlain, one of the chief officers of the Royal Household. The Lord Chamberlain was entitled to not license a play that he and his readers found unsuitable for a public performance. Such a play was then returned to the theatre manager, and it either had to be modified or could not be staged under any circumstances in a public theatre. Between the years 1945 and 1954, 42 plays were refused a licence. The most frequent reasons for banning a theatre piece were sexual content (18 plays) and treatment of homosexuality (14 plays). This suppression of new plays resulted in constant critique from theatre managers and playwrights. Lord Chamberlain's powers to censor drama were therefore abolished in 1968. (2000, 9) Playwrights were then allowed to write their pieces without respecting the taboos imposed by the society.

The above presented analysis demonstrates the state of the British theatre before the appearance of *Look Back in Anger*. The play is often regarded as "revolutionary". (Rebellato, 1999, 1) It changed the British theatre and helped to define the new wave of drama. It was written by John Osborne and premiered on 8 May 1956 at Royal Court Theatre. The main character of the play, Jimmy Porter, openly criticizes all established conventions and traditions. The play itself was revolutionary enough but its importance lies in the fact that it inspired other young dramatists to start writing plays about themselves and the environment they were so familiar with. Thanks to this play, the whole new generation of authors decided to choose drama as the primary form of expressing their opinions and even managed to find theatre managers and audiences who frankly appreciated their effort. (Taylor, 1962, 11, 12)

### 2.3. Features of 'kitchen sink drama'

The following part of the thesis is focused on the features of 'kitchen sink drama' that was introduced in the late 1950's by a group of young playwrights, who were following the trend initiated by John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger*. The features that are to be mentioned should characterize the genre, despite the fact that Kerensky describes the movement as "easy to recognize, but hard to define." (1977, xv)

The term 'kitchen sink drama' was applied by theatre critiques and journalists probably because it captures one of the most striking differences between the post-war plays written and staged in the early 1950's and the ones written by the new generation of authors. (Shellard, 2000, 70) The feature is a dramatically different stage setting. Reid Douglas, in the article "The Failure of English Realism", claims that "Real life always seems to live in a particularly unfashionable district." (1962, 180) If the post-war British plays were set in middle-class drawing rooms, 'kitchen sink drama' gained its name because the authors of the genre depicted mostly working-class houses with modest equipment. The authors decided to demonstrate that the majority of inhabitants of Great Britain lived in poorly equipped houses or rented flats:

Gas stoves, sinks, creaking wooden chairs and bare kitchen tables replaced the earlier fashionable decors with their overstuffed comforts, velvet draperies, and stylish paintings." (Cornish; Ketels, 1985, vii)

Oleg Kerensky describes the stage as "non-representational" and adds that this allowed the authors to use immediate changes of place or time in their plays. (1977, xvi) This was thus the first radical change the audience was to experience.

Nevertheless, it was not the only one. Also the authors themselves changed. More precisely, on the scene appeared a new generation of authors who were writing plays about themselves and their working-class background they were familiar with. Some of them, like John Arden and John Mortimer for example, had a university education but the other ones left schools rather early. Into this group belongs Shelagh Delaney, Arnold Wesker or Edward Bond. (Taylor, 1962, 14) These playwrights exchanged formal education for experience with practical theatre work and this decision allowed them to start writing frank and realistic plays about their own lives.

One thing the authors of 'kitchen sink drama' have in common is thus their working-class origin. (Cornish; Ketels, 1985, x-xi) This paradoxical change is further commented by John Russell Taylor.

For many years, the West End stage has been a middle-class preserve: middle-class writers, more often than not university educated, have written for mainly middle-class audiences. But now things are different" (Taylor, 1962, 14)

Taylor's remark shows that the change of the social background of the authors was rather sudden and unexpected. Focus of the new authors on the working-class environment resulted in the fact that plays of 'kitchen sink drama' also contain working-class characters and ordinary people "whose lives had not been regarded before as fit subject for the English stage." (Cornish; Keteles, 1985, xv) This was another major change compared to the standard of the early post-war plays.

It should be also mentioned that these working-class characters were dealing with issues greatly different from the ones that had been depicted in theatre plays before 1956. This caused that another change introduced to the British theatre audience was the appearance of new themes and completely different methods of exploring them. While the early post-war plays respected the taboos imposed by the British traditional society and Lord Chamberlain's censorship, in the new wave plays the same taboos were being constantly challenged. The content of these plays became the most important aspect, even more important than their new form. The new wave playwrights were addressing issues like moral collapse of the society, conventions of marriage and family life, interracial relationships and homosexuality. Given to their background, these authors also were concentrated on contemporary problems like poverty or social mobility. The slight increase of social mobility was especially frustrating for them because they were aware of the fact that it did not mean the end of the British class system they despised. (Kerensky, 1977, xvi-xx) The exploration of new themes also initiated the change of the language used by the characters depicted in the plays of 'kitchen sink drama'. The way the characters spoke corresponded with the radical ideas expressed by the authors. A frequent usage of strong language became common especially after 1967 when The Lord Chamberlain's power to censor drama was abolished. Kerensky observes that:

Before that time, the actual language spoken by people in real life, especially by people without middle-class inhibitions, could not be spoken on the stage. Everyday 'four-letter' swear words were banned. (Kerensky, 1977, xix)

The change of language used by the characters in the new wave plays is also commented by Cornish and Ketels. "New characters and fresh themes called for fresh idioms, new patterns of stage dialogue, and new theatrical forms." (1985, xi)

The last feature of the genre to be mentioned is the fact that the authors of the genre were trying to describe working-class life as realistically as possible. Their plays can be therefore considered even naturalistic. Simon Trussler in his article "British-Neo Naturalism" suggests that the new wave dramatists instinctively chose naturalism mainly because it served their purposes, and allowed them to make social comments, unlike the previously frequently used poeticism. Trussler further adds that naturalism also "suited to the semi-autobiographical idiom in which the new weavers tended to play with their problems." (Trussler, 1968, 130) It can be thus supposed that the new wave plays also contain autobiographical features.

When contrasted with the state of the British theatre before the year 1956 that is analyzed in the first part of the thesis, the above mentioned features of 'kitchen sink drama' demonstrate the fact the appearance of this genre caused a dramatic change of the British theatre. It forced critiques as well as the audiences to acknowledge the theatrical pieces written young working-class playwrights. These authors were considered revolutionary mainly because they decided to challenge the traditional taboos, were interested in actual themes, used new forms of expressing their opinions and paid previously unseen attention to the working classes. (Cornish; Ketels, 1985, xxxv)



### 3. Features of ‘kitchen sink drama’ in *The Kitchen* by Arnold Wesker

#### 3.1 Expressing negative emotions

Three aspects of ‘kitchen sink drama’ in *The Kitchen* by Arnold Wesker are analyzed in this chapter. The first one is expressing negative emotions like grudge, hatred or contempt. In the play, there are certain characters who are somehow dissatisfied with their lives or work. They stay in their jobs only because it is rather lucrative for most of them. These characters express their discontent about the working hours, working conditions and activities their jobs involve them doing. Some of them are also frustrated by their personal relationships which are often rather complicated. This results in the fact that they frequently express their frustration, especially during the service time because at this period of the day, they are under larger psychological pressure. This kind of behaviour is described by the author in the introduction:

All kitchens, especially during service, go insane. There is the rush, there are plenty of quarrels, grumbles, false prides and snobbery. Kitchen staff instinctively hate dining-room staff, and all of them hate the customer. He is the personal enemy. (Wesker, 1961, 5)

A typical example of a dissatisfied employee is Peter, the main character of the play. He is the most conflict person of all workers. Peter is hot-tempered, and gets often involved in various arguments. He is also having a love affair with one of the waitresses, Monique. Peter gets angry for the first time when Monique passes by his work station and repeatedly calls him “bully.” (Wesker, 1961, 31) Peter reacts angrily, not only because of how she calls him but mainly because he is extremely jealous and wants to prevent her from speaking with customers:

Peter: (*following her like the pathetic, jealous lover*). And remember you’re a hostess today, I can see you in the glass. No flirting, do you hear? (*Grips her arm.*) No flirting.

Monique: I shall talk to who I like. (*Moves off*)

Peter: (*hoping no one can hear him*). Cow! Disgusting cow! All the restaurant can see you. (Wesker, 1961, 32)

Even though Peter is in love with Monique, he can not resist saying that. However, it is not only Peter who gets angry with his colleagues.

During afternoon break, Dimitri advises the other kitchen staff members not to argue so much about the environment they work in and their working conditions. Peter appreciates this opinion, but Dimitri does not give any importance to that:

Peter: You're a very intelligent boy, Dimitri.

Dimitri: And you're a bloody fool. I'm not sure I want to talk with you.

[...]

Dimitri (to Peter): A bloody fool you! (Wesker, 1961, 53)

Apparently, Dimitri does not enjoy Peter's company and refuses to get involved in any conversation with him. Nevertheless, Peter had had no conflict with Dimitri before the above mentioned conversation. This fact demonstrates that not only Peter, but also Dimitri is sometimes irascible.

Another cook, Paul, behaves to Peter in a similar manner. Within the same break Peter encourages his colleagues to dream of an ideal world in which they could become and do whatever they want. Some of his colleagues have problems imagining such a thing but Paul completely refuses to do that. When asked to describe his dream, he immediately starts being offensive towards Peter:

Paul: No. (*Relents*) Listen, Peter...I'll tell you something. I'm going to be honest with you. You don't mind if I'm honest? Right! I'm going to be honest with you. I don't like you. Now wait a minute, let me finish. I don't like you! I think you're a pig! You bully, you're jealous, you go mad with your work, you always quarrel. (Wesker, 1961, 57)

Paul mentions the fact that Peter gets often involved in various arguments. This shows that among his co-workers, there really are some employees who consider Peter a conflict person. Usually choleric Peter is not offended this time. Dimitri then asks Peter to start dreaming because he originally proposed the idea of sharing dreams. However, Monique enters the kitchen and Peter leaves, following her. After he has left, the other cooks start discussing Peter's personality:

Dimitri (*shouting at the absent Peter*): Fool! Bloody fool! We wait for a dream.

Paul: I don't know what you see in him.

Dimitri: I don't know what I see in him either. Bloody fool!

Kevin: Bloody volcano if you ask me. I don't see no point in it. I don't see no point in that Peter bloke either. He talks about peace and dreams and when I ask him if I could use his cutting-board to cut me lemons on this morning he told me – get your own. Dreams? See yours! (Wesker, 1961, 60)

From their conversation it is quite apparent, that they do not understand Peter's behaviour and this also might be the reason why they speak so negatively about him.

Ronald Hayman, in his book *Contemporary Playwrights: Arnold Wesker*, states that Peter's offensive behaviour and frequent changes of mood are caused by frustration and the pressure he is under. (1970, 18) Given to this fact, his personal relationships with colleagues are rather complicated and certain workers do not hesitate to express their feelings publicly.

The kitchen staff members also express their negative opinions towards the restaurant proprietor, Mr. Marango. Naturally, they do this only when the restaurant owner is not present in the room. Peter discusses the restaurant owner with Kevin, a new cook who has recently been employed:

Kevin (*to Peter*): He seems a kind old man.

Peter: You think he is kind? He is a bastard! He talks like that because it is summer now. Not enough staff to serve all his customers, that is why he is kind. You going to stay till winter? Wait till then. You'll see. The fish is burnt! Too much *mise-en-place*! The soup is sour! He is a man, he is a restaurant. [...] (Wesker, 1961, 30)

While Kevin is rather optimistic and does not realize any fault which his new superior might possibly have, Peter points out the fact that Mr. Marango is interested in the profit of the restaurant, not in the comfort or contentment of his employees. Later on, when the kitchen staff members are eating, Molly, one of the waitresses approaches them:

Molly: Mr. Marango wants a leg of chicken and some *sauté*.

Frank: Mr. Marango can go to hell, I'm eating.

Molly: (moves off) I'll call for it in five minutes.

Frank: They don't give you a chance to eat here. (Wesker, 1961, 39, 40)

Frank's reply is a clear demonstration of his disrespect to the employer. The negative attitude towards Mr. Marango is also expressed by the cook, who supervises the other ones. Throughout the play he is referred to as *Chef*. When one of the cooks causes himself an injury, the restaurant owner addresses Chef, thinking that Chef is the person responsible for the event:

Marango: He's burnt his face. It's not serious, (*to Chef*) but it might have been. (*He shakes his head sadly and moves away.*)

Chef: What can I do, Mr. Marango? They rush about like mad, I tell them but they don't listen. (*Marango moves off shaking his head still.*)

Chef (*to Frank*): Much he cares. It interrupts the kitchen so he worries. Three more years, Frank, three, that's all and then the whist! Retire, finish! Then you can take over. (Wesker, 1961, 35)

Even the person who Mr. Marango relies on does not agree with the way he treats his employees. It can be seen that the opinions of Mr. Marango's employees do not differ significantly.

The presented quotations demonstrate that his employees perceive him as someone who is interested only in his personal wealth. Mr. Marango is, as the restaurant owner, also the only symbol of the middle class and his working-class employees instinctively hate him. Not only because he is their superior who suspects everyone from sabotage and they possibly might fear him, but also because he symbolizes something they will probably never achieve. Roger Cornish and Violet Ketels suggest that this tension between classes is one of the characteristic features of 'kitchen sink drama' and many of new wave playwrights were challenging the established class system in their plays. (1985, xi)

### **3.2 Conflicts between characters**

Expressing negative emotions towards other colleagues, as it is described above inevitably leads to the rise of various conflicts. In conflict situations, characters are not only speaking indignantly about someone else but they actually get involved in various arguments. These conflicts will be analyzed in the following subchapter.

The initial conflict can be found in the first part of the play, where the author describes the kitchen before all cooks enter it:

The night porter, Magi, enters. [...] Then with a taper he lights the ovens. Into the first shoots a flame. There is smoke, flame, and soon the oven settles into a steady burn, and with it comes its hum. It is this hum of the kitchen, a small roar. It is a noise that will stay with us to the end. As he lights each oven, the noise grows from a small to a loud ferocious roar. There will be this continuous battle between the dialogue and the noise of the ovens. (Wesker, 1961, 13)

What Wesker describes as a "continuous battle" can be seen as the first conflict of the series of the upcoming ones. It is not a conflict between characters, yet this struggle helps to create the atmosphere of aggression which can be felt throughout the whole play.

The following conflict can not be experienced directly by the audience because all characters in the play are only discussing it. According to their conversation, there was a fight between two cooks - Gaston and Peter, on the preceding evening:

Anne: Hey, Raymond, tell me, what happened to Peter in the end, you know, last night?

Raymond: Now he's a silly boy, eh? Don't you think so? I don't even know what it was all about anyway. You know, Paul?

Paul: All I know is he had a fight with Gaston. Why? I don't know. Over a ladle I think, or maybe a ...

Max: He's a bloody German, a fool, that's what he is. He is always quarrelling, always. There's no one he hasn't quarreled with, am I right? No one! That's some scheme that is, exchanging cooks! What do we want to exchange cooks for? Three years he's been here, three years! (Wesker, 1961, 16)

Max describes Peter as a conflict person saying that Peter has already had an argument with every other employee. The conflict with Gaston however was not only verbal but also physical with a visible consequence.

Another conflict happens early in the morning after, when all cooks are already present in the kitchen, examining the daily menu. There is not much other activity to be seen in the place but even during this relatively calm part of the day a conflict arises. It is also the first conflict between two characters that can be seen directly by the audience:

Paul: You'll see. Two thousand customers a day. (*While Kevin has been introduced and is talking to the pastrycooks, Bertha goes to the cold cupboard and, after looking around inside, take out a tray of sliced, cold potatoes. Following behind, about to start his work, is Nicholas. He has a bottle of beer which he is drinking.*)

Nicholas (*to Bertha*): Where you go with that?

Bertha: I need it for sauté.

Nicholas (*taking tray*): Oh, no, no, no. That's for me. Me, I prepared that yesterday. That's for my salad.

Bertha (*trying to get hold on to tray*): You get your salad from the vegroom.

Nicholas: Ah no bloody hell. You get *yours* from the veg. That is for me, that is what I get ready.

Bertha (*nastily*): You don't bloody hell my, my son. You bloody hell in your own country. (*to others*) What d'you think of him, eh? The little...

Nicholas: This is my country.

Bertha: Lavatory is your country.

Nicholas (*taking tray eventually*): The lavatory is *your* country, and the sewers, you know that? The sewers.

Bertha (*taking out another tray*): I'll pay you sonny. You cross me once, that's all, just once. Lousy little foreigner you!

Nicholas (*cheekily*): She calls *me* foreigner! Listen to her...(Wesker, 1961, 23)

The conflict is initiated by a trivial event. Even though such a situation is a common part of each working day in the kitchen and can be solved peacefully, the discussion

gives rise to a conflict during which the participants start offending each other. Ronald Hayman observes that in Wesker's play, racial and nationality-related prejudices engender tensions between individual workers. (1970, 18) This is reflected in the presented quotation. At the end of the argument, Bertha mentions Nicholas' foreign descent, calling him a "lousy little foreigner." (Wesker, 1961, 23)

The following conflict happens between Nicholas and Max. In a short while, Nicholas gets involved in the second argument. This time, the two cooks are discussing the fact that Nicholas relies excessively on Max, who is older and more experienced. Max expresses his discontent with Nicholas' behaviour and Nicholas becomes irritated:

Raymond: So why you take notice? Look at them. (*Max and Nicholas are pointing at each other in some sort of argument, waving fingers, pulling face and swaying.*)  
Nicholas: No! No! No! I'm never going to listen to you again, never.  
Max: Good, very good. I'm fed up with you hanging around me anyway. 'Max should I do this, max should I do that? Well, Max isn't your father.  
Nicholas: You're a damn right he's not my father. My father was a man with kindness, my father never betray what I tell him.  
Max: Well, I didn't betray what you told me either, I keep telling you.  
Nicholas: My father brought up nine children and all of them good people.  
Max: I didn't tell anyone, I keep telling you.  
Nicholas: My father –  
Max: Your father nothing! He's been dead since you was three years old so give that one a miss also. (Wesker, 1961, 66, 67)

Once again, it can be seen that the above described conflict was not initiated by any serious cause. It seems that characters in the play tend to exaggerate their problems which might be also the reason why conflicts arise so often. Most of the above described situations could have probably been solved without arguing. However, the pressure they are under and consumption of alcohol cause that Mr. Marango's employees behave more aggressively than necessary.

The last conflict to be analyzed appears almost at the end of the day and again, Peter is involved in it. There are many waitresses at his station waiting for him to serve the requested dishes. Because of the queue one of them, Violet, attempts to take the dishes herself and steps into Peter's work place. This makes him angry and he asks Violet to wait till he serves her. Violet feels offended because she knows that Peter is busy and she would have to wait for a long time:

Violet: Now you wait a bloody minute will you? Who the hell do you think you are, you?  
Peter: You don't worry who I am. I'm the cook yes? And you're the waitress, and in the kitchen I do what I like yes? And in the dinning room you do what you like.

Violet: (*taking another plate from off the oven*). I won't take orders from you, you know, I...  
Peter (*shouting and smashing the plate from her hand for a second time*): Leave it! Leave it there! I'll serve you. Me! Me! Is *my* kingdom here. This is the side where *I* live. This.  
Violet (*very quietly*): You Boche you. You bloody German bastard! (*She downs plates on the bar and walks off. PETER follows her. There is a general uproar and protest from the other waitresses who are waiting to be served.*)  
Peter: What you call me? What was it? Say it again. (*He screams at her.*) SAY IT AGAIN! (*She halts, petrified.*) (Wesker, 1961, 75-76)

After this argument, Peter becomes completely furious and destroys the gas lead. This final scene is also the climax of the whole play. Peter is not able to bear the psychological pressure caused by the work, and also by the emotionally demanding relationship with Monique. His behaviour can be seen as a type of rebellion. It is supposed to show the audience what may happen when one's personal needs and wishes are not understood and constantly ignored. This personal protest of Arnold Wesker is described by Ray Orley in his review of *The Kitchen*:

The microcosm [of the play] strains and bursts because Wesker tries to pack it too much tightly with incidents, tries to commandeer it a bulldozer for his own personal revolution against meaningless work, impersonality and the whole catalogue of contemporary society's ills. (Orley 1972, 189)

Few moments after Peter caused that the whole kitchen stopped working, enters the restaurant owner Mr. Marango and asks Peter who gave him the right to do that. Peter does not answer him and leaves the kitchen.

Mr. Marango clearly does not understand the disappointment of his employees, especially in the case of Peter who expressed it in the most significant way. He is persuaded that some work to do, appropriate wages and some food to eat is everything what his workers need. This employer does not realize that lack of career opportunities, monotonous work, need of money and frustrating personal problems are the factors which probably made his employee behave in an unexpected way. (Taylor, 1963, 143)

All the above described conflicts create the unpleasant, aggressive and somehow disturbing atmosphere that the audience can feel throughout the whole play. (Cornish; Ketels, 1985, 2) Probably all the conflicts except the final one could have been solved peacefully. However, by describing them the author creates a very authentic and realistic image of an ordinary day of working-class people. Cornish and Ketels observe that "*The Kitchen* is a complete metaphor for the world of ordinary work." (1985, 2)

### 3.3 Critique of working conditions

Apart from their colleagues, many characters also criticize working conditions in the place. Cooks claim that they are constantly under large pressure and have to work with speed that negatively influences quality of the dishes they serve. The working tempo and the conditions in which cooks have to work are demanding especially for the ones who are less experienced with the Tivoli restaurant. Hans, one of these cooks, suffers an injury when a pot full of hot water falls on him:

*(Crashing in on laughter is a loud scream from the steam-room. Hans comes running out with his hands covering his face. A number of people run and crowd him.)*

Hans: My face! My face! I burnt my face.

Frank: What is it Hans?

Hans: Who bloody fool put a pot of hot water on steamer?

Peter: It felt on you?

Hans *(moving away from crowd)*. Bastard house! I never worked before so bad. Never, never...

*(Peter takes him away for some first aid)* (Wesker, 1961, 34)

Hans is obviously angry because he is aware of the fact that he might have got seriously injured. The above described situation demonstrates that the working conditions in the kitchen are really harsh. Few moments later, when all the cooks sit down to eat their meal, Kevin, the new cook starts questioning two more experienced cooks, Peter and Michael, about their career in the Tivoli restaurant:

Kevin *(to Peter)*. How long have you bee here?

Peter: Three years. *(Michael laughs)*

Kevin: How did you stick it?

Michael: Sick already?

Kevin: I don't think I'll last the day.

Peter: People are always coming and going.

Hans *(he is not eating much)*. I think me I'll go soon.

Michael *(to Kevin)*. The worse is to come. *(to others)* Am I right? You wait till the service ah! ...but you'll get used to it after a while.

Peter: We all said we wouldn't last the day, but tell me what is there a man can't get used to? Nothing! You just forget where you are and you say it's a job. (Wesker, 1961, 36)

Both new cooks Kevin and Hans find their jobs really demanding. Hans even joins the conversation claiming that he will probably not be working in the Tivoli restaurant for a long time. Peter and Michael have already managed to get used to the working conditions and they claim that the worst part of each day at work is the service time, when there is plenty of work to be done within a short period of time.



Nevertheless, not only cooks but also waitresses have problems to work in the harsh conditions. One of them, Violet, is also a new employee who is not experienced with the place. She express her disappointment with the working conditions in the morning, after she has just realized what she can expect during the service when every waitress wants to be served as quickly as possible and cooks behave inconsiderate of her:

Peter: Three cod, four cod. (*As Violet turns with the plates, Mangolis, who is passing, knocks her, and the plates fall to the ground.*)  
Jackie (*to Annie*). Three coffees.  
Violet: Oh God, God, God, I can't, I can't.  
Gwen: Don't upset yourself, love.  
Violet: Look at it all, I can't work like this. I'm not used to this way of working.  
Betty (*to Michael*) One minestrone.  
Violet: I've never worked like this before, never.  
(*During this the Cheff also calls Frank, who calls Mangoli, to clear the broken china*)  
Peter: Too old, too old my sweetheart. Go home old woman – for the young this work – go home.  
(Wesker, 1961, 47)

Peter makes the situation even worse for Violet by taunting her because of her age. Violet does not react, probably because she is more frustrated by the working conditions than by Peter's opinion towards her.

Apart from stress and speed which the kitchen staff members have to work with, there is another factor that is causing problems to some employees. The temperature in the place is so high that it results in one of the waitresses, Winnie, loosing her consciousness:

Alfredo: All right, now don't crowd round, take her into the dining-room. Don't crowd round.  
(*Crowd disperses as Winnie is taken into dining-room*)  
Paul: Who was it? What's happened, then?  
Molly: It's Winnie, she's passed out.  
Kevin: Well what was all that now?  
Gaston: The heat. Always affecting someone. Terrible. (Wesker, 1961, 72)

Even though there are no other examples of the effects of heat on the restaurant employees mentioned in the play, Gaston admits that the high temperature in the kitchen is a long-term issue. However, none of the employees complains directly to Mr. Marango, who is responsible for the whole restaurant. Given to this, the restaurant owner is not forced to make any attempts to improve the working conditions in his restaurant and the problems of his employees can not be solved.

Constant critique of working the conditions shows that Wesker is concerned with problems that working-class people daily encounter. His intention to address new audiences from the working classes is reflected in his focus on the environment these people work in. (Carlson, 1993, 423) The result of Wesker's effort to draw the attention of the audience to the working classes is mentioned by Cornish and Ketels. They observe that within a relatively short period of his career as a playwright, Wesker managed to secure a more prominent position for working-class people than they ever had in the history of British drama. (1985, 3) His importance for the genre was also mentioned by Karl-Heinz Stoll who regards Wesker "the most prominent representative of 'kitchen sink drama.'" (Interviews with Edward Bond and Arnold Wesker, 1976, 422)

## 4. Features of 'kitchen sink drama' in *A Taste of Honey* by Shelagh Delaney, comparison of both plays

The following chapter is focused on features of the genre that can be found in Shelagh Delaney's play *A Taste of Honey*. The first feature of the genre is again, expressing negative emotions. As in *The Kitchen*, in *A Taste of Honey* characters express negative emotions rather often. This also causes various conflicts that will be described in the second part of the chapter. The third subchapter contains an analysis of critique of living conditions the characters in the play express and the fourth subchapter deals with the female perspective of life that Delaney provides to the audience. Both analyzed plays will also be compared at the end of each subchapter.

### 4.1 Expressing negative emotions

*A Taste of Honey* is set in Manchester, Lancashire, in the district called Salford. The main characters are Helen and her daughter Jo, who have just moved into a new flat. During their conversations, Helen and Jo often express negative emotions towards each other. Given to that, their relationship can not be described as harmonic. It should be mentioned that Helen is not a typical loving mother. It seems that she is not interested in her daughter's life at all. Her daughter, Jo, wishes to start working and stop living with her mother. It can be said that they both are dissatisfied with their life situation. When Jo's future is being discussed, Jo criticizes her mother for the first time:

Helen: Why, are you still set on leaving school at Christmas?

Jo: Yes.

Helen: What are you going to do?

Jo: Get out of your sight as soon as I get a bit of money in my pocket.

Helen: Very wise too. But how are you going to get your money in the first place? After all, you're not very fond of work, are you?

Jo: No, I take after you. (Delaney, 1994, 12)

Jo does not hesitate to tell her mother what she thinks about her. She mentions the fact that Helen, who used to work in bars and then started with prostitution, has never been working diligently in order to secure a stable financial income for her and her daughter. Helen does not even attempt to persuade Jo to continue her studies. This relatively

approving reaction to Jo's decision shows how little Helen is interested in her daughter's life.

The two women then continue discussing Jo's future and Helen remembers her past when she used to work as a singer in Manchester pubs. Jo then proposes that she could start a similar career:

Jo: I said what would you say if I got a job in a pub?

Helen: You can't sing, can you? Anyway, it's your life, ruin it your own way. It's a waste of time interfering with other people, don't you think so? It takes me all my time to look after myself, I know that.

Jo: That's what you said, but really you think you could make a better job of it, don't you?

Helen: What?

Jo: Ruining my life. After all, you've had plenty of practice. (Delaney, 1994, 13)

Helen again emphasizes the fact that any important decisions regarding Jo's future are up to her. Jo's mother also stresses that she wants to focus mainly on her own life. From this conversation it is also quite apparent that Jo does not hesitate to remind her mother that she should have behaved better to Jo during her childhood.

When speaking to her mother, Jo expresses her opinion in a quite ironic manner. It shows lack of respect Jo has for Helen. Nevertheless, Helen replies to Jo in a very similar way and the ironic comments the two characters use to evaluate each other are common parts of their conversations.

Another moment, when Jo expresses her opinion towards Helen and speaks about the future life without her, appears when Jo is going to have a bath:

Jo: That's all we do, live out of a travelling-bag.

Helen: Don't worry, you'll soon be an independent working woman and free to go where you please.

Jo: The sooner the better. I'm sick of you. You've made my life a misery. (Delaney, 1994, 15)

Jo criticizes the fact that they do not have a proper, comfortable home. Her mother's response once again shows that she considers her daughter an adult person who is capable of living on her own. Jo seems to be frustrated by the way her mother influences her own life. However, she does not mention any concrete act Helen has done. Jo complains in rather vague manner and it is not possible to realize which concrete deed she has on mind. The idea of Helen spoiling Jo's life can be considered the main source of Jo's negative attitude towards her mother.

Helen, who is rather calm and does not reply to her daughter's critique starts to express negative emotions towards Jo later, when her daughter's behaviour makes her angry:

Jo: You should have asked him to stay? It wouldn't be the first time I've been thrown out of my bed to make a room for one of your...

Helen: For God's sake shut up! Close your mouth for five minutes. And you can turn the light off and come to bed. (Delaney, 1994, 21)

Jo and Helen are discussing Peter, Helen's lover. He is the person whom she was trying to escape from. Peter managed to find her new flat and decided to pay a visit to Helen. After he has left, Jo comments on the way Helen makes her living and Helen gets angry with her daughter. However, Helen does not seem to be especially angry because of the remark but she might be rather tired of constant criticism from Jo.

From the analyzed examples it is apparent that in *A Taste of Honey*, there are only two main characters, Jo and Helen, who tend to express their negative emotions. Frequency with which they criticize each other was described by Michelene Wandor, who in her book *Carry On, Understudies*, states that "Jo, a young working-class girl, is pregnant by her black boyfriend; she and her mother Helen row all the time, but understand each other extremely well." (1986, 143) Wandor thus argues that despite often critique they express, Jo and Helen are still capable of respecting each other's opinion. The main source of negative emotions seems to be their disappointment with their contemporary lives.

Generally, it can be said that Shelagh Delaney is focused on Jo and Helen, and uses negative emotions and the ironic tone of their conversations in order to demonstrate their complicated relationship. Arnold Wesker, in *The Kitchen*, examines the environment of the Tivoli restaurant as a whole, paying attention to the events that are happening during one day. His usage of negative emotions expressed by the characters in the play allows him to explain the difficulties of working-class life, and also to criticize the middle class. Both authors, however, follow the tendency of the genre that was defined by Oleg Kerensky who claims that authors of 'kitchen sink drama' are focused on negative emotions and use them as innovative dramatic features of their plays. "Their skill as dramatists is in expressing their anger in entertaining and theatrical terms." (1977, xx)

## 4.2 Conflicts between characters

Unlike in *The Kitchen*, where the characters get involved in a large number of conflicts, in *A Taste of Honey*, there are only two serious arguments to be found. Expressing negative emotions as described above does not in Delaney's play necessarily initiate conflicts as it does in *The Kitchen*.

The first conflict to be analyzed appears when Helen visits the place they had lived in with Jo, before Helen moved to Peter's house. Jo now shares it with a friend of her, an art student Geoffrey. Jo is apparently annoyed by her mother's presence. She does not want to talk to her, claiming that she can manage her life on her own:

Jo: Get out of here. I won't go out if I don't want to. It's nothing to do with you. Get back to your fancy man or your husband, or whatever you call him.  
[Helen begins to chase her]  
Aren't you afraid he'll run off and leave you if you let him out of your sight?  
Helen: I'll give you such a bloody good hiding in a minute, if you're not careful.  
[...]  
Helen: You had to throw yourself at the first man you met, didn't you?  
Jo: Yes, I did, that's right.  
Helen: You're man mad.  
Jo: I'm like you.  
Helen: You know exactly how they're calling you round here? A silly little whore!  
Jo: Well, they all know where I get it from too.  
Helen: Let me get hold of her! I'll knock her bloody head round!  
Jo: You should have been locked up years ago, with my father.  
Helen: let me get hold of her.  
Geof: Please, Jo, Helen, Jo, please!  
Helen: I should have got rid of you before you were born.  
Jo: I wish you had done. You did with plenty of others, I know.  
Helen: I'll kill her. I'll knock the living daylight out of her. (Delaney, 1994, 62)

This conflict arose from the preceding conversation during which Jo and Helen were discussing Jo's life. In this case there is quite a strong argument going on between Jo and Helen. Helen appears to be rather aggressive, threatening to physically attack Jo. However, she does not fulfil the threat. The conflict is terminated by Geoffrey, who somehow manages to restrain the two women.

The second conflict appears in the play when Helen arrives to Jo and Geoffrey's place again. Geoffrey politely asks Helen not to frighten her daughter before she delivers the baby. Helen replies that she knows how to treat her daughter and Geoffrey decides to leave the flat:

Geof: I'm going. She can't cope with the two of us. Only just don't frighten her, that's all.  
Helen: I've told you we don't want that.  
Geof: Yes I know, but she likes it.  
Helen: You can bloody well take it with you, we don't want it.  
[Geoffrey empties food from the pack on to the table while Helen thrust it back. Helen finally throws the whole thing, pack and all, on to the floor. ]  
Geof: Yes, the one thing civilization couldn't do anything about – women. Good- bye Jo, and good luck. [*He goes*] (Delaney, 1994, 84)

The act of throwing the food on the floor could be described as the only physical part of the two conflicts described in *A Taste of Honey*. By doing that, Helen demonstrates her opinion towards Geoffrey, whose willingness to help Jo she has been always ignoring. Helen seems to think that she knows what is best for her daughter, even though she does not behave according to that.

Compared to *The Kitchen*, a significantly smaller number of conflicts is described in *A Taste of Honey*. This might be explained by the fact that the two main characters are a mother and her daughter. Since they are in such a close relationship, they tend to argue less often. All the characters are also under far smaller psychological pressure in the described situations, and therefore their conversations very rarely result in conflicts. Physical conflicts are not present in the play at all.

In *The Kitchen* on the contrary, there are many conflicts to be found. This might be caused by the fact that individual workers are not in close relationships, they are only colleagues. Therefore, they tend to argue more often, not paying so much attention to maintaining friendly relationships and some of their conflicts are even physical. Cornish and Ketels observe that it is the physicality of the play what “dramatizes the workers life with a vivid clarity no socialist manifesto could even approach”. (1985, 2) The conflicts in a *Taste of Honey* thus do not have such an important role as in *The Kitchen*.

Nevertheless, during almost all the aforementioned conflicts, characters tend to use some strong language. This fact is also commented by Cornish and Ketels who compare its usage in new wave plays with the tendency of the early-post war pieces:

Of course, homosexuality, nudity, and obscenity were forbidden, [in the post-war plays] but also so also was much of the uninhibited language of everyday life. (Cornish; Ketels, 1985, xiv)

The usage of strong language by ‘kitchen sink drama’ authors, as it can be seen in the analyzed arguments and conflicts, thus appears to be characteristic for both plays.

### 4.3. Critique of living conditions

As working-class people, Jo and Helen can not afford to rent a comfortable flat. The environment the two characters live in is mentioned by Delaney in the stage description: “The stage represents comfortless flat in Manchester and the street outside.” (Delaney, 1994, 7) Dominic Shellard evaluates it “The set [for *A Taste of Honey*] was just as squalid as that for *Look Back in Anger* [...]” (2000, 70) Immediately after their arrival, Jo evaluates the place replying to her mother’s exclamation:

Helen: Well! This is the place.

Jo: And I don’t like it.

Helen: When I find somewhere for us to live I have to consider something far more important than your feelings...the rent. It’s all I can afford.

Jo: You can afford something better than this old ruin.

Helen: When you start earning, you can start moaning.

Jo: Can’t be soon enough for me. I’m cold and my shoes let water... what a place... and we’re supposed to be living off her immoral earnings.

Helen: I’m careful. Anyway, what’s wrong with this place? Everything in it’s falling apart, it’s true, and we’ve no central heating – but there’s a lovely view of the gasworks, we share a bathroom with the community and this wallpaper’s contemporary. What more do you want? (Delaney, 1994, 7)

Jo quite openly criticizes their new home, claiming that Helen can afford to rent a better place than this one. Helen replies that this is the best place they can afford with her financial income.

Helen and Jo are not the only people who are not satisfied by the state of the flat. Peter, who comes to visit Helen, introduces himself to her daughter and then starts criticizing the place:

Peter: Why did you come here? I had to chase you all over town looking for you, only to finish up in this dump.

Helen: Oh, shut up! I’ve got a cold.

Peter: What on earth made you choose such a ghastly district?

Helen: I can’t afford to be so classy.

Peter: Tenements, cemetery, slaughterhouse.

Helen: Oh, we’ve got the lot here.

Peter: Nobody could live in a place like this. (Delaney, 1994, 17)

Peter, who works as a car dealer, does not respect the fact that Helen can not afford to pay more money for another flat because her income is not as high as Peter’s one, criticizes the flat quite openly. Peter’s reaction represents the outer perspective because



he does not have to live in the flat. Yet, his evaluation is still very negative and demonstrates the impression that the new flat makes on its potential visitors.

Helen and Jo express their feeling about the living conditions again in the evening after Peter has left. They speak in the ironic manner that is so typical for both of them:

Jo: Thanks, I'll do that. What's the bed like?  
Helen: Like a coffin only not half as comfortable?  
Jo: Have you ever tried coffin?  
Helen: I dare say I will one day. I do wish we had a hot water bottle.  
[...]  
Jo: Aren't we going to clean this lo up?  
Helen: No, it'll look all right in the dark.  
Jo: Yes, it's seen at its best, this room, in the dark. (Delaney, 1994, 21)

In their conversation is expressed resentment as well as resignation. They are not satisfied with the contemporary state of their flat but the only thing they do about it is that they switch the light off instead of making any attempt to change their situation. According to John Russell Taylor "They accept their life and go on living without making any too serious complaint about their lot." (1963, 114) Unsuitable living conditions as one of the aspects of 'kitchen sink drama' are also described by Cornish and Ketels. They suggest that with the appearance of new wave plays the stage settings started to imitate the environment in which the majority of people actually lived, while in the past, they used to represent mostly homes of the privileged ones. (1985, vii)

The above described apathetic approach of Jo and Helen seems to be characteristic for characters in both plays. In *The Kitchen* the characters behave in a similar way, despite the fact that they often complain about their working conditions and also experience direct results of their influence. Nevertheless, from the presented examples it is apparent that like John Osborne and other authors of 'kitchen sink drama', Delaney and Wesker are heavily concentrated on the working-class environment. (Cornish; Ketels, 1985, x-xi)

#### **4.4. Female perspective of life in *A Taste of Honey***

The last subchapter deals with probably the most significant feature of *A Taste of Honey*. The play was written by a woman and this makes it somewhat exceptional, since the majority of the British new wave drama authors in the 1950s and early 1960s were

men. (Cornish; Ketels, 1985, x) Trevor R. Griffiths and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones in the book *British and Irish Women Dramatists Since 1958*, present the fact that compared to the male playwrights, Shelagh Delaney provides the audience with a completely different perspective of lives of working-class people, especially women. (1993, 138)

This is apparent when Delaney's play is compared with *The Kitchen*. In Wesker's play female characters seem to be present in order to somehow complement the whole piece and create the sense of a diverse environment. Their roles can not be considered crucial because Wesker is focused on the kitchen as a whole, not paying so much attention to individual characters. Delaney, on the contrary, provides a relatively detailed study of female characters, Helen and Jo. She focuses on their behaviour, relationships and communication between them rather than on the plot. (Griffiths; Llewellyn-Jones, 1993, 18)

In her play, Delaney challenges stereotypical ideas of motherhood, pregnancy and roles of women in a family. Considering pregnancy and motherhood in *A Taste of Honey*, it is important to mention that Helen and Jo got pregnant accidentally without any prior plans to start a family. This fact is later reflected in the way they behave as mothers. Jo describes her rather cold relationship she has always had with her mother to Geoff:

Jo: You've got nice hands, hard. You know I used to try and hold my mother's hands, but she always used to pull them away from me. So silly really. She had so much love for everyone else, but none for me. (Delaney, 1994,72)

According to Jo, Helen was not fond enough of her. Nevertheless, in the future, Jo might treat her child in a similar way because from her behaviour it is possible to recognize that she is not mentally prepared for motherhood. This is demonstrated when Jo is given a doll to practice on:

Jo: The colour's wrong. [*Suddenly and violently flinging the doll to the ground.*] I'll bash it's brain out. I'll kill it. I don't want his baby, Geof. I don't want to be a mother. I don't want to be a woman. (Delaney, 1994, 75)

Jo's reaction, although it might be shocking for the audience, captures Delaney's unconventional attitude towards motherhood. She realizes that motherhood is not

always desired by women and this fact might negatively influence relationships they later have with their children. The importance of pregnancy in *A Taste of Honey* is also mentioned by Michelene Wandor. She argues that writing about pregnancy is essential for the author and because Delaney is a woman, she is capable of deep understanding the influence of pregnancy on Jo's future life and therefore she focuses on it. (1986, 144)

Except their approach to motherhood, Helen and Jo also share their attitude towards men. Both female characters in *A Taste of Honey* do not need men in order to survive. Helen apparently marries Peter only because she wants to do that. Obviously, she knows that Peter is wealthier than her, and as a car seller he probably belongs to a higher social class but these facts are not major reasons for marrying him. She simply seems to enjoy company of a man with whom she can spend her time and still stay independent. This behaviour is analyzed by Helene Keyssar in *Feminist Theatre: An Introduction to Plays of Contemporary British and American Women*. According to her, rather than for material wealth, Helen desires for entertainment and she gets married also because she wants to escape from the stereotypical life with her daughter. (1984, 39)

Jo shares a similar attitude towards men. Despite the fact that she is pregnant and therefore she might need someone to financially support her, Jo claims that she does not want to see the father of her baby again. The only male companion she is willing to accept is Geoffrey, partly because he is a homosexual:

Geof: Do you wish he was still here?

Jo: Not really. I think I've had enough. I'm sick of love. That's why I'm letting you stay here. You won't start anything.

Geof: No, I don't suppose I will.

Jo: You'd better not. I hate love.

Geof: Do you?

Jo: Yes, I do. (Delaney, 1994, 53)

Jo has apparently decided to become a single mother and shares the flat with Geoff mainly for economical reasons. They maintain their non-physical relationship and Geoff stays with Jo in order to take care of her. (Wandor, 1978, 41) Jo is not planning to find any partner and this is apparent from her sceptic attitude towards the emotional aspect of a possible relationship with the father of her child. She also states that she does not want to see him again, even though Geoffrey offers her to find the sailor:

Geof: Do you want me to go out and find that chap and bring him back? Is that what you want?  
Jo: I don't want that. I don't want any man. (Delaney, 1994, 75)

Apparently, Jo and her mother both prefer independence to security and their own decisions to general conventions. Their will to stay independent is also demonstrated at the end of the play when Jo and Helen reunite in Jo's flat. They are together without any male character present in the place, expecting Jo's child to be born. This situation is mentioned by Wandor who states that in the moment, the audience can see two women who have decided to live without men and still they are not disturbed by the fact. (1986, 143, 144)

Delaney's decision to focus mostly on Jo and Helen, results in male characters losing their importance in the play. Their roles are rather symbolic compared to the importance of the female characters. This is especially the case of Jo's boyfriend, who becomes the father of her child. By impregnating Jo, he forwards the plot but his role in her future is rather unimportant. This is emphasized by the fact that in the script he is simply referred to as *Boy*. (Keyssar, 1984, 40) Helen leaves Peter in order to return to her daughter and also Geoffrey, another male character, exits the flat when his presence is no longer required. The situation when Jo and Helen stay alone at the end of the play is commented by Wandor: "Though heterosexual family life is problematic for them, they prefer to live without men rather than take their disillusion out on them." (1986, 144)

Nevertheless, the fact that Wandor describes heterosexual relationships in *A Taste of Honey* as "problematic" should not be perceived as a negative evaluation of male characters in the play. She argues that *A Taste of Honey* is different from the other plays from the same era also because it demonstrates that women can adequately exist even without men. (1986, 148) The purpose of *A Taste of Honey* is actually not to criticize men. The play is rather intended to provide the audience with the female and thus different perspective of life of working-class women. Strong focus on their lives and problems they have to solve is also the reason why *A Taste of Honey* is regarded one of the first feminist theatre plays. (Griffiths; Llewellyn-Jones, 1993, 19)

Delaney's play also contains interracial coitus or Jo's friendship with the homosexual, Geoff. As it has been mentioned in the theoretical part of the thesis, these

themes had not been common in British plays before the appearance of 'kitchen sink drama.' Given to this fact, Dominic Shellard mentions the importance of *A Taste of Honey*, claiming that that it "has been overlooked as an example of a new theatre." (2000, 70)

## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this bachelor paper was to find and analyze features of 'kitchen sink drama' in plays *The Kitchen* by Arnold Wesker and *A Taste of Honey* by Shelagh Delaney. These two plays represent the new wave of British realism.

Firstly, the development of the genre was contextualized and focus was mainly on the historical events that preceded the appearance of the genre, especially The Education Act 1944. The Act caused that working-class people started to be aware of their disadvantageous position in the British society. The state of the British theatre before 1956 was also described. British playwrights of the period, mostly of middle-class origin, were not writing progressive plays. The stagnation of the British theatre was even emphasized by theatre censorship of the Lord Chamberlain. However, the scene was revolutionized by the appearance of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in 1956. His play inspired young, working-class dramatists to start writing realistic plays about the environment they lived in. Their plays were dealing with everyday issues working-class people had to encounter, and also with previously unexplored themes like sex or homosexuality. Their pieces often contained very expressive critique of the established values, traditions and the middle-classes.

Secondly, the analysis of Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen* was conducted. It was found that, given to the pressure they are under, the characters in the play frequently express their negative emotions towards their colleagues and towards the restaurant proprietor, Mr. Marango. He is constantly criticized by his own employees as the symbol of the middle class. This shows that the authors of 'kitchen sink drama' were challenging the established class system in their plays, because in their real lives, they were unable to penetrate it. Expressing negative emotions in *The Kitchen* also often results in various conflicts and by describing them, Wesker creates a realistic depiction of the working-class life. This impression is even emphasized by the fact that characters in the play also criticize their working conditions. The realism of the play, the overall focus on the working classes and the critique of middle-classes prove that *The Kitchen* belongs to 'kitchen sink drama'

The last subject of the analysis was Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*. As in *The Kitchen*, also in Delaney's play negative emotions are often expressed. However,

the author is focused mainly on the main characters, Helen and her daughter Jo. Negative emotions they express, as well as the ironic tone they use when speaking to each other, help Delaney to demonstrate their complicated relationship. Yet, expressing negative emotions in *A Taste of Honey* does not initiate as many conflicts as it does in *The Kitchen*. Nevertheless, all analyzed conflicts contain strong, among the working classes daily used, language that had not been used by the authors of post-war plays before the appearance of 'kitchen sink drama'.

The author of *A Taste of Honey* is also focused on the working-class environment. Jo, Helen and also Peter criticize the flat the two women live in. Given to their financial situation, they can not afford to live in any better-equipped house. Nevertheless, they accept this fact and as the characters in *The Kitchen*, they make no effort to change the unsuitable conditions. The critique of living and working conditions in both plays shows that the authors pay plenty of attention to the lifestyle of the working classes. The last feature of Delaney's play that was analyzed is the female perspective of life she provides to the audience. It was shown that in her play, Delaney describes an alternative opinion towards motherhood. She suggests that it is not always desired by women and this fact is demonstrated through the relationship between Jo and Helen as well as through the scene when Jo is given a doll. The author also shows that certain women want to be independent and can spend their lives without male counterparts. Generally it can be said that Shelagh Delaney, as a woman, is concentrated on lives of working class women more than Anronld Wesker. Consequently, her play is often referred to as feministic. The last feature of 'kitchen sink drama' examined in the paper was Delaney's exploration of revolutionary themes: homosexuality and an interracial relationship.

The analysis of both plays proved that *The Kitchen* and *A Taste of Honey* contain certain features of 'kitchen sink drama' and thus can be considered representative works of the genre.

## 6. Resumé

Tato práce se zabývá analýzou dvou divadelních her a to *The Kitchen (Kuchyně)* od Arnolda Weskera a *A Taste of Honey (Chuť medu)* od Shelagh Delaney. Oba tito autoři jsou považováni za významné představitele tzv. nové vlny realistického dramatu, která se na britské divadelní scéně objevila ve druhé polovině 50. let a pokračovala i v 60. letech 20. století. První část práce poskytuje stručné informace o historických událostech vedoucích ke vzniku analyzovaného žánru, zejména pak o vydání zákona nazvaného The Education Act 1944 a jeho vlivu na názor příslušníků pracující třídy na jejich pozici ve společnosti.

Pro britskou společnost je charakteristické tradiční a velmi silně zakořeněné rozdělení obyvatelstva do společenských vrstev neboli tříd. Základní vrstvy existují tři: nejvyšší, střední a pracující. Tento systém, obvykle kritizovaný zejména příslušníky pracující třídy, kterým neumožňoval dostatečné vzdělání nebo aspiraci na vyšší pracovní pozice, měl být po druhé světové válce pomocí sociálních reforem změněn. Jako příklad těchto změn, lze uvést již zmíněný Education Act 1944, který měl zajistit úpravu vzdělávacího systému, která by usnadnila příslušníkům pracující třídy jejich vzdělávání. Tito studenti si však díky získanému vzdělání začali být více vědomi jejich nevýhodné pozice ve společnosti a jejich frustrace narůstala.

V další části práce je pak popsáno kulturní pozadí vzniku nové vlny realistického dramatu, přičemž důraz je kladen na podobu britského dramatu v poválečné éře. Zmíněn je i vliv cenzury na jeho obsah. Od konce druhé světové války až do první poloviny padesátých let dvacátého století bylo totiž britské divadlo doménou zejména střední vrstvy. Z toho segmentu společnosti pocházeli jak dramatici, tak publikum a logicky tedy i postavy, které se v divadelních hrách objevovaly. Poválečné publikum bylo velmi konvenční a očekávalo klasická témata divadelních her i tradiční způsoby jejich zpracování. Nicméně v roce 1956 se objevila hra s názvem *Look Back in Anger (Ohlédni se v hněvu)* a iniciovala vznik nové vlny realistického dramatu. Jejím autorem je John Osborne a hlavní hrdina této hry, Jimmy Porter, příslušník pracující vrstvy, v ní otevřeně kritizuje zejména střední třídu britské společnosti. Tato divadelní hra svým obsahem ani formou neodpovídala tomu, na co bylo doposud publikum zvyklé. Inspirovala tak celou řadu autorů z řad pracující třídy aby se pokusili pomocí



vlastní divadelní tvorby vyrovnat se zklamáním a frustrací způsobenými neustálými omezeními plynoucími z jejich nevýhodného postavení v tehdejší společnosti.

Následkem toho se na britské divadelní scéně po roce 1956 mimo tvorbu Johna Osborna, začaly objevovat hry od autorů, jako jsou John Arden, Harold Pinter, Edward Bond, Joe Orton, Peter Barnes a v neposlední řadě také Arnold Wesker a Shelagh Delaney. Jejich společným rysem je právě fakt, že pocházejí z pracující vrstvy společnosti, což bylo v porovnání s původem jejich předchůdců unikátní. Nicméně tvorba těchto dramatiků obsahuje i další společné prvky a ty charakterizují právě tzv. novou vlnu realistického dramatu. Pro některé divadelní hry z tohoto období se používá anglický termín 'kitchen sink drama', který poměrně přesně vystihuje jednu z vlastností, kterou se tato díla vyznačují. Jedná se, v porovnání se výše popsanou konvencí platnou po druhé světové válce, o radikální změnu prostředí ve kterém se hry odehrávají. Již se nejedná o domy příslušníků střední třídy ale naopak, děj se většinou odehrává ve skromně vybavených obydlích patřících té vrstvě obyvatelstva, z níž pocházeli i sami autoři. Tito dramatici tak poukazovali na fakt, že většina obyvatel Velké Británie žila v podobných podmínkách a snažili se je zobrazit co možná nejvěrohodněji. Důraz, který autoři kladli, na co možná nejrealističtější zobrazení pracující třídy se projevil i v dalších rysech. Hry totiž obsahují i postavy, které jsou typickými představiteli pracující třídy. Život těchto lidí je publiku přiblížen i použitím pro ně charakteristického jazyka a způsobu komunikace. Výše uvedené prvky je možné zhodnotit, jako celkové zaměření na pracující třídu. Dalším rysem žánru je často otevřená kritika střední třídy, tradičních hodnot a konvencí uznávaných společností. Autoři 'kitchen sink drama' se rovněž zabývají tématy, která byla do té doby pro divadelní hry neobvyklá, například sex, nebo homosexualita.

*The Kitchen* a *A Taste of Honey* jsou analyzovány právě z hlediska obsahu prvků typických pro 'kitchen sink drama'. První analyzovanou hrou je Weskerova *The Kitchen*, jejímž hlavním hrdinou je kuchař Peter. Hra popisuje jeden pracovní den v kuchyni restaurace Tivoli a autor v ní napodobuje atmosféru přeplněné kuchyně, kdy se jednotliví pracovníci ocitají pod velkým tlakem a snaží se co nejrychleji připravit a servírovat objednané pokrmy. Díky své povaze Peter tento tlak špatně snáší, stává se konfliktním a často se chová nevhodně k ostatním zaměstnancům. Ti jeho chování nerozumějí a tak dochází k rozličným hádkám. Tyto konflikty vytvářejí negativní

atmosféru, kterou může divák cítit po celou dobu představení. Rovněž pomáhají Weskerovi dokreslit realistický obraz prostředí typického právě pro pracující třídu. Autor divákovi naznačuje, jak je složité se vyrovnat se stresem a nelehkými pracovními podmínkami. Postavy si totiž stěžují na nadměrné horko na pracovišti, nebo na rychlost se kterou musí vykonávat jednotlivé pracovní úkony. Mnoho ze zaměstnanců rovněž kritizuje majitele restaurace, pana Maragna. Ten je zaměstnanci vnímán jako symbol střední třídy, který představuje právě onu neprostupnost třídního systému, jelikož se nachází v pozici, na kterou jeho zaměstnanci nemají šanci dosáhnout. Díky primárnímu zaměření na pracující třídu a kritice třídy střední lze *The Kitchen* považovat za jedno ze stěžejních děl 'kitchen sink drama'.

Druhým dílem analyzovaným v této práci je pak divadelní hra *A Taste of Honey*. Její autorka, Shelagh Delaney, popisuje soužití matky Helen, a její dcery Jo. Obě hlavní hrdinky se na počátku hry nastěhují do pronajatého bytu v jedné z nepříliš populárních částí Manchesteru. Jejich vztah je plný drobných rozepří a hádek. Zvláště Jo je velmi kritická ke své matce a často ji vyčítá, že jí zkazila život a měla se o ni lépe starat. Její výtky jsou zčásti oprávněné, protože Helen rozhodně nelze charakterizovat jako příkladnou, milující matku. Živí se občasnou prostitucí a nakonec se rozhodne vdát za jednoho ze svých milenců, Petera, aby tak alespoň na chvíli unikla zodpovědnosti za vlastní dceru. Kritika, kterou se obě hlavní hrdinky častují, zde napomáhá naznačit jejich komplikovaný vztah.

Jo mezitím prožívá krátký vztah s chlapcem, který má africké kořeny. Během tohoto vztahu Jo otěhotní, nicméně Jo zůstává sama. Domácnost sdílí s Geoffreyem, homosexuálním přítelem, který jí finančně vypomáhá po dobu nepřítomnosti její matky. Ta, protože její vztah s Peterem nefungoval, se nakonec k dceři vrací a nastává několik hádek, které vyústí odchodem Geoffreyho. Během těchto konfliktů se postavy uchylují k ostřejším výrazům, které tak stejně jako ve hře *The Kitchen* dokreslují prostředí typické pro pracující třídu. Obě ženy pak zůstávají v bytě bez svých mužských protějšků rozhodnuté se postarat samy o sebe.

Hlavní postavy této hry opět patří k pracující třídě a k definovaným rysům žánru opět patří i popis a následná kritika jejich životních podmínek a bytu, ve kterém žijí. V obou dílech jsou tyto podmínky kritizovány a díky této kritice je k nim přitažena i pozornost diváka. Zaměření obou autorů na pracující třídu je tedy společné pro obě hry

a shoduje se s rysy 'kitchen sink drama' popisovanými v úvodní části práce. Jak Wesker, tak Delaney rovněž nechávají své postavy vyjadřovat negativní emoce a procházet různorodými konflikty. To jim umožňuje ventilovat vlastní nespokojenost a zároveň díky těmto prvkům jejich díla působí reálně a uvěřitelně.

Specifickým prvkem *A Taste of Honey* je pak, vzhledem k tématům diskutovaných v poválečných dramatech, dříve nemyslitelné zpracování námětů jako je homosexualita nebo vztah bílé dospívající dívky Jo s černošským mladíkem, který vyústí v nechtěné těhotenství. Jelikož je autorkou díla žena, je schopná porozumět vlivu tohoto těhotenství na budoucnost matky dítěte, která se navíc rozhodne žít sama, aniž by se pokusila kontaktovat otce. Delaney rovněž zkoumá roli žen ve společnosti a naznačuje, že i ženy, které se rozhodnou žít bez mužských protějšků mohou být spokojené. Díky výše uvedeným prvkům a celkovému důrazu na ženské postavy je toto dílo často označováno jako feministické.

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