

<b>Institution:</b> University of Oxford		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28 – History		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Using Shelagh Delaney's work to champion working-class women's lives and voices in British culture		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2014-2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>  Professor Selina Todd Dr Andrea Thomson	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>  Professor of Modern History Research Assistant	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>  2010-present 2017-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015-July 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)  <p>Todd's research has inspired both professional and amateur theatre groups and writers to perform and reinterpret the work of Shelagh Delaney – a working-class playwright (1938-2012) – in ways that attracted new audiences. Most specifically, theatre directors and writers have used Todd's research to develop their artistic practice by foregrounding women's writing and experiences. Todd's work has also helped to extend the reach of cultural organisations by encouraging women and young people in the Greater Manchester area to participate in the arts. In these ways, the research has increased public understanding of Delaney's work and of working-class culture.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)  <p>The research underpinning this case study was undertaken in three related projects on which Todd was Principal Investigator: G1: 'A biographical study of Shelagh Delaney' (Arts Council funded, 2014-15), G2: 'Feminism, culture and women's lives in Britain c.1945-c.2015' (AHRC funded, 2017-18), and G3: 'Housing, culture and women's citizenship in Britain c.1945 to the present' (AHRC funded, 2018-19).</p> <p>G1 examined the life and work of Shelagh Delaney (1938-2012) using unpublished papers and interviews with Delaney's family and friends. G2 and G3 analysed how Delaney's working-class background informed her work, and examined its relevance for young people and women in 21<sup>st</sup> century Salford (Delaney's home town, and an area of high socio-economic deprivation). G2 and G3 also disseminated Delaney's work to audiences in north-west England.</p> <p>Todd's research uncovered aspects of Delaney's life, and several of her works, that had previously been overlooked by scholars and cultural practitioners. Delaney was a teenager when her debut play, <i>A Taste of Honey</i>, had its premiere in 1958. <i>Honey</i> was a box-office hit and adapted into a film in 1961; it has been staged around the world and is on GCSE English and Drama syllabuses. <i>Honey</i> centres on Jo, a white, working-class teenager who gets pregnant while having a brief relationship with a black sailor. Many productions, along with most of the limited scholarship on Delaney, have been overly influenced by the approaches of <i>Honey</i>'s first director, Joan Littlewood, and of Tony Richardson, who directed the film adaptation. Littlewood emphasised the brutality of working-class life (through casual racism and homophobia), while Richardson foregrounded heterosexual romance. In contrast, Delaney's original script focused on the complex relationship between Jo and her single mother, Helen.</p>		

Scholars and practitioners have also wrongly assumed that Littlewood was solely responsible for the avant-garde aspects of *Honey*, such as the use of live music and breaking of the fourth wall. Todd's research showed that these innovations resulted from collaboration with Delaney, whose attempt to capture women's dreams and frustrations drew on music hall, Samuel Beckett and cinema. The tendency of scholars and directors to categorise Delaney as a social realist has overlooked her interest in exploring emotion and desire in women's lives.

Delaney's later work similarly foregrounded working-class women's lives and voices. While many commentators assume she stopped writing after *Honey*, Todd's research revealed that she enjoyed a long career as a writer for theatre, film and television. Her work showcased the richness of women's voices and illuminated aspects of their lives – including mother/daughter relationships and female friendship in older age – that remains neglected in the media and the arts today.

Todd developed these conclusions in her book *Tastes of Honey: The Making of Shelagh Delaney and a Cultural Revolution*.<sup>[R1]</sup> Todd's key research findings informed the collaborations and inspired the new cultural work described in Section 4:

- Delaney's work developed from and contributed to a rich community culture, and subsequent generations have found the work captivating. Todd's research challenges prevailing political rhetoric and cultural policies that treat such communities as 'marginal' to cultural life, or as lacking 'cultural capital'.
- Delaney's career was facilitated by radical and socialist theatre and by the welfare state, and her work needs to be understood in relation to an ongoing tradition of innovative local arts initiatives, often run as grass-roots enterprises. Greater opportunities to meet the existing demand within local communities are vital to sustain levels of aspiration and cultural engagement, contrary to some current media and political assertions.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

**R1.**[Authored Book, listed in REF2] S. Todd, *Tastes of Honey: The Making of Shelagh Delaney and a Cultural Revolution* (Chatto & Windus: London, 2019). ISBN 9781473545090. This book was the lead review in the *Observer* (25 August 2019) and *TLS* (1 November 2019) and was an *Observer* and *New Statesman* book of the year for 2019.

**R2.**[Website Content] S. Todd, 'An Introduction to *A Taste of Honey*' (2017), article published on the British Library's *Discovering Literature* website, <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-a-taste-of-honey> (Accessed 21 February 2021).

#### Grants awarded

**G1.**Arts Council (27927134): 'A biographical study of Shelagh Delaney' (PI: S. Todd), 2014-2015, GBP6,500

**G2.**AHRC (AH/N00986X/1): 'Feminism, culture and women's lives in Britain c.1945-c.2015' (PI: S. Todd), 2016-2018, GBP192,217

**G3.**AHRC (AH/S00002X/1): 'Housing, culture and women's citizenship in Britain c.1945 to the present' (PI: S. Todd), 2018-2019, GBP79,999

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Todd's research **increased cultural participation in working-class areas**. In 2016 Todd's research inspired **MaD Theatre Company** – a community theatre based in north Manchester – to create a Delaney Theatre Group (DTG) in premises in Salford owned by the Guinness Partnership, an affordable housing provider. MaD's Co-Director notes that 'thanks to Selina's work, which demonstrated the importance of Shelagh Delaney's work, the Guinness Partnership agreed to support us in establishing the Delaney Community Theatre Group'.<sup>[E1, E2]</sup>

Inspired by Todd's research, and supported by her AHRC grants, the DTG staged an adaptation of a trilogy of Shelagh Delaney's short stories, *Sweetly Sings the Donkey*, at The Lowry, Salford in September 2017 (2 sell-out performances; total audience 240). A BBC North West news report, broadcast in 2017, highlighted that the members of the DTG were 'amateur actors who grew up on the same streets' as Shelagh Delaney.[E3] The Co-Director of MaD reports that participation developed members' confidence, encouraged some to achieve professional qualifications and led others 'to create their own plays that have been performed at Greater Manchester Fringe'.[E1]

Cultural organisations and practitioners were major beneficiaries of Todd's research. Todd led two public workshops on her research at the Working Class Movement Library, Salford. The Library Manager states that these 'drew in many local people who had not visited the Library before', **increasing public engagement with the Library**. [E4]

The research **helped MaD to expand their cultural practice and network, with lasting benefits**. The company's Co-Director writes that their partnership with Todd was 'a new and fruitful departure...as until then we had staged our own work'.[E1] The Lowry's Senior Theatres Programmer and Producer notes that 'Professor Todd's work in raising the profile of the playwright to new local audiences' helped persuade The Lowry to stage the DTG's performances.[E5] The Co-Director reports that 'as a direct result of [the project], MaD was able to establish a much needed relationship with The Lowry'. This is 'invaluable...as it introduces our work to new audiences from beyond the districts of Manchester where our participants live'.[E1]

The research partnership **enabled MaD and The Lowry to increase audience reach**. Lowry staff 'were delighted with the response and [the opportunity] to engage so directly with people who were new to The Lowry and theatre generally'. [E5] 31% of the DTG's audience had attended a theatre twice or less in the 12 months prior to the performance; 19% had not attended a theatre in this period.[E6] Todd's research thus **enabled MaD to achieve its aim of 'produc[ing] theatre by and for people who would not normally attend'**. [E1]

Todd's research (e.g. R1) contributed to an increased affinity among the project partners with Delaney's social themes. Through their production and performances, they renewed **public interest in Delaney's work and challenged negative stereotypes of working-class life**. The BBC North West report observed that 'Salford born Shelagh Delaney became an overnight success with her ground-breaking debut play' and emphasised that DTG members came from 'the same streets'. By 31 July 2020 this report had been viewed on Facebook approximately 37,000 times.[E3] Audience members at the DTG's performances of *Sweetly Sings the Donkey* praised the positive portrayal of northern working-class life: 'very northern, very Salford!'. [E7.1] The performances also enriched spectators' understanding of Delaney's work: '[I have gained] More understanding of her work and would like to now know more'; [E7.2] '[I learned] that she continued to write wonderful plays throughout her life. Now I want to see more'. [E7.3]

The research **encouraged practitioners and participants to represent and value working-class women's experiences**. Todd commissioned freelance writer **Charlotte Delaney** to adapt *Sweetly Sings the Donkey* for the DTG's stage performances. This was Charlotte Delaney's first stage adaptation, and success gave her 'the confidence to take the rigour of academic research and apply it to the conversations, relationships and choices made by "everyday" women' in her subsequent work.[E8] Charlotte Delaney led three creative writing workshops at a women's refuge in Salford where, influenced by Todd's research she encouraged 'women to explore their own voices'. This helped some participants to become 'more confident at speaking for themselves in difficult situations'. [E8] Todd's work inspired MaD to include '[Shelagh] Delaney's life and work in a commissioned production for the Co-operative Group' about Manchester, in order to show that 'ordinary women played a huge part in the cultural heritage of Greater Manchester'. [E1]

Todd's work was an **'invaluable resource' for the 2019-20 National Theatre production of *A Taste of Honey***. It helped the director 'understand...[how] some of Shelagh's difficult early experiences were expressing themselves through the play'. Cast members read Todd's *Tastes of Honey* so that 'we were able to begin our rehearsal period with a shared in-depth knowledge of the [play's] background'. [E9] The director had previously directed a 2014 production of *Honey*, but Todd's research changed his interpretation of the play. He and his team 'developed one of the main ideas of this production – the relationship between the audience, the live music and the actors – through our conversations with Selina'. [E9] The resulting production had more than 80 sold-out performances in ten venues, including The Lowry (with combined Lowry audiences estimated at c.10,000). The *Guardian's* reviewer noted that some productions of *Honey* 'seem a little patronising, as if the 19-year-old Delaney merely had a certain authenticity to offer', whereas the production by the National Theatre 'isn't particularly interested in being "real" and is all the more interesting for it'. [E10] Todd's research thus **generated new ways of thinking about and understanding Delaney's work**.

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- E1. Emailed statement from Co-Director, MaD Theatre Company, 17 February 2020.
- E2. Letter of support produced by The Guinness Partnership (29 October 2015) for the DTG's production of *Sweetly Sings the Donkey*, confirming the Partnership's desire to increase awareness of Delaney.
- E3. Screenshot of BBC North West news report (31 August 2017) broadcast on the main evening and late evening regional news bulletins, showing viewing figures on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1637599102937812>. Accessed: 19 January 2021.
- E4. Emailed statement from Library Manager, Working Class Movement Library, 27 January 2020.
- E5. Emailed statement from Senior Theatres Programmer and Producer, The Lowry, 21 January 2020.
- E6. Audience survey data on theatre attendance, gathered at performances of *Sweetly Sings the Donkey*, The Lowry, Salford (7 and 8 September 2017), as part of the AHRC project.
- E7. Survey responses gathered at performances of *Sweetly Sings the Donkey*, The Lowry, Salford (7 and 8 September 2017), as part of the AHRC project:
  - E7.1. 'Responses to Qualitative Q1 Friday 8 September 2017'.
  - E7.2. 'Responses to Qualitative Q3 Thursday 7 September 2017'.
  - E7.3. 'Responses to Qualitative Q3 Friday 8 September 2017'.
- E8. Emailed statement from Charlotte Delaney, daughter of Shelagh Delaney and trustee of her estate, 30 July 2020.
- E9. Statement from director of National Theatre production of *A Taste of Honey*, 28 July 2020.
- E10. 'A Taste of Honey review – sweet songs and sour love', *Guardian* (10 December 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/dec/10/a-taste-of-honey-review-traffic-jam-studios-london-shelagh-delaney-jodie-prenger>. Accessed: 19 January 2021.