

SECTION 3: INTIMACY, DESIRE & AMBIGUITY

Heavenly Creatures (1994) Peter Jackson NZ

This section will explore the film *Heavenly Creatures* as a key text from my area of study - Antipodean cinema. I want to therefore analyse the film in depth particularly in relation to my main objective of this dissertation, to assess what representation of women it offers. In looking at the main themes and style of the film I will particularly be addressing the notion of 'desire' and examine how this is explored. Using theories from Gilles Deleuze and his notion of 'unbound desire', to assess what extent this is played out in the film. I want to situate desire particularly in relation to the intimate relationship of the two girls central to the story, but also assess where desire and identity for the spectator may lie and discuss what issues this brings up.

My other area for analysis is 'intimacy', which can mostly be identified in the complex relationship between the girls, I want to explore how this intimacy is articulated to the viewer. 'Ambiguity' is again prevalent in the discussion and in this film, both in its effort to truthfully depict the true story of the Parker & Hulme murder case and indeed in representing the real relationship of the two girls (nobody can actually know what they were thinking or feeling). Navigating the territory between fantasy and reality, documentary and fiction, the ordinary and the extraordinary, the film opens up many ambiguities and seems to transgress many borders. It offers an interesting alternative representation of women and one that had previously not been shown. It allows the voice of the minority to be heard in this story of intimate unbound desire. *Heavenly Creatures* as a film that complicates normal notions of womanhood, could be seen as radical in its representation, particularly as a text coming from New Zealand which is a country in which traditional values and strict moral views are prevalent.

It is important to situate the film in its context of the real case and events that happened in Christchurch in June 1954 when the teenagers Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme bludgeoned Pauline's mother to death. The discussion will have to acknowledge that 'all events happen in a social and political context' (Glamuzina & Laurie: 1991: 18) which in

publicised and the whole nation labelled it an outcry after following the story in the press which covered the trial extensively. It is considered one of New Zealand's most sensational crimes and the fascination with the story ultimately led to Peter Jackson making the film *Heavenly Creatures*. The interplay of reality with fiction is a sensitive approach to take, and leads us on to questions of ambiguity, which are still left surrounding the case. It is important to discuss the film as a text but we must also be considerate to the true crime story and be aware that it is a fictionalisation of real evidence and real people.

Jackson opens up the narrative of *Heavenly Creatures* from the established facts of the Parker & Hulme case. By revealing the facts at the beginning, the film is then able to flesh out this framework to give deeper insight into the intriguing lead characters. The film is an attempt to place the event within a social context, to try and figure out why such emotions, desire and intimacy between two teenage girlfriends could spiral into one of New Zealand's most tragic crimes. The opening sequence establishes the complex vision of the film as it inter-cuts three counterpointed layers of imagery which suggests right from the start the crossing of boundaries and the ambiguous relationship between reality and fantasy that will follow, as well as setting up the historical context for the story. The opening newsreel footage of 1950's Christchurch New Zealand, leads us through the attractive and pleasant images of the small town, setting up our impression that Christchurch was a cosy, provincial, clean and pleasant wholesome community with very traditional values. This image is quickly intruded upon with the juxtaposition of the next interlaying sequence, in which we hear the shrieks of Pauline and Juliet as they run through Victoria Park, fleeing from the scene of the murder. Close up shots of the girls blood stained legs and feet running through the bushes are dramatically effective in building up tension and bringing across a kinetic urgency to the narrative. These shots are inter-cut with a black and white fantasy sequence also depicting the girls running, but instead of running in a anxious frenzy they are running together along the deck of a ship smiling and yelling "mummy" to Juliet's parents. The contrast of these two scenes is effective in establishing the thin line between fantasy and reality which is continually crossed throughout the film. The end of this sequence is of the two girls, their faces and clothes covered in blood as they emerge out of Victoria Park seeking help and Pauline shrieks "It's mummy! She's been terribly hurt!".

Clear themes and tensions which are central to the structure of the film are established within this densely edited juxtaposed imagery, and Jackson's focus on running and feet suggests early on an attempt by the characters to find a bearing or to direct a mercurial fate. The symbolic meaning impaired in the legs and feet, which continues into the following scene, is that of transition, of passing borders and the notion of escape, suggesting the girls constant struggle to escape their lives. The motion on the screen also communicates their adolescence, which is a time of great, rapid change and exuberance, the relentlessness and energy that we see resembles this period in their lives. This opening sequence is important as by setting up the context of the events, they somehow seem more shocking in nature, 'the film demonstrates both the horror lurking within the mundane and the manner in which reality and fantasy converge and diverge' (Columpar 2002: 324).

Jackson blurs many boundaries throughout the film, choosing to explore the transitional spaces in between, without giving any real concrete conclusions to the issues opened up. Ultimately the film is fully ambiguous primarily as it presents itself as both history and fiction. The inter-title just after the opening sequence offers the audience facts of the real case, this immediately frames the film in a different light from just pure fiction. It identifies that these characters were real, and the event of the murder did take place and this gives an added investment from the viewer into the story and is perhaps what makes it stay more resonant in memory. The film attempts to tell the story primarily through Pauline Parker's perspective, by using her real diary entries to frame the story of events leading up to the eventual murder of her mother Honara Parker. These (now infamous) diaries were also used in the trial as evidence to convict the girls of murder. The use of real life private documents adds a serious edge to the dramatisation of the case. Using them as a narrative device gives the viewer the feeling that they have extra insight or knowledge and this in turn leads us to identify with Pauline's complex character. But being privy to her private thoughts is also a little unnerving. By giving the audience this insight the film questions our voyeuristic urge and actively makes us contemplate the intrusion that took place into their lives during the trial. The film never sticks to a pure factual, documentary style of storytelling, instead it creates a vision of the imaginary world of Pauline and Juliet in many fantasy sequences and fictional narration. By doing this it bring

to life the story of Parker & Hulme, which at the time was misunderstood, and it opens up many of the issues surrounding the case. It leaves it up to the audience to contemplate on the interesting and intensely complex relationship between the two girls. By identification with some of the passions and desires which they felt at the time, the film allows the viewer to actively sympathise with their situation and partly understand why these strong emotions became enough for them to eventually exclude the outside world. The viewer as much as the characters on screen, get lost in their imaginary fantasy and see how the stifling restrictions of the time ultimately lead them to their merciful fate. We witness the emergence of a transition from reality to an eventual bordering psychotic state of mind in the two lead characters but we also witness why this may have happened.

The film traces the relationship between the two girls from the first day they met, initially pointing out the wide differences between them in social class, whilst simultaneously drawing links of similarities between them. It attempts to illustrate how they became so close particularly in relation to the context they were in, which would initially lead you to think the friendship wasn't possible according to their social circumstances. It is in fact their 'divergent class backgrounds (that) create a fundamental difference' (Columpar 2002: 329). Part of my analysis is understanding what drew these girls together when from the outside it seems an impossible match. A bright, intelligent, confident, polite English girl and a New Zealand girl from a working class background with a headstrong, serious and rebellious nature become inseparable. We initially identify with Pauline's point of view and the relationship that is built between the two girls is mainly appropriated through our identification with Pauline as she then identifies with Juliet. Pauline first identifies with Juliet after learning she has an appreciation of the same singer Mario Lanza. She goes home and plays his record, her face full of appreciation for him and in a state of euphoria, this initial wilful appreciation of the same music is what Columpar calls 'a temporarily objectless desire' (2002: 329). This is interesting in terms of the different levels of desire I will be discussing later, but it's an important moment as it links the girls desire for the singer to identification with each other. Identification between the girls is firmly established when they both trade stories about their childhood illnesses, which have obviously had a deeper inflicting pain for both of them other than just the scars

on their bodies. Their status as outsiders is their initial point of identification, Pauline is presented as a slight loner at school, daydreaming and choosing to be by herself and Juliet is seen as an outsider simply on the terms that she is a new student to the school, but also because of her higher social status. It is closing the gap in their wide social differences that Pauline seeks to do as it gradually emerges through the film that Pauline has a desire to be like Juliet. It is in Pauline's over attachment and identification with Juliet that translates into a complex and continually diverging desire which is later seen by others as 'unhealthy' and leads to their eventual separation. The initial identification with one another proceeds onto deeper links, as similar dreams and desires become more and more visible as the film goes on. We witness the process of Pauline's growing desire and the levels of changes it makes in relation to Juliet's own needs and demands.

Initially Pauline's identification is built on a heterosexual paradigm and sticks to traditional conventions of the gaze, as when she first visits Juliet's house we see their relationship set out in the classical way. After cycling to her house, Pauline hears Juliet's laughter, then significantly Juliet call's Pauline "Paul" which marks the relationship in a heterosexual way as 'she interpolates her friend into a sort of heterosexual role play that initially structures their relationship' (Columpar 2002: 333). When hearing her name Pauline turns around and gazes directly towards Juliet. At this point the audience is positioned with Pauline, and our gaze is that of hers which interestingly embodies what Mulvey discussed earlier - it is a male gaze. The romanticised image of Juliet on the bridge dressed as a princess immediately positions Pauline as bearer of the gaze, and Juliet constructs her as the prince to her Princess, as Columpar notes this 'reinforces the conventionally masculinized and feminized positions the girls have taken up in relation to the act of looking and in accordance with cinematic convention, the act of desire' (2002: 333). This pattern of identification is continued throughout the beginning of the relationship as initially Pauline is in awe of Juliet. Another key scene in setting up Pauline's desire is when her and Juliet are outside at night sitting by a makeshift altar in which they are worshipping celebrities. This scene also begins to suggest other identifications and fantasies as Juliet first talks of "the fourth world". As Juliet places photo's up onto the altar and idolises the stars, Pauline is shown to be quite literally gazing at Juliet shifting the set gaze

from the pictures and redirecting it so she is looking at Juliet rather than with her. Juliet is also positioned higher during this scene so the shot/reverse/shot cuts position Pauline as lower, gazing up towards Juliet, an initial 'homosocial identification and homoerotic desire [is] mobilized' (Columpar 2002: 334) in this scene and the gaze can be clearly recognised. However their relationship becomes much more complex with the emergence of multiple identifications and desires which develop as their fantasies go on. Columpar notes, 'desire and identification emerge as bound together' (2002: 333), Pauline wants to diverge right into Juliet's way of life, whose situation seems so desirable in comparison to what she is used to. She adopts Juliet's parents and starts referring to them as 'mummy' and 'daddy' as she goes away on holiday with them. But her desire goes further than just becoming a part of the Hulme's family, as more and more Pauline's desire grows and becomes multi-dimensional as she gets drawn into Juliet's imagination and fantasy world. Juliet is equally drawn to Pauline in seeking appreciation for her vivid imagination and companionship from the neglect she feels from her parents in this aspect of her life.

Deleuze & Desire

It is possible to relate some of Gilles Deleuze's concepts on desire in relation to this model of *Heavenly Creatures* as 'the subject for Deleuze is a process of becoming in active processes of transformation' (Braidotti 2000: 159). Both Pauline and Juliet's identities seem to develop and fragment throughout their relationship, as by adopting different names for themselves they create shifting and continually changing identifications for one another and their desires transform accordingly. Columpar notes 'the film explores the space between desire and identification' (2002: 326), their pleasures become continual in nature with the dynamic multiplicity of their identities. Importantly though, the film sustains an 'interaction between identification and desire wherein neither process is privileged over the other and both are shown to be implicated in one another from the very start of the friendship' (Columpar 2002: 328). Every time they each identify with each other it seems another desire is bound to that, constructing the girls' desires as multiple and intrinsically

various fantasies and role-plays in which the girls take part, as more and more they begin to merge the boundary between reality and fantasy. Towards the end of the film, there is a scene that depicts this confused identification and desire between the girls and demonstrates the deep level of their intimacy. After returning home from the cinema they decide to "enact how each saint would make love in bed" (Pauline's diary), this is visualised through close ups of both Pauline and Juliet's faces, at the point they come to kiss, one of their faces morph's into a idolised male character. Their complex relationship is highlighted in this scene as they seem to be masking their own desire for each other through play acting with other identities, Columpar notes 'fantasy and reality, heterosexual desire and lesbian sexuality, homoerotic desire and intimate friendship converge, intermingle and mutate' (2002: 338). The intense intimacy between them demonstrated in this scene is re-iterated by Pauline's diary entry voice-over "we spent a hectic night going through the saints. It was wonderful, heavenly, beautiful, and ours" but also illustrates 'the shifting and multidimensional nature of their involvement' (Columpar 2002: 339). What is clear is that desire and identification are complicatedly tied to one another and continually in flux in the film.

This type of desire can be tied according to some of the ideas from Deleuze, who challenges traditional trajectories of desire as being bound to lack. It is an example of a very complicated desire and coming from a woman in film it is extremely radical in its very nature. It can also be seen as transgressive in the relation it bears to Deleuze's challenging concept on desire as 'pure positivity (and) production' (Grosz 1995: 179). Deleuze tries to get away from the concept of desire as 'primarily a lack: a lack of an object, a lack of the real object' (Deleuze & Guttari 1984: 25). Generally in society, the notion of desire has been for 'something' or an 'object' we feel we are lacking. In the paternalistic and social order, emphasis was based on concrete ideals, which were obtained by various capitalist notions such as a good education, wealth and status. But Grosz points out Hegel's opposition to and Deleuze's appreciation that 'the only object desire can desire is one that will not fill the lack or provide complete satisfaction. To provide desire with its object is to annihilate it. Desires to be desired' (1995: 176). Deleuze continues on this trail of thought 'if desire is the lack of the real object, its very nature as a real entity depends upon an

“essence of lack” that produces the fantasized object’ (1984: 25), perhaps this can be seen in the vivid imaginations of Pauline and Juliet. The many fantasy sequences in the film suggests a notion of longing in each of the girls, but as Cowie points out ‘fantasy involves, is characterised by, not the achievement of desired objects, but the arranging of, a setting out of, desire; a veritable *mise en scene* of desire’ (1997: 133). Their enactment of desire is very much concerned with the want or hope for a thing rather than the need or the thing itself. This fits with Deleuze’s productive force of desire, Grosz explains this further ‘what is significant about desire is not the objects to which it attaches itself; but rather the flows and dynamics of its circulation, the paths, detours, and returns it undergoes’ (1995: 178). This articulation of desire can be identified in both Pauline and Juliet’s complex and continually changing desires. Although Juliet has many of the things the paternalistic order would presume satisfies her desires (wealth, clothes, good environment), it is in fact more than these that she needs. Juliet has a desperate need to be loved and for a feeling of belonging, with her vivid imagination of concepts and ideas she longs to be recognised by her parents. However idealistic or mad her ideas may seem in the day to day materialistic world, it is her creativity that’s important to her and that’s what seems to drive her throughout the film. Deleuze says on desire ‘what exists in fact is not lack, but passion ... desire is not bolstered by needs, but rather the contrary; needs are derived from desire’ (1984: 27). Nobody around Juliet recognises these very desires and passions apart from Pauline who shares the same longing, desires and fantasies. It is the recognition of each other’s multi-dynamic passions that brought the two so closely together. Pauline and Juliet create for each other their own world where they can appreciate these things as each of their parents don’t seem to recognise their chosen values.

Perhaps this desire is linked to the loneliness and abandonment they felt from their parents, which caused them both to feel a sense of lack. However it is in their mutual recognition of each other’s more complex desires which lead them together despite their social class differences. These desires are, in the film, then projected into their fantasy world of Borovnia, which becomes the playground for them to satisfy their continual urges and desire for love, companionship and fulfilment. They could give to each other, which they saw as others taking away from them, and this is the main bond they share together.

These fantasy sequences are visually impelling and magical, demonstrating their bordering transitions from the real world and separation from family life towards their fantasy concept of “the fourth world” where they share intimate moments of mutual recognition. Here it seems they feel connected as one, as Pauline wrote in her diary of these discoveries

We have an extra part of our brain which can appreciate the Fourth world. Only about 10 people have it. On two days every year we may use the key and look into that beautiful world which we have been lucky enough to be allowed to know of

Her voice-over is used over an image of the two girls sitting quietly and blissfully head to head. From this stage on in the film, the continual divergence from fantasy to reality intermingle and demonstrate the complex nature of Pauline and Juliet’s relationship as they become more and more drawn to each other. It is from these shared desires that they form such an intimate relationship.

Intimacy between the two girls in the film is very carefully constructed, in the scenes in which they enter into their fantasy world, or moments where they act out the saints making love, carefully portray the intense and confusing relationship they shared. Jackson was keen not to brand the relationship on a strictly lesbian paradigm, which is what happened in the real case, as it seems sexual impulses were irrelevant to what these girls were trying to achieve and find in each other. He toys mercilessly with the audiences preconceptions of the case and drives home his point that the girls had a relationship that pretty much defied simple categorisation. Instead we witness their relationship grow in terms of their mutual understanding, of being able to recognise each others wishes and desires. Their case can be seen in terms of Deleuze’s philosophy of unbound desire as through their imagination and creativity they found solace in each other. At the time these misunderstood desires for each other were seen as bad or evil due to the strict social attitudes in Christchurch and were therefore prevented from continuing, ‘if desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 116). It seems it is only when their desires turned into beliefs that they became psychologically disturbed enough to act out murder. Their minds at some point bordered on a psychotic state, as they believed that the concrete act of killing the obstacle in their way would prevent their

forced separation from each other. The fear of such abandonment drove them to this state of paranoia and psychotic behaviour to actually murder the object whom they believed was the cause of their predicament. The mother became the scapegoat of the patriarchal attitudes that existed at that time. From this act they ultimately gave in to the society which was preventing them from being together and this also gave the world the misjudged impression that they were murdering lesbians. In fact their relationship was much deeper than this as I have discussed. In either interpretation, *Heavenly Creatures* offers an insight into a complex articulation of desire and presents the viewer, particularly the female viewer, with moments of intense adolescent intimacy which they can relate to.