



ABBAY THEATRE RESEARCH PACK
KATIE ROCHE
TERESA DEEVY

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**With special thanks to the Abbey Theatre Archive
and the Teresa Deevy Archive, Special Collections &
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For more information see [https://www.abbeytheatre.
ie/about/archive/](https://www.abbeytheatre.ie/about/archive/) and www.deevy.nuim.ie

Cover Image: Caoilfhionn Dunne as Katie Roche © Ros Kavanagh

WELCOME

PHIL KINGSTON

Community and
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From 26 August to 23 September 2017, the Abbey Theatre presented a major revival of Teresa Deevy's ground-breaking play *Katie Roche*. It was over 80 years since this daring meditation on freedom, duty and pride in the life of a young woman made its world premiere on the Abbey stage.

In its initial press release the Abbey explicitly recognised that the political climate had influenced its programming - "*The Abbey Theatre is committed to elevating the work of women in Irish theatre. Katie Roche is a brilliant play from the Irish canon. Welcoming Teresa's work back to our stage is just one way we hope to correct the issues of gender inequality that we see in our own society today.*" (Graham McLaren and Neil Murray, Directors of the Abbey Theatre). Much of the press reaction also acknowledged the historical and cultural significance of the production actually happening.

But what also emerged was an appreciation of how theatrical works, for all their canonical importance, are also mutable. Morna Regan's

dramaturgy and Caroline Byrne's expressionistic staging turned this *Katie Roche* into far more than a reverential museum piece. The audiences saw a specific, thrilling and thought provoking take on Deevy's classic story. Coincidentally at the same time another artist, Amanda Coogan, presented a performance art based response to Deevy's work in collaboration with Dublin Theatre of the Deaf in *Talk Real Fine, Just Like A Lady*.

Finally Deevy was back in the wider cultural conversation and one immediate question was where is the context for people to understand her work better? Thankfully Dr Marie Kelly of University College Cork offered to present aspects of her own and her colleagues' painstaking work for a wider audience.

Welcome to this *Katie Roche* Research Pack, a first for the Abbey Theatre in terms of the multiple contributions and gathering together of existing scholarship. We hope it contributes to a greater appreciation of Teresa Deevy and the art of drama that she so loved.

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INTRODUCTION

MARIE KELLY

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It has been an honour and privilege to put together this information pack as a resource for those with an interest in the work of playwright Teresa Deevy and her 1936 play, *Katie Roche*.

This new production of the play at the Abbey is enormously significant in the context of recent local and world events that have pushed issues of inequality and mobility unprecedentedly to the fore. Katie stands for those on the margins, those without place and voice, those who exist between one unknown and another. In this staging of Deevy's play we are not told the story of Katie's peripatetic reality, we live it through the prism of the sensory and psychic moments of her conscious existence.

Emphasized through the semiotics of birth, metamorphosis, and transcendence, Caroline Byrne's production offers a kaleidoscopic view of Katie's interior world as she transitions from silence towards expression, questioning to knowing, from stasis towards movement and change. Capturing the intense and unforgiving

contours of Katie's subjectivity, Joanna Scotcher's minimalist set design echoes Appia and Craig with its towering receding side walls that lead the eye towards a guillotine shaped shard of glass that hovers ominously over the rear of the stage. On the floor a deep bed of loose soil covers pristine white marble. In this austere and unwelcoming environment, illuminated by the glittering sharpness of Paul Keogan's lighting design, we feel every inch of the architecture of Katie's effort and discomfort. Dwarfed by its monumental boundaries, rebuffed by its hard surfaces, and stumbling to gain a foothold on the shifting soil beneath her feet, Katie heroically refuses to be subsumed. Somewhere beneath the mess and dirt there lies the grandeur of marble, Katie's potential, her greatness. It is towards the hints of this potential that Teresa Deevy's character is propelled in the course of her play and Byrne gets right to the nub of this in the expressionism of her stage action, Morna Regan's careful/pared back dramaturgy, and an adept and sensitive cast including Caoilfhionn Dunne (Katie), Sean Campion (Stanislaus),

Kevin Creedon (Michael), Donal O'Kelly (Reuben), Dylan Kennedy (Jo) and Siobhan McSweeney (Amelia).

Coming into her own by the end of the play, Katie makes a pact with Amelia to be brave in her quest: 'I was looking for something great to do', she says' and 'now surely I have it'. In this production, Katie leaves Amelia's embrace and moves to a position behind the glass wall where she stands facing the audience. Amelia turns to face the audience too, but she remains trapped forever on the other side. Through its powerful *mise en scène* and this striking closing image, this new Abbey production of Deevy's play celebrates the astonishing forces of human indefatigability and self-determination in circumstances of oppression and disempowerment.

As I gathered material and engaged with Deevy (and Katie) through the work of the artists and scholars who have so generously contributed to this pack, these forces were at the forefront of my mind. I hope that this endeavour will generate discussion around this hugely important playwright, and that it will enable and inspire many future productions of her work.

My sincere thanks to Caroline Byrne (director), Morna Regan (writer/dramaturg), Valerie Payne, Hugh Murphy, Róisín Berry, and Barbara McCormack (the Teresa Deevy Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Maynooth University), Mairéad Delaney (Archivist, Abbey

Theatre), Phil Kingston and Lisa Farrelly (Community and Education, Abbey Theatre), Amanda Coogan (performance artist), Úna Kealy and Kate McCarthy (Waterford Institute of Technology), Fiona Becket (University of Leeds), Caoilfhionn Ní Bheacháin (University of Limerick), Cathy Leeney (University College Dublin), Chris Morash (Trinity College Dublin), Eibhear Walshe (University College Cork), Christie Fox (Westminster College, Utah), Dee Maher (Smudge Design).

ABOUT TERESA DEEVY

TERESA DEEVY: A QUIET SUBVERSIVE

ÚNA KEALY



Caoilfhionn Dunne as Katie Roche © Ros Kavanagh

Teresa Deevy made no claims to being a political radical, a feminist, or a social revolutionary: and yet she was all of these things. Her plays, particularly those written for the Abbey in the 1930s imagine into life a cast of characters who must negotiate and survive, often with great difficulty and distress, the ever-decreasing freedoms

available in 1930s Ireland. Cathy Leeney describes Deevy's work as a "complex and authentic articulation of personal dilemmas within a matrix of private and social circumstances and expectations [...] not skewed by stereotypical masculine / feminine dichotomies".¹ Similarly, Eibhear Walshe (2003) asserts that

Deevy's examination of the often self-destructive struggle for freedom and self-fulfilment is not confined to female characters.² To suggest Deevy's sole concern is with the confinements endured by women is to reduce the resonance and relevance of her artistry and critical observation. Nevertheless, the stories that Deevy creates around her female characters' experiences are uniquely luminescent in their evocation of female desire, frustration and repression.

To subvert is to undermine the power and authority of an established system or institution and Deevy's plays do exactly this. As Caoilfhionn Ní Bheacháin asserts, Deevy's plays astutely analyse the impact upon women's lives and freedoms of a simultaneously stagnant but transitioning Irish society of the 1930s.³ Written as legislation limiting female access to the workplace, contraception and rights of equal citizenship were drafted and passed into Irish law, Deevy's plays reveal, critique and challenge conscious and unconscious gender bias in Irish society. In their frustrated attempts to achieve autonomy within their sexual, emotional and intellectual lives Deevy's characters challenge and subvert these systems from within.⁴ Teresa Deevy did not accept the curtailing of women's freedoms and opportunities and her portrayal of this on the national stage ensured that Irish people in the 1930s and today are asked to question such things too.

Susan McKay reminds us of the invaluable importance of

documenting women's 'lives, beliefs, desires and activities' to address the relative lack of documentation of these things and combat 'elisions and one-sided historical accounts'.⁵ Deevy's plays, as Christie Fox suggests, provide an interpretation and documentation of the situation in which women in 1930s Ireland found themselves.⁶ Christopher Morash describes Deevy's characters as having "fully realized private lives" and significantly it is these private hopes, dreams and sorrows that are written into the narrative of cultural history countering the fact that real-life women's histories were often dismissed or diminished in other State sponsored histories of Irish life.⁷ As Fiona Becket argues Deevy's women, struggle within the domestic domain but, crucially, they remain within it substituting "voice for voicelessness" powerfully evoking the powerful flare and burn of passion, frustration and sorrow.⁸ McKay, cites Clare Hemmings' argument in "Telling Feminist Stories" which asserts that feminist accounts of history, 'herstory' if you like, are often 'heavily imbued with emotion' and reminds us of the challenge to readers, practitioners and scholars in attending to the affective dimension of material created by women artists.⁹ Once again Deevy bucks a trend.

Deevy, as Frank O'Connor, astutely notes in a letter to her, shunned the overtly theatrical; she also shunned the overtly emotional.¹⁰ Hers is a theatre of subtext, of subtle demonstrations of attitudes rather than proclamations and declarations. Emotion is not absent from Deevy's work but rather it is contained in the way that emotions are often contained and revealed—in understatement, restraint and silence—and when her

characters move beyond this they begin to express attitudes and ways of being that are registered by those around them as unacceptable. The affective dimension in Deevy's work is subtle because she realised that often, to avoid trouble, women must reign in their aspirations, their sense of injustice and disappointment so as to appear reasonable, objective and rational. Women may not agree with systems in place in society but sometimes an effective and enduring mode of resistance constitutes an ability to fit into such systems and to subvert them from within. Deevy's skill as a playwright is found, somewhat paradoxically, in her use of silence to expose and break silences thereby revealing stories and experiences secreted away in the bodies, places and conventions of Irish life and people. The intricacies of Deevy's understanding of human behaviour and her sophisticated appreciation of the potential of lighting, scenography, costume, sound design and the actor's physical, emotional and intellectual presence to inform, shade and expand the emotional resonance of her stories make her a quintessential dramatic artist of universal and enduring appeal.

Amanda Coogan and Dublin Theatre of the Deaf prove this enduring appeal as a case in point. *Talk Real Fine, Just Like a Lady* responds to the energy within Deevy's work finding space within the text to parallel contemporary concerns around equality of opportunity.



Sean Campion as Stanislaus Gregg, Caoilfhionn Dunne as Katie Roche © Ros Kavanagh

Caroline Byrne's production of *Katie Roche* complements this, as Marie Kelly says in her 'introduction' to this pack, celebrating 'the astonishing forces of human indefatigability and self-determination in circumstances of oppression and disempowerment.'

A huge congratulations to all at the Abbey and Peacock Theatres and the Dublin Theatre of the Deaf in relation to the 2017 productions of *Katie Roche* and *Talk Real Fine, Just Like a Lady* which reveal the dangers of fracturing the heart and soul; the devastating and sorrowful effects of shutting out joy, wonder and the imagination; and of the injustices of being imprisoned within the confines of frustration, disappointment and voicelessness. Stylistically spare in its direction and design and performed with an aching intensity, *Katie Roche* reveals a cast of richly complex characters whose passions flare and dull but refuse to die despite the suffocating conditions created by the opposing forces of Church and State. Meanwhile, Amanda Coogan's provocative adaptation of *The King of Spain's Daughter* reconfigures how concepts of language, adaptation and translation are understood in contemporary theatre practice.

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1 Cathy Leeney, "Themes of Ritual and Myth in Three Plays by Teresa Deevy," *Irish University Review* 25, no. 1 (Spring – Summer, 1995): 86, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25511474>.

2 Eibhear Walshe, "Ineffable Longings," in *Selected plays of Irish playwright Teresa Deevy, 1894-1963*, ed. Eibhear Walshe (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edward Mellen Press, 2003), <http://hdl.handle.net/10468/449>.

3 Caoilfhoinn Ní Bheacháin, "Sexuality, Marriage and Women's Life Narratives in Teresa Deevy's *A Disciple* (1931), *The King of Spain's Daughter* (1935) and *Katie Roche* (1936)," *Estudios Irlandeses*, no. 7 (2012), www.estudiosirlandeses.org/wp-content/uploads/.../Caoilfhionn_Ni_Bheachain_7.pdf.

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4 For more on legislation that curtailed Irish women's freedoms see Mary McAuliffe's "The Unquiet Sisters': Women, Politics and the Irish Free State Senate 1922-1936," in *Irish Feminisms: Past, Present and Future*, eds. Clara Fischer and Mary McAuliffe (Dublin: Arlen House, 2015), 47-70.

5 Susan McKay, "Respect and Respectability", in *Irish Feminisms Past, Present and Future*, 250.

6 Christie Fox, "Neither Here Nor There: The Liminal Position of

Teresa Deevy and Her Female Characters,” in *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage* eds. Stephen Watt, Eileen Morgan, and Shakir Mustafa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 193 – 203.

7 Christopher Morash, “Teresa Deevy: Between the Lines,” in *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed: Volume One, Temporal Powers, Katie Roche, Wife to James Whelan* eds. Jonathan Bank, John P. Harrington and Christopher Morash (New York: Mint Theater Company, 2011), xiv.

8 Fiona Beckett, “A Theatrical Matrilineage? Problems of the Familial in the Drama of Teresa Deevy and Marina Carr,” in *Ireland in Proximity: History, Gender, Space* eds. Scott Brewster, Virginia Crossman, Fiona Becket and David Alderson (London: Routledge, 1999), 84.

9 Susan McKay, “Respect and Respectability,” in *Irish Feminisms Past, Present and Future*, 254.

10 Correspondence from Frank O’Connor to Teresa Deevy, 18 September 1932, PP/6/7, Teresa Deevy Archive, Russell Library, Maynooth University, National University of Ireland.

ABOUT TERESA DEEVY

CATHY LEENEY

Reproduced by kind permission of the author, Cathy Leeney, and publisher Peter Lang from 'Teresa Deevy (1894-1963): Exile and Silence', *Irish Women Playwrights 1900-1939: Gender and Violence on Stage* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 161-193.

Anyone especially a young girl, who struck out on her own and made good was a hero to her.¹

Teresa Deevy was a contradictory figure; modest, quiet living, and devoutly Catholic, she set out purposively in her twenties to become a playwright, and achieved extraordinary success both in production and artistically. She was on the fringes of Dublin cultural circles, but she produced one of the most original and impressive bodies of work for the stage in 1930s Ireland.

She was the youngest of thirteen children, born to a prosperous middle-class family on the then outskirts of Waterford city. She experienced loss early on in her life; two of her siblings died in infancy, her father died when she was three years old, and later her sister Mary was a victim of the influenza epidemic of 1917.

Deevy began writing while a boarder at the Ursuline Convent School near her home;

articles she wrote about her active school life show her to have been optimistic, energetic and intellectually alive.² Deevy's relationship with her mother was key; from her she received the encouragement that made a writer's career seem possible. Sadly Mary Feehan Deevy died in 1930, the same year in which Deevy's first play, *Reapers*, was produced at the Abbey Theatre. When *Katie Roche* was published in *Famous Plays 1935-1936*³ the dedication read: 'To mother, as we planned.'

As a young adult, while she was a B.A. student at University College Dublin Deevy suffered the onset of Ménière's Disease, a condition affecting the inner ear. She transferred her studies to University College Cork, and received treatment but by the time she graduated in 1917 her plan to become a teacher was shattered as she was then profoundly deaf. Deevy went to London to learn lip-reading, and there she became fascinated by theatre, reading the play text carefully prior to attending a performance. Her beginnings as a playwright then grew out of her silent

world; immured from the everyday speech around her, she composed a verbal and visual dramatic language that is highly inventive, poetic and expressive. It may be that the playwright's deafness led to her extreme awareness of how the image in theatre speaks, how it functions as a powerful visual text.

Neither Deevy nor any of her seven sisters married and it is not clear if there was a reason for this, or if it was coincidental. A common wedding joke in the 1930s was often attributed to the groom at the wedding breakfast: 'Mary and I have become one, and I'm the one.' Certainly for Deevy, the independence associated with the single state, and the co-reliance and exchanges of power operating in the married state seemed to occupy her imagination a great deal. This was paradoxical given the national context where marriage rates at the time were at an all-time low. Brendan Walsh notes that the generation born between 1896 and 1910 (Deevy was born in 1894) 'displayed the greatest reluctance to marry of any Irish generation and indeed of any national cohort for which reliable and comparative marriage patterns can be established.'⁴ Yet Irish women's roles continued to be defined by marriage and motherhood. Deevy explored the search for self-realization in relationship with another in both female and male characters. She dramatizes marriage, very often as a possibility for transformation, through the other, and thus creates, through theatrical ritual, an allegory of the possibility for social and political transformation.⁵



Caoilfhionn Dunne as Katie Roche © Ros Kavanagh

In plays by Mary Manning or Lennox Robinson the theme of marriage is used as a way to explore gender roles and how they reflect social pressures on individuals. Yet, for Deevy, marriage is more than an economic strategy or a social requirement; it is brought forward into the narrative and the psyches of the characters concerned so that the rules of perspective are broken open to express the binding connections between private personal decisions and the public and social sphere.

Whatever her own reasons for remaining single, in her plays Deevy explored the challenge of marriage especially to women, since for them in Ireland at that time, married life most often meant loss of independence: financial, physical (there was no legal access to birth control or abortion) and emotional.

[...]

As the crucial years of national cultural re-invention, political revolution, and then consolidation took place] [...] the plays of [Augusta] Gregory, [Eva] Gore-Booth, [Dorothy] Macardle and [Mary] Manning reflect a movement from bold imaginative re-figuring of female representations, through a gendered analysis of violence in political and personal lives, to a higher register of female alienation. Dorothy Macardle's *Witch's Brew* is a case in point, and in Manning's *Youth's the Season?* issues of homosexual identity expose gender regulation and reflect young women's placelessness as autonomous individuals. However, perhaps Teresa Deevy's work for theatre in the 1930s is most thoroughly a drama and a dramaturgy of alienation, of occluded realities, on the margins of the canon of Irish theatrical history, dealing with issues that were effectively sidelined in the social history of the nation too.

Deevy's work in performance creates images of oppression, and, to use the current term, abuse. Several of her key plays of the period deal with female characters whose social circumstances make them

particularly vulnerable to the wills of others. They are punished for their presumption of individuality and aspiration, although their only crime is that they are poor. Deevy dramatizes the emotional and psychological confusions arising out of this power structure, the struggle to participate in the circulation of power, and the silences surrounding these issues and how these silences are covered over.

1 Kyle Deevy speaking of his aunt, quoted in Sean Dunne, 'Rediscovering Teresa Deevy,' *Cork Examiner*, 20 March 1984, 10.

2 'School Notes' in *St. Ursula's Annual*, 1911-12, 82-8.

3 *Famous Plays 1935-1936* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936).

4 Brendan M. Walsh, 'Marriage in Ireland in the Twentieth Century', *Marriage in Ireland*, ed. by Art Cosgrove (Dublin: College Press, 1985), 132-50.

5 Cathy Leeney, 'Themes of Ritual and Myth in Three Plays by Teresa Deevy,' *Irish University Review* 25 (1) (Spring/Summer 1995), 88-116.

TERESA DEEVY IN THE LIGHT OF HER CONTEMPORARIES

CHRIS MORASH

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One way to begin to understand Teresa Deevy's work is to put her in the context of the generation of Irish writers who came before her. She was born in 1894, three years before W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Edward Martyn founded the Irish Literary Theatre (later the Abbey Theatre); and yet, she was never really a part of that generation. In 1913, while attending university, Deevy contracted Ménière's disease and lost her hearing. At around the same time, the family fortunes began to decline, a factor that would later increasingly tie her to the family home, Landscape, in Waterford, with her mother and sisters. Nonetheless, as her hearing began to fade, she began attending the theatre in London, where she had gone to learn lip-reading. In the late 1920s, she began to write plays, and on March 18, 1930, (after at least one encouraging rejection), the Abbey Theatre staged . This

was followed in rapid succession by a one-act comedy, *A Disciple*, in 1931, and her first major play, *Temporal Powers*, staged by the Abbey in 1932. The latter won the Abbey's new play competition that year, and was followed by a powerful one-act work, *The King of Spain's Daughter*, in 1935. The following year she produced the play for which she is best known today, *Katie Roche*, and not long after came a sprawling historical play, *The Wild Goose*.

All told, the middle years of the 1930s saw an impressive burst of creativity on Deevy's part—six plays in as many years—and, as a result, hopes for her future were high. Reading through reviews from this period, as the Abbey's founding generation stepped aside, there was a palpable hope that Teresa Deevy would be among those who would take up the mantle as part of a new generation of Irish playwrights for

a theatre whose reputation had always rested on its writers. However, it was not to be. Even at the height of her success, it was clear that Deevy was far from comfortable with the Abbey. In a January 1935 letter to her friend Florence Hackett in Kilkenny, Deevy wrote: "Something will have to be done about the theatre in Ireland. It's appalling." In public, Deevy was equally critical of other aspects of Irish culture in the 1930s, particularly literary censorship. "Who are the censors?" she demanded in an open letter to the *Irish Times* in 1936. "By what right do they hold office? And how, in case of proved incompetence, can they be removed?"¹

If Deevy was outspoken in her personal capacity, it was not immediately obvious that her plays were subversive. And yet, we need to remember that *The King of Spain's Daughter* and her best-known work *Katie Roche* were on the stage of Ireland's national theatre at the same time that the 1937 Constitution was being drafted. In *The King of Spain's Daughter*, the character of Annie Kinsella must choose between loveless marriage and a life of drudgery in a factory, on a stage dominated by a large sign reading "Road Closed." *Katie Roche* develops this theme of the limited opportunities that the new state presented to Irish women; the overwhelming feeling in *Katie Roche* is of watching a woman who has been trapped by domestic life. All of this is in sharp contrast to the official view of the role of women in the 1937 Constitution, which declares: "The State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved." As the *Irish Times* noted of *Katie Roche*, "All



Sean Campion as Stanislaus Gregg, Caoilfhionn Dunne as Katie Roche © Ros Kavanagh

through the play, one seems to see an almost imperceptible change in the ordinary values of life."²

Teresa Deevy was ultimately a victim of the culture wars of Ireland in the 1930s. In 1939, a new play, *Holiday House*, was accepted by

the Abbey and a contract issued. However, the play was never staged, and any attempt by Deevy to find out why was met, in her words, “with evasive replies.”³ Similarly, she later wrote to Florence Hackett about the rejection of *Wife to James Whelan*: “Blythe’s letter, when returning it, showed clearly that he has no use for my work – never asked to see any more. ... it may be a good thing to be finished with the Abbey. Yet I love the Abbey, & their actors are fine.”⁴ From that point onwards, apart from one play performed on the Abbey’s experimental stage (*Light Falling*, 1948), Deevy was effectively finished with the Abbey Theatre. With the major Irish theatre for new playwrights closed to her, Teresa Deevy turned increasingly after 1940 to writing for radio. From one point of view, this was remarkable, given that the first radio broadcast in Ireland took place in 1926, more than a decade after Deevy had become deaf. And yet, in this medium that she could never experience directly, she excelled, both writing specifically for the airwaves and adapting her stage plays. However, she never gave up on the theatre, and some of the works included in the Teresa Deevy Archive (Maynooth University) are the texts of plays written after she had parted company with the Abbey. In this regard, her life began to echo the situation of a character like *Katie Roche*, insofar as a vivid life of the imagination became a necessity in a world of material constraints.

Indeed, if we are looking for the distinguishing feature of Teresa Deevy’s theatre, it may well be this: the quest for a theatrical form that could accommodate the essential privacy of an inner life. In *Katie Roche*,

the title character may be trapped in marriage to a man to whom she seems indifferent; nonetheless, there is triumph in her final lines: “I will be brave! ... I was looking for something great to do—sure now I have it.” Likewise, in *Wife to James Whelan*, she brings together a group of characters who live closely with one another in a small Irish town, but who each maintain a deeply private self from which the others are excluded. Developing this idea later in a short play called *In the Cellar of My Friend*, one character observes: “It do seem to me there is no two people can to the full com-pre-hend one another. Not fully ... not as I sees it.”⁵ In these gaps of comprehension, Teresa Deevy stakes out her theatrical territory. In the years just before her death in 1963, there was a brief, belated, flurry of interest in her work. The script of *Wife to James Whelan*, which dated back to the early 1940s was finally staged in October 1956. That same year, John Jordan, one of the most respected Irish literary critics of the time, published an influential reassessment of her work in which he argued that she should be seen as a key figure in an Irish dramatic tradition: “Synge and O’Casey are our dramatic geniuses in this century. But there is a distinguished class of those who are only less than great. I believe that Teresa Deevy should be counted among that select band. And, within her chosen field, she is incomparable.”⁶

Today, we can begin to place her even more precisely. Just as her plays do their work with what happens between the lines, Deevy’s work as a whole exists between two generations of Irish playwrights. If some

aspects of her work look back to those who preceded her, her ability to create characters with fully realized private lives that are partly obscured from the audience (and from the other characters) anticipates Brian Friel, who was only just beginning his career at the time of Deevy's death. Considered in this light, she begins to take her proper place as a pivotal figure in Irish theatre. The Teresa Deevy Archive at Maynooth University is one of the means by which we can begin to see her work more clearly.

1. Teresa Deevy, "The Censorship", *Irish Times* (Oct. 20, 1936), 4.
2. "Miss Deevy's New Play", *Irish Times* (March 17, 1936), 5.
3. "The White Steed", *Irish Times* (May 8, 1939), 8.
4. Teresa Deevy, Letter to Florence Hackett, [undated; ca.1941/2) TCD Ms. 10722.
5. Teresa Deevy, "*In the Cellar of My Friend*", NLI Ms. 29,169.
6. John Jordan, "Teresa Deevy: An Introduction", *Irish University Review* 1:8 (Spring, 1956), 26.

TERESA DEEVY — THEMES IN CONTEXT

CATHY LEENEY

Reproduced by kind permission of the author, Cathy Leeney, and publisher Peter Lang from 'Teresa Deevy (1894-1963): Exile and Silence', *Irish Women Playwrights 1900-1939: Gender and Violence on Stage* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 161-193.

Teresa Deevy writes about the circulation of power in society ramifying in individual lives. Power here may be understood in the sense in which Michel Foucault defined it, 'this machine [...] in which everyone is caught, those who exercise this power as well as those who are subjected to it.'¹ Foucault's definition is based on the process whereby power produces knowledge, 'there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge.'² The women in Deevy's plays are already within and are formed by the corpus of knowledge that 'extends and reinforces the effects of this power.'³ In this sense, Deevy writes less about victims and scapegoats, and more about the struggle to engage with power and to survive.

The machine of the new Irish State defined the roles of its citizens specifically

according to gender. Women's independence and status as citizens was compromised by a number of pieces of legislation, such as the 1927 Juries Bill (which meant that women had to apply specifically to be considered for jury duty while men were automatically called), the 1932 public service marriage bar ('which prevented the employment of women civil servants and later national school teachers after marriage'), Section 16 of the 1935 Conditions of Employment Bill (which gave the Minister for Industry and Commerce the power to limit the number of women working in any given sector of employment in order to protect the work of men), and then the Constitution of 1937 (against which women's organizations actively campaigned on the basis that it diminished women's rights as citizens, defining their role as providing unpaid service within the home and characterizing their weakness alongside that of children).⁴

The orthodoxies of Catholicism supported the dominance of men in the marriage relationship, effectively outlawing family planning, divorce, and abortion even under circumstances that threatened the life of the mother, and inveighing against women as sources of impurity and corruption for men. Pope Pius XI ratified St. Augustine's insistence on 'the ready subjection of the wife and her willing obedience,' and decried the assistance given to 'the unmarried mother and her illegitimate offspring'.⁵ Thus the dominant institutions of the state and the Catholic Church together created a deadening national environment for women.

Feminist scholars have speculated as to why Irish women did not, in greater numbers, resist such discrimination. Beaumont suggests a combination of factors to explain Irish women's reluctance to rebel⁶: the wide acceptance across Europe of the domestic role of women; economic hardship; religious and nationalist conservatism. However, other factors were at work in the discourses concerning women as expressed in society in general, revealing how legal and political restrictions were part of a wider technology of coercion, a demand for docility, and subjection to 'a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish.'⁷ Theatre was a site where, for Deevy, these more subtle and internalized forces might be traced. Institutional censorship exercised against foreign newspapers and magazine, books, and films, restricted the progressive images of the 'modern girl' designed to offer young women especially, new aspirations of personal independence.⁸

The social control of citizens through the authority of the State and the Catholic Church over education and health services meant that bodies were subject to what Foucault describes as 'micropower' operating as disciplines which 'extend the general forms defined by law to the infinitesimal level of individual lives'⁹. Thus, institutional censorship discourses in the public sphere becomes individual, personal and embodied, becomes self-censorship. This applies to playwrights as well as to the characters they may wish to portray. Deevy employed strategies in her dialogue and dramaturgy to point to what could not be said directly; she used performance to show the body as a place where the complex workings of power are inscribed.

The quality of Deevy's dialogue, its complex psychological registers, its subtextual depth and its patterning, show it to be a carefully wrought construction. Apparently natural on the surface, it disguises an intense degree of emotional detail and rhythmic control that recalls, in different ways, Chekhov, Ibsen, and Synge, all of whom were important influences on Deevy. This quality in the language has been remarked on by critics such as Robert Hogan, who notes 'her intriguing experiments with structure and dialogue.'¹⁰ Her plays are textually rich, but their full impact emerges only with reference to the images she creates on stage alongside the psychological narratives that drive the structure. The body of the actor, the spatial relationships of the staging, and the patterning of the action bear an intense and dynamic relationship with the text, creating a physical and spatial sub-text that is often disruptive and discordant, a source of rogue energies.



Caoilfhionn Dunne as Katie Roche © Ros Kavanagh

As texts, Deevy's plays for the Abbey Theatre from 1931 to 1942 have been read as realist enactments of the narrow confinement of socially insignificant women's lives; the privileging of literary over theatrical values leads to this reading. In performance the plays become more complex. In performance, the energy and vitality that the structure of the play contains and finally thwarts is, theatrically, at the core of the audience's experience. Deevy creates a relationship of dramatic irony in metatheatricality: the audience sees the tension between the narrative and the characters trapped in it, understands more than the characters themselves how they are trapped.

Bert O. States, writing about the idea of a world on stage, notes how the location or scene of the drama relates to the action. In his view the tragic drama of high individualism is only possible where the stage space and setting reflect the metaphysics of the hero's angst. As soon as realism settled within the walls of a room, and filled that room with furniture, what became possible was conversation, the comedy of social life. 'In the graphic economy of theatre symbolism,' States elaborates, 'rooms, like all images, must eventually justify their presence: they must inhabit the people who inhabit them.'¹¹ Deevy's settings are the basis for her interrogation of society's and theatre's systems of control on the female subject. The spaces of performance then ground the analysis of what is possible for the characters, and flag Deevy's often unstable mixing of tragic impulse with comedic playfulness.

Her settings may refer, mostly, to the recognizable rooms of realism, but Deevy is aware of the playing space as an external image of the internal life of the characters, the 'drama of the interior' that Maeterlinck professed. Elements of expressionist and symbolist styles are visible in her settings and spatial choices. In *Temporal Powers*, for example, the exposure to the elements of the otherwise domestic scene, Michael and Min's roofless and invaded space, expresses their painful vulnerability. In contrast, Min's imprisonment by her husband in a kind of bolt hole where he ceremoniously locks her in the dark, is an expressionist image of her abject social confinement.

Interrogating theatrical systems of control of the female subject is part of Deevy's skill, as she makes visible the inadequacy of conventions of melodrama and the well-made play to express the textures of experience. Critics such as Alisa Solomon and Elin Diamond have examined how Ibsen embedded metatheatrical meanings in *Hedda Gabler* (1890), creating a figure that dwarfed melodrama's stereotypical errant woman. Gay Gibson Cima wrote of Elizabeth Robins's performance of Hedda that '[she] attempted to enact and kill off the melodramatic image of the self-sacrificing woman, to show the ludicrousness as well as the seductiveness of her very sacrifice.'¹² In a twentieth century parallel, Deevy invites us to anatomise the theatrical as well as the social boundaries on womanhood.

Deevy's work in the 1930s creates images of the hidden history of those whose access to citizenship was barred by illegitimacy, poverty, gender, or other disadvantage, and this is another decisive aspect in analysing her work for twenty-first century audiences. As Ireland continues to come to recognize institutional abuses that were widespread, and to consider how institutional censorship, self-censorship and collusion have obscured this history, these plays open questions concerning the vulnerable, their experience of interpersonal and social violence, and the silence that walled them in. Key amongst her characters are figures victimized by institutions of church and state whose fates reflect those chronicled in a series of damning reports and publications, including recognitions of organized exploitations

such as Magdalen Laundries.¹³ Women's own collusion with the illegal detainment of their female family members in the Laundries or Asylums ('72% of those "brought" to the Good Shepherd Homes were consigned to the institutions by female relatives'¹⁴) has meant that the campaign for justice for those detained has been impeded by a sense of guilt and complicity. It is hard to understand how a society stood by, even up to 1996, while women (and children) were illegally imprisoned, robbed of their identity, effectively enslaved and frequently abused without sanction. Such practices often resulted in financial advantage; as Foucault observes 'punitive mechanisms serve to provide an additional labour force'¹⁵. The Laundries closed only when domestic washing machines became widely available. Perhaps more influential is the process whereby oppression becomes internalised, whereby resistance is outside of the discourses available to victims and onlookers alike. For twenty-first century audiences, Deevy's gaze on Ellie, Min and Michael, Annie, Katie and Nan is ghosted by the normalized injustices committed on vulnerable individuals by the institutions of the Catholic Church and the State.

In Deevy's work the role of violence is treated with some complexity. Its erotic attraction is not denied. Rather the playwright creates dramatic situations where the oppressed are seen to be unable to escape the systems of control to which they have been victim; they then project their fantasies in terms of those systems. The psychological authenticity of this perception is offset against the theatricality of the power struggle between remarkable yet disempowered individuals and coercive systems. This is illustrated most vividly in the heroines of *A Disciple*, *The King of*

Spain's Daughter, and *Katie Roche*. It is Ellie Irwin in the first of these, though, who discovers deep irony of her own illusions. Unlike Annie Kinsella and Katie Roche in the latter two plays, she does not surrender to the pressures around her. For this reason the earlier play serves as a useful preface to the later work, as it clearly expresses the underlying will to power of all three heroines, and the gendered social processes standing in their way. Annie and Katie eventually submit to their approved social roles even if only after both have been beaten by their fathers, but they submit by creating a masochistic fantasy out of necessity.

The Carceral: Ireland as Prison

After de Valera's narrow victory in the election of 1932, policies were put in place to promote his notion of what Ireland might be – 'a genuinely independent, self-sufficient rural republic.'¹⁶ It was de Valera's intention to abolish free trade. An image of Ireland was formed which refers not only to economics but to cultural life too, of a country captive, defined behind 'high tariff walls.'¹⁷ The image finds expression in a number of Deevy's plays of the period, whether it is in Min's imprisonment in *Temporal Powers*¹⁸ Mrs Maher's barricaded parlour in *A Disciple*, or the road signs so expressively placed in *The King of Spain's Daughter* reading "No Traffic" and "Road Closed".¹⁹ Hostility to foreign influence meshed with antagonism towards contemporary artistic movements, and with suspicion of youthful enthusiasm for the budding mass media of cinema and dance music. Frank O'Connor commented, 'after the

success of the Revolution [...] Irish society began to revert to type'²⁰ but arguably, this period led to an unprecedented confrontation with the responsibilities of self-determination, and of self-created failure.

In dramatizing the experience of some of the most vulnerable members of society, Deevy's contribution is unique. Through these characters, often but not solely young women, she explores the pressures operating on their sense of themselves, their potentialities, and the harsh dynamic between personal aspiration and social suffocation. Her genius is in finding a theatrical vocabulary to materialize the processes of decision-making, of indecision, and of social expectation, doubt and survival that go on invisibly in people's lives, ordinary lives, passionately lived.

¹ Michel Foucault, 'The Eye of Power' in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon (London: Harvester Press, 1977), 156.

² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991), 27. Further quotations will be from this edition and will be identified by page number.

3 Foucault, 1991, 29.

4 Catriona Beaumont, 'Gender, Citizenship and the State in Ireland, 1922-1990,' *Ireland in Proximity*, ed. by Scott Brewster [et al], 94-108.

5 *Casti Connubii: Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Christian Marriage, 31 December 1930 in The Papal Encyclicals, 1903-1939*, ed. by Claudia Carlen (Raleigh: McGrath Publishing Co., 1981), 391-414, (395; 398; 402; 411).

6 Beaumont, 102.

7 Foucault, 1991, 184.

8 L. Ryan, 'Neogtiating Modernity and Tradition: Newspaper Debates on the "Modern Girl" in the Irish Free State,' *Journal of Gender History*, 7 (2) (1998), 181-97.

9 Foucault, 1991, 222.

10 Robert Hogan, *After the Irish Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1965), 42.

11 Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the*

Phenomenology of Theatre (London: University of California Press, 1987), 46.

12 Quoted by Alisa Solomon, *Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on Theater and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1997), 66.

13 Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse by Mr. Justice Ryan (Dublin: Government Publications Office, 2009); *The Forgotten Maggies* (A documentary film) produced and directed by Steven O'Riordan and Ger Boland (2009); *The Magdalen Sisters*, written and directed by Peter Mullen (2002); *Sex in a Cold Climate*, directed by Steve Humphries; produced by Testimony Films for Channel 4 (1997).

14 Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish: Magdalen Asylums in Ireland* (Oxford: OUP, 2004) [First published by Congrave Press, 2001], 3.

15 Foucault (1991), 25.

16 See Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History (1922-1985)*, (London: Fontana, 1985), 141-47, and J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 175-201.

17 Brown, 143.

18 Teresa Deevy, *Temporal Powers*, *Journal of Irish Literature*, 14 (1985), 18-75. See also Cathy Leeney, 'Teresa Deevy: The Paradigm of Persephone in *Temporal Powers*,' *Études Irlandais*, 21 (1) (1996), 81-95.

19 Teresa Deevy, *Selected Plays of Irish Playwright Teresa Deevy [The King of Spain's Daughter, Katie Roche, The Wild Goose and Supreme Dominion]*, ed. Eibhear Walshe (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 121.

20 Frank O'Connor, 'The Future of Irish Literature,' *Horizon*, 5 (25) (Jan. 1942), 56-57.

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Compiled from material in Eibhear Walshe, *Selected plays of Irish playwright Teresa Deevy, 1894-1963* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edward Mellen Press, 2003) and the Teresa Deevy Archive (see also <http://deevy.nuim.ie>)



Caoilfhionn Dunne as Katie Roche © Ros Kavanagh

PLAYS:

Reapers. Three-act stage play.

A Disciple. (originally known as *The Enthusiast* and later re-titled *In Search of Valour*). One-act stage play.

Temporal Powers. Three-act stage play.

The King of Spain's Daughter. One-act stage play.

Katie Roche. Three-act stage play.

The Wild Goose. Three-act stage play.

Wife to James Whelan. Three-act stage play.

Wife to James Whelan. One-act radio play.

Dignity. One-act radio play.

Strange Birth. One-act stage play.

Polinka. Radio playlet adapted from Chekhov's

short story of the same name.

Light Failing. One-act radio play.

Light Failing. Full-length stage play.

Within a Marble City. One-act stage play.

Within a Marble City. One-act radio play.

Going Beyond Alma's Glory. One-act radio play.

Eyes and No Eyes. One-act stage play.

Holiday House. One-act radio play.

The Finding of the Ball. One-act stage play.

Concerning Meagher, or, How Did He Die? Radio playlet.

In the Cellar of my Friend. One-act stage play.

In the Cellar of my Friend. One-act radio

play.

Supreme Dominion. Full-length stage play.

PLAYS PUBLISHED:

A Disciple in The Dublin Magazine 12.1 (1937), 29-47.

The Enthusiast in One Act Play Magazine 1.9 (Jan. 1938), 771-85.

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In Search of Valour in *The King of Spain's Daughter and Other One-Act Plays*

(Dublin: New Frontiers, 1947).

Temporal Powers in The Journal of Irish Literature 14.2 (May 1985), 18-75.

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Strange Birth in Irish Writing 1 (1946), 40-48.

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Wild Goose in *Three Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1939).

NON-DRAMATIC WORKS:

"Just Yesterday: A Story:" *Green and Gold: A Magazine of Fiction* IV, no. 17 (December 1924): 268 – 276.

'Patricia Lynch: a study' *Irish Writing* 5 (July 1948).

'Strange People', Lisheen at the Valley Farm and other stories (Dublin: Gayfield Press, 1946)

The Greatest Wonder in the World: A Christmas Story.

NOTES FROM THE TERESA DEEVY ARCHIVE ON OTHER WORKS:

For further information see also <http://deevy.nuim.ie>

1914 - 1919: Plays by D.V Goode

These three plays, *Practice and Precept*, *Let Us Live* and *The Firstborn* were written between 1914 and 1919 and are signed by 'D.V. Goode'.

1931: *A Disciple / In Search of Valour*

Originally known as *The Enthusiast* this play was performed in the Abbey in 1931 as *A Disciple*. Produced by Lennox Robinson, the play ran for seven performances and was later revised and retitled *In Search Of Valour* and

broadcast under that name on television by the BBC in 1939.

1932: *Temporal Powers*

Temporal Powers was Deevy's third play to run in the Abbey. An Aonach Tailteann competition winner it was staged in 1932 alongside Lady Gregory's *Spreading the News*.

The play was well received, and its fans included Frank O'Connor. In 1937, when O'Connor was a director of the Abbey, *Temporal Powers* was revived for a headline performance.

1935: *The King of Spain's Daughter*

The King of Spain's Daughter debuted on the Abbey stage in 1935 and was revived a number of times between that and 1939. It was recorded in two different languages for three different radio productions and was broadcast by BBC television before the outbreak of World War II.

1930: *The Reapers*

After the rejection of at least one play *The*

Reapers was the first Deevy play to be accepted and staged in the Abbey. There are no known surviving copies of any manuscript. What has survived are production details from the Abbey staging, a range of reviews and some correspondence. Details of the Abbey production and the response it received from the critics can be explored in the Teresa Deevy Archive. In 'What do we know about 'The Reapers'?' Dr. Shelly Troupe draws on the available material to conduct a 'Theatre Studies Investigation' and piece together a picture of the play's narrative, its themes and how it was performed.

1936: *Katie Roche*

By far the most popular of Deevy's plays *Katie Roche* has been staged by the Abbey Theatre ten times since its debut in March 1936 with the most recent production being in 1994.

1936: *The Wild Goose*

The Wild Goose was Deevy's sixth play to grace the Abbey stage. It was very well received on opening night with critics noting the long drawn

out applause that greeted the final curtain. The text of the play was published in Deevy's *Three Plays*. The Teresa Deevy Archive holds programs from non-Abbey productions, both professional and amateur as well as detail on two different radio productions.

1946: *Polinka*

Initial reviews of Deevy's *The Reapers* compared her writing and characters to those of Anton Chekhov. Almost twenty years later her adaptation of Chekhov's *Polinka* aired on BBC Northern Ireland.

Possession: Cattle of the Gods

Despite her loss of hearing Teresa Deevy produced at least two treatments or librettos for a ballet entitled *Possession (or Cattle of the Gods)*. These were based on Eleanor Hull's the 'Cattle Raid of Cooley', a telling of the Irish legend the Táin Bó Cúailnge. The treatments contain the narrative of the ballet and though they give some flavour of the choreography and music, there are no detailed descriptions of either. The effect both have in telling the story is

clear however.

Untitled

These two typescripts appear to be drafts of unfinished plays written by Deevy. They vary in size and topic, what they have in common is that they are all formatted as plays and they all appear to be missing some of the text.

KATIE ROCHE PLAY AND PRODUCTION



KATIE ROCHE: A PRODUCTION HISTORY

A PRODUCTION HISTORY

YEAR	THEATRE	DIRECTOR	KATIE PLAYED BY
1936	Abbey Theatre	Hugh Hunt	Eileen Crowe
1937	Abbey Theatre (followed by tour to London, Cambridge, New York and other US cities)	Hugh Hunt	Eileen Crowe
1938	Abbey Theatre Festival	Hugh Hunt	Eileen Crowe
1949	Abbey Theatre	Ria Mooney	Máire Ní Dhomhnaill
1953	Abbey Theatre (at the Queens Theatre)	Ria Mooney	Máire Ní Dhomhnaill
1954	Abbey Theatre	Ria Mooney	Máire Ní Dhomhnaill
1975	Abbey Theatre	Joe Dowling	Jeananne Crowley
1994	Peacock Theatre	Judy Friel	Derbhle Crotty

Information source: [Abbey Theatre Archive](#)

KATIE ROCHE – PLOT SYNOPSIS

CATHY LEENEY

Reproduced by kind permission of the author and publisher: Cathy Leeney, 'Deevy's Leap: Teresa Deevy Re-membered in the 1990s' in Bort, Eberhard (ed.), *The State of Play: Irish Theatre in the Nineties* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1996), 39-49



Siobhan McSweeney as Amelia © Ros Kavanagh

Katie [Roche] is the illegitimate daughter of Mary Halnan, a local beauty who was seduced by the married master of the big house. Mary Halnan dies and Katie is brought up and named by a Mrs Roche, who does not offer her an education and,

it is hinted, exploits her. Katie works for the nuns for some time before being taken on as domestic servant by Amelia Gregg, a spinster obsessed by religion and scones. Amelia has a brother, Stanislaus, who is an architect in his forties. The Greggs are

middle-class, not grand, the backbone, you might say, of Irish respectability. Stan was once in love with Katie's mother and now, by an odd displacement of his unfulfilled passion (a displacement not unknown in other Irish plays of the period such as Brinsley McNamara's *Margaret Gillen* and Lennox Robinson's *All Over Then*) proposes to Katie. Katie has been stepping out with a local boy, Michael, but Michael is cautious in committing himself to a young woman with 'no name'. His mother would not have Katie cross their threshold.

Katie accepts Stan's offer of marriage. In Act II we learn that the relationship is not a success. A few details of life have changed: Katie now calls her ex-employer, now her sister-in-law, by her first name. Otherwise, the narrow confines of her world remain unchanged.

Notwithstanding the theatrical power of Stan's arsenal of silence, withdrawal and condescension, perhaps the most shocking scene is in Act II when the local vagrant Reuben, demands an interview with Katie. He lectures her on the proper behaviour of a wife, and when she turns scornful, 'Reuben, with surprising vigour, raises his stick, hits her across the shoulders. Katie collapses on to a chair.'¹ [...] Katie displays absolutely no self-pity; indeed the assault gives her the outraged courage to confront him, 'so you thought to frighten me!'² But here the style of the play becomes suddenly and surprisingly symbolic, for Reuben declares himself to be Katie's biological father. Katie is understandably

disarmed by this momentous news. His patriarchal sternness is unabated however, and in Act III he returns to declare that 'what she needs is humiliation – if she was thoroughly humbled she might begin to learn'.³

By Act III, Stan has disappeared back to Dublin and Katie has resorted to religion. Michael her ex-lover, points out to Katie out how much more restricted her life is now that she is married. 'There's no holiday out of it now,' he observes. It is plain that Michael is more in love with Katie than he ever was before, and it is also plain that she is still very much attracted to him. When Stan realises the potential of this relationship (outlined to him in brutal terms by Reuben [...]), Stan decides to depart with his wife at once. In the last scenes of the play, Katie leaves the place she knows and loves to face a future with a frigid husband old enough to be her parish priest.

¹ Teresa Deevy, *Selected Plays of Irish Playwright Teresa Deevy [The King of Spain's Daughter, Katie Roche, The Wild Goose and Supreme Dominion]*, ed. Eibhear Walshe (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 59.

² Deevy, 59.

³ Deevy, 105.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

INTERVIEW WITH CAROLINE BYRNE / MARIE KELLY (AUGUST 2017)

Caroline, can you begin by telling us about the background to your engagement to direct this play at the Abbey. Had you a specific interest in Deevy?

Neil [Murray] and Graham [McLaren] came to see my production of *Taming of the Shrew* at The Globe in London. We had a coffee and they said that they were interested in me possibly proposing something at the Abbey. Sometime later Graham rang me to check my availability for a play he wanted to creatively produce. To my shame, when he told me that the play was Teresa Deevy's *Katie Roche*, I said that I didn't know the play or the work of Teresa Deevy.

What were your first impressions of the play and your immediate thoughts about staging it?

Immediately after that phone conversation with Graham I read the play. My initial reaction was both interest and bewilderment. You really have to read it several times to unpick what Deevy is saying.

The style of the play was fascinating. Fintan O'Toole identified it really

brilliantly when he wrote that *Katie Roche* is a domestic drama and a expressionistic drama both at the same time. This really interested me. The language was utterly unique, heightened, funny and very original. Added to this was the fact that I had never met a character quite like Katie Roche before; how changeable she is. These were the things that immediately struck me on reading the play.

I told Graham and Neil that I didn't want to stage this as a museum piece, nor did I want it to be an exercise that was purely about the politics of programming work by women. I felt strongly that the piece had to stand on its own without an agenda or narrative around it. When I direct a play I have to find my own relationship with it, rather than the world's relationship with it. I needed to find freedom with it, and release it. I decided I was not going to set the play in a cottage even though a cottage setting is specified in the text. I wanted to explore the play as a psychological drama and an expressionistic drama. First and foremost, I wanted to allow the staging and set to be reflective of her psychological journey. Graham and Neil were very supportive of this approach.

Was dramaturgy important then as a starting point in putting your creative team together?

Yes, I felt that the text needed editing so that we could really commit to Katie's journey. It was important to review what wasn't feeding directly into her narrative and sometimes the play deviated slightly from that;

particularly with the narratives that involved Frank and Margaret. My idea was to create a very sealed experience, without interruption, without an interval. I asked Morna Regan to work on the play because we worked really well together on *Taming of the Shrew* and she's a brilliant dramaturg. She and I did two extensive Research and Development workshops on the play: first of all to see what the play was like to have those characters (Frank and Margaret) in, and then to see what it would be like to take them out. So we really audited that choice; we didn't make it carelessly or without testing the thesis that the play could hold without them.

Morna and I spent a lot of time on the through-line of the text. It was tricky to crystallize that and to make sure it would be absolutely clear to an audience and I needed Morna's experience as a playwright to ensure the through-line was very sharp and playable. This took a bit of time to really get right, and a key part of the exercise involved identifying the main objectives that would help the actor carry that through-line. We also worked a lot on relationships. For instance, we isolated all the scenes in which she appears with Reuben, and unpacked the discoveries she makes in each section and how the relationship develops through the piece. The play leaves lots of gaps or places where decisions need to be made by the director and dramaturg and so our chief task was to make these decisions. We also isolated specific lines and explored how these linked to the key ideas in the play. What did Katie mean by 'my mind, my body and my soul', for example? This was talked about quite a lot



Caroline Byrne © Ros Kavanagh

through the play. We also worked hard to give the play a strong climax and so the most heavily edited part of the text is the ending. We were keen to ensure that this was given the drive and landing it deserved.

Deevy's text provides us with a very large number of stage directions and many of these are extremely detailed. What was the approach here?

The action based stage directions were left in, but Morna did take out a lot of stage directions that were indicative of how to perform the

play. The original stage directions provide a great road map through the play, but we felt that many of these were not always helpful to the actor. As both an actor and dramaturg Morna is attuned to that; she always understands the actor's intuition.

In my initial work on the play I put all the stage directions into one document and ended up with twenty-five pages of stage directions out of an eighty-six page text. That fascinated me and so I went to the Young Vic and they gave me the resources to work on just the stage directions of the play with a group of actors over the course of one evening. That exercise was invaluable in providing me with an immediate understanding of the physical life of Deevy's text; I love to do that kind of forensic study.

How did this dramaturgical work feed into the design aspect of your concept?

I didn't want to do anything hyper-naturalistic and I was aware that that would present obvious challenges for the audience; like when a character says, 'shut the door' or 'come in, Michael' but there's actually no physical door on the kind of minimalist set that we created. I think we eventually cut all of these lines out for the end product but we explored them in rehearsals.

When it came to design I very much wanted to work with Joanna (Scotcher), the set and costume designer, to create an architectural

space for Katie to live in. The territory she inhabits is crucial given that this territory is what she must relinquish as the play ends. If her crisis is about getting removed from her environment then we have to understand what that environment is and what it means to her. Locations in the play, like Connolly's Field or the Hill of Knock, can be seen through her eyes, but ultimately I felt that the important thing was to find a way of representing a personal/psychological place rather than a literal place.

I like to capture what the play feels like and in this I use ideograms (images that bypass language) when working on the world of the play to ensure the audience has an emotional, sensory and visual experience. Early on in my research, when I was exploring the kind of materials to use in the play, I had a conversation with Chris Morash (Trinity College Dublin). Chris shared an image he had of Deevy sitting behind in a radio studio looking through a glass pane lip-reading actors as they recorded one of her radio plays in Belfast. He said that this was representative of what Deevy's life must have been like; an outsider, behind a barrier, cut off from being able to communicate fully and ever the observer of the detail of life. I was determined that glass would be a significant material element of the setting. And so along with glass, I'm also using marble and I'm also using soil. Marble comes out of the aria, I Dreamt I Dwelt in Marble Halls [from *The Bohemian Girl* / Michael William Balfe/Alfred Bunn] which I'm not really referencing directly, but I'll be just taking little bits from it. Marble comes from fossils, marble comes from history and marble is something grand; it's also something really

religious, aspirational, and oppressive as well. The use of soil points to how mucky, how messy, how fertile, and how expressive Katie is. In combination these materials represent her desire and her mind, body and soul. In terms of the overall design then, without giving too much away, at the beginning of the play the audience first sees a landscape made up completely of soil and from this landscape everything rises up. Here I was interested in the simple motion of rising and falling, because Katie is continually trying to rise out of her situation, but of course it keeps collapsing. Katie tells us that the world is a very flat place; it takes everything out of what it gives and everything that rises falls.

So in this 'rising up' Katie is not only a figure of self-determination but a creative force as well?

What struck me about this play is that Katie Roche is like an artist with no medium. There's a moment in Act II when she's talking about Stan's plans and she's actually envisaging them or bringing them to life in front of us. In this production, Katie is really a creative force but she has not been given an opportunity to express that. She has this desire; it's not just a desire to be great but to fulfil something great in herself. It's not like she's saying 'I'm a great person,' rather that there is something in me that's bigger than the circumstances going on around me.

Katie desperately wants to fulfil something in her life, and it takes such courage to be able to do that when all the odds are stacked against

her. I admire her capacity for regeneration and her ability to take a knock and get back up. She's always on the up; she never gives up. She embodies courage, and bravery.

Following on from this, then, what were the key things that were significant in your approach to casting? Are there any characters in the play that you found tricky to cast?

Reuben was particular because he's the kind of mythic figure in the play; he feeds into the play's expressionism and the archetypal. I cast Donal O'Kelly in this role because I love how he works physically and I love his voice. Through rehearsals we found that it was difficult to sustain the style of that and we have now taken the myth more into the man; moving him more into the naturalism of the play.

Sometimes the casting process presents new perspectives on a play or a character. Were there any instances of this during your casting process?

In casting Sean Campion as Stan he brought a charmisa and energy to the character and through him I began to see the potential of a love story between Stan and Katie. I realised that Stan is a man that is really congested and not able to express himself. Katie awakens him. Initially, I think he marries her for practical reasons (for his work) but then he falls in love with her. This forces him to confront himself and he has

to examine himself at the end of the play. I think they both want the relationship to work, she wants to stay and work it out and he wants to go and start afresh.

Before we conclude, can you talk a little about your approach to the rehearsal process?

I work very physically and so at the beginning of the process I work through all of the entrances and exits and stage directions in the play. The cast do not have the text in their hands, ever. My main interest is to explore the relationships between the characters and I believe that the language always arrives out of a need. Without the need there is no speaking so I try to get the actors into a place where they want to speak. Once the ensemble has worked through the shape of the play I go right back to the opening scene to recalibrate. Given the time that it takes to work through the entire play, you'll often find that when you return to the opening scene it needs to be restaged. The beginning and the ending are the most significant moments of the production.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DRAMATURG

INTERVIEW WITH MORNA REGAN / MARIE KELLY (AUGUST 2017)

Morna, had you known of Teresa Deevy and this play before Caroline Byrne invited you to work with her on the production?

I had, of course, known of Deevy but I hadn't read the play up to that point. I also knew that the play was produced here at the Peacock in 1994 but I hadn't seen that production.

What were your immediate thoughts on the play and its central character?

I was struck by the fact that Katie is such an unformed character and initially this made her feel quite elusive; but gradually I began to see her as someone who's like new clay waiting to be moulded. At the beginning of the play all she knows about herself is the fact that she has greatness or has the potential for greatness somewhere within her. She's seeking a form for herself, or she is struggling to form herself without being imposed upon by others. Deevy gives you facets of her as the other half of Michael, or the other half of Stanislaus, or the other half of domesticity; and all of these people and situations constrain her. What is tantalizing about the play is the question of what Katie would be like if she was just

allowed to exist without these restrictions. In excavating the play with Caroline [Byrne], then, we wanted to make sure that you could see the vivacity, the wildness, and the honesty of Katie; all these things are in her but they are stripped away so that she can be a good wife or a good girl for others but not great for or in herself.

What was your initial approach to the text?

I knew I wanted to pare back Deevy's text but not to impose anything of mine onto it. To me the text felt like a sculpture and I knew that if I carefully and respectfully chipped and chipped away I could get to the pure centre of it. In the end, the play demanded to be itself. It had its own existence.

Throughout the process I had my own instinctual and emotional reaction to the text as well as a dialogue going on in my head between Teresa Deevy and a theatre audience of 2017. The question was how to help make this a living, relevant, moving, play for 2017 and not a museum piece. The experience was like being a funnel between Teresa Deevy and the director's ideas for the production.

Both Caroline and I felt that the only approach was to foreground the play's innate expressionism. It was important, I felt, to have a hermetically sealed performance (over an hour and a half) without an interval, bringing the audience directly into Katie Roche's head and without allowing the

audience to be distracted from that.

So what were the specific things that you pared back or edited?

It felt immediately obvious that the characters of Frank and Margaret should go, although Margaret remains as an off-stage character. They are the only characters who don't feed directly into Katie's experience of herself and their major scenes required Katie to be off stage which broke the tension on her that we were after. I wanted to keep the character of Jo Mahony because he illustrates beautifully all the things that Katie has to Jettison; the vivacity and exuberance of youth and life; the camaraderie of the group from which Katie is excluded when she cannot go to the dance. The next thing to be addressed was structure. The Abbey was very generous with Research and Development support and so we were able to read the play with actors; to listen to it. Out of this it became clear that the third act would need to be restructured. Even though it is written as a three act play, it doesn't honour a three act structure in the way that we know it. Act III is very episodic and built around scenes that peak and drop, but which collectively don't drive towards the kind of climax a modern audience expects a three act play to deliver. So I condensed the smaller scenes in Act III into one longer scene. We then see Katie tossed between the two men - between judge and jury - and in the present tense, with Amelia on stage to witness the trial and the delivery of the verdict, as opposed to the majority of this happening without either woman being present on stage. The ending is then trimmed down but the



Donal O'Kelly as Reuben © Ros Kavanagh

exchange between the two women feels a bit more powerful resting now on what we have witnessed the women go through.

Amelia without Frank became a different character, another Masha if you like - another woman without agency, which makes her a stronger character – a woman with higher stakes. Another thing that Caroline and I talked about a lot was the incessant serving of tea and how to avoid this becoming too domestic or twee. The everyday or commonplace is such an important feature in the play and within a big expressionistic set

it carries even greater significance and meaning. Tea becomes almost like a religion, or a battleground, or an act of love. For Amelia it is all she has to offer, the only thing she can control. So in Act II, for example, I let her get excited and feel important, valued because she was readying for afternoon tea with Margaret and her husband, when already everyone knows they aren't coming and no-one has bothered to tell her. So we see this tiny little moment where she is rendered completely ineffectual and valueless because nobody wants a cup of tea, and that is all the agency she has in the entire world. A character crushed because no-one wants tea. Amelia lives in constant fear of the control that Stanislaus has over her security, the roof over her head. A reminder of this is Reuben's line to Katie where he says 'You have nothing but what a man gives you'. And it is true. Offering tea allowed her some dignity. Until it is taken away from her.

This brings us to the male characters in the play. Did your editing of the play prompt a particular perspective on these characters?

Stan is not awake. He's sleep-walking through life. For me, Deevy shows us a man who has been given every opportunity, the right gender, the right job, the right money, the right standing in society and he still can't make a life. Yet here is this Katie Roche who has nothing materially but who has the potential to fashion a great life for herself if this quality is not completely squashed out of her. I love that juxtaposition but ultimately

Stan cannot connect with Katie. She is too 'vital' for him so he has to kill that bit of her so that he can contain her. And both of them lose out.

Michael also loses out because he too cannot accept Katie as she is. He is ashamed of her illegitimacy and ridicules her for wanting to better herself. He realises too late that it is himself he has belittled and denied. Ultimately there are no real winners where one person has to oppress another to 'win.'

To what extent has your experience as an actor informed your dramaturgy of this play?

I write from 'under a text' in the way that an actor would understand that term. I love the idea that everything that happens in a production should have two or more values; that a line should never be just a line – that the audience should always get one piece of information from the text, and another piece from the subtext. Actors instinctively know that so I think I am quite rigorous as a writer but I test it as an actor. I always ask can I get more than one thing out of this line, or could I get at least three, and then I know it's rich and it's going to work.

TALK REAL FINE, JUST LIKE A LADY

AMANDA COOGAN WITH ÚNA KEALY AND KATE MCCARTHY (SEPTEMBER 2017)



Sketch for 'Talk Real Fine, Just Like A Lady' © Amanda Coogan

In collaboration with Dublin Theatre of the Deaf, Amanda Coogan appropriates and reinterprets Teresa Deevy's *The King*

***of Spain's Daughter* offering the audience an immersive experience that reveals the complexities and injustices of a**

myriad of inequalities. The production presents a challenge to literary theatre and, what the performers describe as, “hearing” audiences, very much in the spirit of Deevy’s challenge to Church and State, and relevant to contemporary socio-cultural discourse. Initiating the project, Lianne Quigley of Dublin Theatre of the Deaf offered Coogan a provocation to celebrate and explore Deevy’s work as “a prototype feminist, as a prototype deaf woman”. Coogan describes how the feminist perspective informs the production, but instead of focusing on a male/female binary it foregrounds a deaf/hearing binary.

Coogan’s response to the text is one of deconstruction and the production explores the internal fracturing of women’s relationships and how one woman can oppress another woman. The relationship at the centre of the installation is that between Annie and Mrs Marks, a decision which downplays an overt gender binary. In addition, both characters are played by multiple performers, simultaneously inhabiting the space, a structuring device that amplifies the conceptual interpretation and serves as a practical solution to working with the particular challenges of an ensemble and community cast.

Coogan also casts several actors in the roles of Jim Harris and Peter Kinsella. Greeting the audience, these characters take us by the hand, and bring us into the space. Mrs. Marks, who functions within Deevy’s play as a metonymic character by mouthing the values of a patriarchal society, is elevated in the space “as a kind of deity” reinforcing the infrastructure of oppression. Once inside the space, we are brought to

sit underneath Mrs. Marks’ skirt. Casting Mrs. Marks in this figurative and physical way heightens the tension between normative verbal interaction and the linguistic cultural expression of Irish Sign Language (ISL), as suggested by a hearing/deaf binary. Thus, the audience experiences this binary tension in an embodied way.

With researcher Alvean Jones, Coogan translated the written text into ISL using women’s sign, a female form of signing, which was frequently used until the 1940s. This gendered use of sign evokes conversations around equality and meaning making through ‘othered’ languages. Coogan emphasises that the performers are “not dancers”, but a troupe of actors with “physically agile, alert, [and] responsive bodies”. Relocating the text and putting it “on the body” in a physical language other than dance constitutes a radical gesture. These concepts are underscored by Beethoven’s music, and the installation also incorporates a large video projection in which Padraic Collum’s poem, *A Drover*, is unwritten. Interpreting Deevy’s text in these ways seeks to “signpost a possibility for the future” and challenge contemporary theatre practice and society to consider Coogan’s contention that “the rational is not only expressed through the verbal” and, by extension, the written text. *Talk Real Fine, Just Like a Lady* invites us to step out of the “hearing world” and radically re-imagine the relationship between language, gender, power and theatre-making.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

LIGHT FALLING ON THE TERESA DEEVY ARCHIVE

BARBARA MCCORMACK

Special Collections & Archives Maynooth University Library

In 2011 Maynooth University Library received the contents of a fabled green suitcase, which had lived for many years in a family home in Waterford. The personal correspondence, scripts, and theatre programmes stored carefully in this suitcase told the story of one of Ireland's greatest female playwrights, Teresa Deevy. Recognising the cultural and historical significance of this collection, the Deevy family donated it to Maynooth University where it represents one of the finest archival research collections in the Library.

The Archive charts Deevy's spectacular rise and fall with the Abbey Theatre during the period 1930-48, starting with her first staged play *The Reapers*, produced by her friend and mentor Lennox Robinson in March 1930. Unfortunately, a copy of the script for this play no longer exists, but a programme for the performance can be found in the

Archive. *The Reapers* received largely mixed reviews from critics, however one glowingly positive response from theatre critic A. J. 'Con' Leventhal is immortalised in the Archive. In a letter to Deevy (dated 22nd March 1930) he exclaims: 'Last night I spent at the Abbey Theatre one of the most enjoyable evenings of my life & I cannot refrain from writing to thank you for that pleasure.'

Deevy's success with the Abbey Theatre continued in August 1931 with the one-act comedy *The Disciple*, later re-titled *In Search of Valour*, also produced by Lennox Robinson. New Frontiers Press later published it with other one-act plays in 1947. A typescript draft of the script for Deevy's three-act play *Temporal Powers* which opened at the Abbey on 12th September 1932 has been preserved in the Archive along with a letter from renowned writer Frank O'Connor (dated 18th September) in which he states:

'Being a mere novelist without much interest in the theatre, which I generally find too jerky and inconsequential, I was enchanted by the technique of your play, its delicious invention and steady, perfectly controlled, progression, its masterly climax without a hint of theatre. Nothing since the *Playboy* has excited me so much.'

Several programmes of the full-length play *Katie Roche* are represented in the Archive, including one for the first production in the Abbey Theatre in 1936. A programme for the three-act historical play *The Wild Goose* marks the end of Deevy's illustrious career with the Abbey, Deevy's next three-act play *Wife to James Whelan* was rejected by Ernest Blythe in 1942.

Deevy increasingly wrote for radio during the 1940s, following her rejection from the Abbey Theatre. Scripts for radio plays *In the Cellar of My Friend* and *Holiday House* exist in the Archive.

Deevy was acquainted with many of those at the forefront of Irish culture in the twentieth century, including Jack B. Yeats who wrote a decidedly encouraging letter to Deevy in February 1955 in which he states, 'I hope you are well and happily busy'.

The Teresa Deevy Archive is physically preserved in a state-of-the-art environmentally controlled storage area in the John Paul II Library, while the Digital Archive is available online at: <http://deevy.nuim.ie/>. Access

to view material from the Archive can be arranged by contacting: library.specialcollections@mu.ie.

LETTERS FROM THE PAST

ÚNA KEALY AND KATE MCCARTHY (SEPTEMBER 2017)

Waterford Institute of Technology Archival Research Project into the Correspondence between Waterford Playwrights Teresa Deevy and James Cheasty

On the 5th of April 2016 Waterford Institute of Technology in association with the Russell Library, Maynooth University, launched an exhibition of artefacts relating to Teresa Deevy's unique connections to Waterford. The exhibition included many artefacts and resources from the Teresa Deevy Archive in the Russell Library but also an array of material relating to Deevy that had not been collected or exhibited before. These materials included excerpts from the St. Ursula's Annual of 1912 in which Deevy reflects on books and plays that she had read with her classmates; a selection from the Deevy family library which included volumes of plays by Chekhov, Ibsen, Shaw, Yeats and O'Casey as well as books on the Waterford Franciscan Fr Luke Wadding. There were also volumes on writing plays and volumes of poetry from a range of Irish and European authors.

In addition, a catalogue indexing the Deevy family library was exhibited detailing notes

relating to each volume specifying whether it was inscribed, its condition of preservation and whether or not it was glossed. For example, *Laird & Lee's Standard Vest-Pocket English-Italian Dictionary* (1909) is described in this index as in "poor condition" and with a missing cover while *The Science of Laundry Work* by Margaret Cuthbert Rankin published by Blackie and Son (1904) is described as in "good condition".¹ The arbitrary proximity of the book titles on the index charms one to imagine the Deevy family as more keen to communicate their thoughts than pursue domestic duties. But making meaning from archival material in this way demonstrates both the lure of the archive as described by Gale and Featherstone and the many (and sometimes irresponsible) ways in which, as Steedman describes, the "mad fragmentations" of archival repositories can be narrativised.² The archival material curated for the WIT Deevy exhibition presented many fragmentations that required careful critical reflection but advice and encouragement to persist in making connections came from Deevy herself, "—do not hurry yourself too much and

yet one longs to be writing, I know..”.³

This advice from Deevy arrived in one of a collection of letters to the late Waterford playwright James Cheasty. These letters, later donated to WIT by the Cheasty family, comprise of over twenty letters and postcards sent by Deevy to Cheasty between 1952 and 1957. The correspondence documents their friendship and provides insights into Deevy’s construction and conceptualisation of her own dramatic work, the milieu of literary Dublin in the 1950s, and the practicalities and challenges of getting new plays produced in both Dublin and Waterford. Gale and Featherstone liken archival work to detective work in that both practices require a willingness on the part of the researcher to ponder on possible linkages, to track the seemingly unimportant or the subtle, and to bring to the fore traces of thoughts, ideas and motivations. They describe the archival researcher as one willing to “question the hierarchies of history, the story, as it has been handed down”.⁴ This seems a pertinent analogy to the role taken by Deevy in her playwrighting which can also be interpreted as a method of tracking the seemingly unimportant vagaries within the hearts, minds and experiences of her characters. Her work can be regarded as a burrowing into experiences, actions, reactions, remarks and responses in order to question the “hierarchies of history” through the stories and situations of her characters. In one of her letters Deevy writes of how theatre can demonstrate the impact of the past upon the present:

And then we could see anger flaring and her dislike of Roddy beginning



Kevin Creedon as Michael Maguire, Dylan Kennedy as Jo Mahony © Ros Kavanagh

–accusation that he loves Roddy better than her.. etc. etc... In fact she could throw something at him, and later we might hear this hurt was the beginning of the early death he had –and so remorse in Mary had hardened and hatred of Roddy who caused it...But there should have been some real warmth in her at that time -...Some motherly feeling that died out as the husband died.⁵

The advice above reveals Deevy’s interest in interrogating the atrophies of the heart, the flare and death of emotion, and the importance of the actor’s physicality and emotional range. The letters make fascinating reading and WIT is pleased that negotiations are currently underway with the Deevy and Cheasty families and the Teresa Deevy

Archive in the Russell Library to ensure that all Deevy scholars will have access to this unique correspondence.

Waterford Institute of Technology gratefully acknowledges the support, encouragement and assistance of the following individuals and organisations who have supported the ongoing work into Teresa Deevy at WIT: the Power family; members of the Deevy family including Jacqui and Bill Deevy, Clare Brazil, the late Barbara Hearn and David Clarke; Jim Nolan; Barbara McCormack and the team at the Russell Library, Maynooth University; Phyllis Doolin; Sr. June Fennelly, Ursuline Convent, Waterford; Caroline Senior and the staff at Garter Lane Arts Centre funded by the Arts Council and Waterford City and County Council; WIT Library Services; Waterford Museum of Treasures; Waterford City and County Cultural Services including the Archives, Arts, and Library Services; the University of the Third Age, Tramore; WIT students and staff and, finally, *the Letters from the Past* transcription teams: Dr Shelley Troupe, Ricky Croke, Dayna Killian, Niamh Ryan, Frances Ryan and Lorna Grant; Jean Kealy, Mary Smart, Annette Wyse; and Aisling O'Meara, Helen Byrne and Orla Foley.

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1 David Clarke, Email communication to U. Kealy, March 2016.

2 Maggie B. Gale and Ann Featherstone, "The Imperative of the Archive: Creative Archive Research," in *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*, eds. Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 2011, 17-40.

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3 Correspondence from Teresa Deevy to James Cheasty, 03.11 UK/KMcC Deevy/Cheasty Correspondence, Luke Wadding Library, Waterford Institute of Technology.

4 Gale and Featherstone, "The Imperative of the Archive: Creative Archive Research," 23.

5 Correspondence from Teresa Deevy to James Cheasty, 03.11
UK/KMcC Deevy/Cheasty Correspondence, Luke Wadding Library,
Waterford Institute of Technology.

RESPONSE TO TERESA DEEVY

COMPARATIVE READING / CRITICISM

DEEVY: A PLAYWRIGHT WORTH REVIVING

EIBHEAR WALSH

Reproduced by kind permission of the author, Eibhear Walshe from 'Ineffable longings' in E. Walshe (ed.) *Selected Plays of Irish Playwright Teresa Deevy, 1894-1963* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press 2003).

The plays of Teresa Deevy deserve republishing for three reasons. Primarily, she is worth remembering because she is that rarity, an Irish woman playwright. During the 1930s, her plays were regularly staged at the Abbey Theatre and Sean O'Faolain once remarked to Joseph Holloway that he liked Deevy's plays best of all the Abbey playwrights: "She comes the nearest to Chekhov's technique" (Holloway, 14 March, 1938). Secondly, for all of her adult life, Teresa Deevy was profoundly deaf and she chose to work most successfully in the medium of stage drama and, even more remarkably, through radio drama. As a director of one of her plays, Judy Friel remarked: "It astonished me that Deevy never heard her plays. Why did she write for theatre? Of all the literary forms she could have chosen, why drama?" (*Irish University Review* 118). Thirdly, Teresa Deevy is one of the few writers to come out of Waterford City and the language, topography and the history of her native

place, although never actually named, infuse her plays.

With Lady Gregory, Christine Longford and Maura Laverty, Teresa Deevy was one of only four Irishwomen whose work was consistently staged by the mainstream Abbey and Gate theatres between 1890 and 1980. At the centre of all her plays was the plight of her young women and male characters, confounded by ungovernable longings for a more expansive sense of selfhood. Each of her Abbey Theatre plays of the 1930s dramatises this lyrical, ineffable yearning for selfhood, for greatness even. Deevy's representation of vacillation and indeterminacy led many of her critics to dismiss her work as unstageable but I would argue that what Deevy excelled at dramatising was irresolution itself, just like Chekhov. Deevy once remarked that her plays were "as fine as thistledown and if not produced properly, they fell apart" (*Journal of Irish Literature* 14). Her contemporary, the novelist Temple Lane, wrote admiringly of Deevy's interest in dramatising inchoate

longings. She noticed that Deevy's work turned on the choice: "between aspiration and fulfilment ... A sensitive discernment: culture in a sense not exclusively linguistic: fastidiousness, non-materialism: the drama of perpetual conflict, not only between diverse characters but within an entity" (*Journal of Irish Literature* 3.) Another perceptive contemporary, John Jordan admired the distinctive calibre of her work for similar reasons: "Miss Deevy frequently writes about 'Romantic' people, that is, people who go in for 'romancing'. But the dramatist herself is little given to romancing. Indeed no other Irish dramatist of the last quarter century has been more concerned with probing realistically the vagaries of human nature." (*University Review* 1956 26).

On the other hand, the diarist and theatre-goer, Joseph Holloway dismissed her 1931 play, *A Disciple*: "The piece was all noise and bustle, signifying nothing and most of the audience laughed at the sheer absurdity of the whole thing and kept wondering if the Directors had gone dotty in seeing merit in such a whirlwind of noisy shouting." (*Irish Theatre* 77). This critical ambivalence dogged Deevy's professional life and, in his history of Irish theatre, *The Backward Look*, Frank O'Connor recounted Yeats "grumbling to me against the charming plays of Teresa Deevy and muttering that "she wouldn't let us rewrite them for her". Lennox Robinson said rudely "Teresa Deevy rewritten by you would be like Chekhov rewritten by Scribe!" (179.)

The other important reason for reconnecting with Teresa Deevy's



Caoilfhionn Dunne as Katie Roche © Ros Kavanagh

plays is the extraordinary fact that she was deaf for all of her adult life. Deevy developed Meniere's Disease in her early twenties, while

a student at University College, Dublin, and she became profoundly deaf as a result. However, this loss never deterred her in her resolve to become a professional writer – as she remarked in an interview: “some people thrive on sympathy, others are braced by setbacks” (*Hoeh* 121.) When Judy Friel directed Deevy’s *Katie Roche* at the Abbey Theatre in 1994, she commented on: “Deevy’s acute, almost hyperactive ear for dramatic language ...Despite or because of her deafness, maybe the most liberating literary medium would primarily be spoken and heard rather than read? In the same way, a composer that has the ability in silence to hear a score as he reads it, to hear with their eye, Deevy transposed what she heard in silence on to the stage...Drama for Deevy was a striving to accurately express the emotional register” (*Irish University Review* 118).

The precision of her language and her interest in radio drama is all the more remarkable when one remembers that she was unable to hear her own plays and it is clear that Deevy composed using her dialogue and her stage and sound directions to create a soundscape. To an RTE radio producer who was working on her play, *Supreme Dominion*, Deevy wrote: “I dislike a harsh note at the start – thinking of the play always as a piece of music – a thing that opens and reveals itself not too suddenly.” (*National Library of Ireland. MS33665*). In many ways, one could argue that her radio play, *Supreme Dominion*, is evidence of a greater confidence in her dramatic development. Perhaps radio enabled Deevy to create more heroic texts where her realisation of a successful,

confident protagonist was possible.

Deevy’s dramatic writing effectively ended with *Supreme Dominion*. In the late 1950s, she retired back to Waterford to her family home, Landscape, where she died in January 1963. However critical and theatrical interest in her plays has continued and her work has been the subject of two special journal editions, *The Journal of Irish Literature* in 1985 and the *Irish University Review* in 1995. The Abbey Theatre had revived *Katie Roche* twice, first in the early 1970’s and again in 1994, the centenary year of Teresa Deevy’s birth. Thanks to the biographical research of the late Sean Dunne, a fellow-Waterfordian and the academic interest of critics like Eileen Kearney, Shaun Richards, Cathy Leeney and Fiona Becket, contemporary Irish critical thought has continued to engage with the singular and rewarding plays of Teresa Deevy. In the words of the theatre director Caroline Williams, “It remains rigorously structured drama which eschews sentimentality and melodrama. Her plays offer a host of complex, vibrant characters and, in particular, her woman characters are strikingly rich and unique in the canon of Irish drama.” (*Note for The Abbey Theatre production of Katie Roche, 1994*). These selected plays are a tribute to a life lived successfully in the imagination.

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WOMEN'S PERFORMANCES: THE FAMILY DRAMA OF TERESA DEEVY AND MARINA CARR

FIONA BECKET

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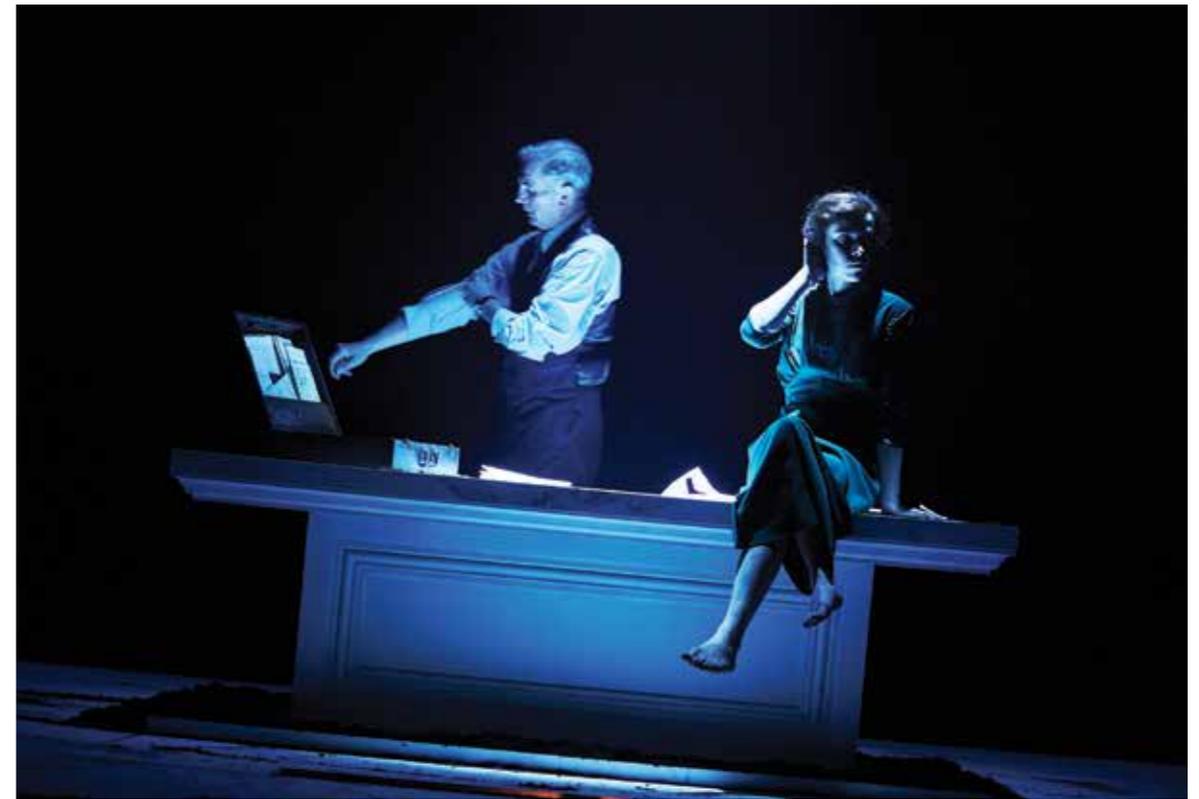
If, as it has been argued, there is no rigorous defence in [Teresa] Deevy's work of the rights of Irish women as equal citizens in the face of the conservatism of, for instance, the 1937 Constitution in its representation of women's contribution to Irish life, it is because of her perhaps unconscious adherence, in her role as 'poet', to the appearance and substance of cultural unity. In her plays it is fair to say that Deevy is not attempting to produce the 'master work', the nationalist epic, a desire for which underpins much debate about Irish cultural formations certainly before the 1930s; and the thought of a woman being in a position to produce this work of national and nationalist significance might anyway be construed as problematic by her

contemporaries in the theatre. In fact, Deevy's work for the stage represents a realism in the manner of O'Faolain and their contemporaries writing prose. In terms of the content of her plays Terence Brown's description of a different genre, the short story of the 1930s and 1940s, is apt: 'Instead of de Valera's Gaelic Eden and the uncomplicated satisfactions of Ireland free, the writers revealed a mediocre, dishevelled, often neurotic and depressed petit-bourgeois society that atrophied for want of a liberating idea'.¹ There is a tension here, palpable in much of Deevy's work and perhaps especially so in *Wife to James Whelan*, between the desire to represent cultural self-confidence and fidelity to a tawdry realism.

Returning to the familial, Anthony Roche accurately identifies Teresa Deevy as 'working within the inherited patriarchal structures of Irish, as indeed most, theatre', and in a comparative study of Deevy, Synge and Marina Carr, he set out to explore the implications of these inherited structures for the work.² While working within the 'inherited patriarchal structures' of Irish theatre, Deevy has an opportunity to develop her particular interest in the way men gain and wield economic and, as a consequence, emotional and sexual control over women. The illegitimate, adopted and by that means effectively disenfranchised protagonist *Katie Roche*, who is employed more or less as a domestic servant in the house of her suitor's sister, is a case in point. As Anthony Roche points out,

Stan [husband and brother to the two women of the house] economically controls the lives of both women in the play ... His romantic obsession ... proceeds from the fact of his economic empowerment, as her employer and therefore a man able to be masterful; his desires may be enforced because they are underwritten by the society and his secure place within it.³

The vagrant Reuben, who unmask his performance to Katie only when he is ready to appear before her as her biological father, is revealed to be a member of the formerly ruling Ascendancy class, who recommends physical violence to Stan as the way to keep his young wife in order. Within this family, where matrilinear channels of communication are effectively blocked, Katie Roche is finally offered



Sean Campion as Stanislaus Gregg, Caoilfhionn Dunne as Katie Roche © Ros Kavanagh

a life of bourgeois respectability, and a veil to be drawn across the conditions of her ignominious conception, birth and upbringing. She is not the only woman in Deevy's work to be served problematically by the structures and politics of the family.

From the 1930s onwards the stage, and particularly women's performances, provides a useful space in which the diminishing power of family myths can be examined, in the work of John Keane for instance (cf. *Sive*), as in Deevy. A contemporary example, that of Marina Carr, continues the demythologising process and challenges the clarity of the distinction between public and private domains as it is played out within Irish family drama where the focus is on women's experience.

In Christopher Murray's recent discussion of the work of Marina Carr the writer's feminist identity seems to be a question around which a number of critical anxieties are collapsed. For some commentators it might prove to be a question that obscures the ways in which contemporary Irish women's writing, in any genre, can be theorised. We learn that *Portia Coughlan* (1996) constitutes 'a more focused feminist *protest* than anything Carr has so far attempted (my italics),⁴ largely because of the directness of the critique of the relation between family and women's identity as it is staged. Is this 'focused protest' (to whom, or about what, does she 'protest'?) ultimately to be received as a weakness in Carr or is she, to employ a macho metaphor, winning her spurs in writing according to what might be reductively represented in some quarters as a 'position' expected of her? Murray admires Carr's work and makes the valuable point irrespective of feminist questions that in her recent writing and particularly in *Portia Coughlan* we are reminded of the paradox that 'in the Irish theatre the avant-garde is conservative while it is revolutionary'.⁵ Carr's achievement, like Deevy's perhaps, is in part to have found a voice in the masculinist culture of Irish theatre, although the strengths and limitations of that voice have yet to be evaluated. This achievement, alongside the modes of representation that characterise her work, in part accounts for the 'avant-garde' status awarded to her in Murray's book. Yet her centrality as writer of family drama, and someone who puts matrilinear modes of understanding into the main frame, is evident. Murray's useful alignment of the conservative and the revolutionary underpins recent productions not only of Carr, but

also of Deevy.

The (matrilinear?) identification of Carr with Deevy (Murray 1997 and Roche 1995) was signalled when *Katie Roche* and *The Mai* were produced in tandem in 1994. At this time *Katie Roche* was directed by a woman, Judy Friel (Friel 1995). Murray, interestingly, concretises the relationship between Deevy and Carr where he asserts that, particularly in *Portia Coughlan*, Carr offers a radical re-write of Irish women's writing, and he gives as an example, Deevy's *Katie Roche*.⁶ This 're-write' is enabled by the very different cultural and socio-political contexts which have produced both writers and their work.

Both *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan* interrogate the familiar forms of Irish family drama. In the course of so doing they turn their attention to dysfunctional families which are so defined by the range of resisting female performances they contain. Carr's deployment of angry women who eventually act to disrupt or arrest the familial forces that seem to be pushing them to undesired conclusions, makes reference to specific Irish family and social contexts. In *Portia Coughlan*, for instance, the significance of Portia's rejection of her mother towards the end of the play, and the symbolic matricide that occurs as she casts her mother off, is not identical to other contemporary dramas of family breakdown outside these Irish contexts where the critical focus is equally on matrilinearity; comparison with Phyllis Nagy's play *Butterfly Kiss* (1994) provides a case in point. *Butterfly Kiss*, which concludes with actual

and violent matricide represented as an act paradoxically of tenderness and compassion, in fact focuses on myths of American family life through the narratives of the daughter whose outsider status within the (primarily female) family is signalled from the outset. In both plays the 'local' cultural contexts are emphasised where they impact on issues of women's self-definition. Both plays however, crucially disrupt the presumed solidarity of mother/daughter (daughter/mother) relationships that frequently underpin feminist family mythologies. The effect of this disruption is not simply iconoclastic in crudely anti-feminist contexts; instead it raises perhaps unwelcome questions about the enduring character of the mother/daughter model as a means of accounting for, or metaphorising, communications among (generations) of women, not least in the particular domestic and social contexts represented.

In Carr, then, the effects of the transmission of knowledge through matrilineal channels (underpinned by the mother/daughter model) is both a central feature of women's relationships in her recent plays and a target for devastating irony. In both *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan* the families represented are largely communities of women. Female solidarity is frequently demonstrated through the desire to 'tell'; and the histories the women tell are always family histories and sometimes the secret histories of absent, but significant women of different generations (like the Mai's mother). In *The Mai* both Grandma Fraochlán who is the oldest woman in the family at 100 years, and Millie, the Mai's daughter, are responsible for narratives of generation. They tell stories of where

they have come from; they make public their private histories. Any resistance to telling that they meet with is more a matter of ritual refusals that are easily by-passed than instance of genuine obstruction, and the stories get told. In contrast, Deevy's use of silences particularly in *Katie Roche*, where any number of Katie's verbal interventions are obstructed or withheld, make way for interpretations that underpin women's voicelessness even at home.⁷ The lack that Katie feels is not lack of a mother (her mother is long dead), nor particularly a lack of voice with which to define and articulate her present, but lack of a narrative of generation and by implication grounds for self-definition. When Reuben, without revealing his paternal identity, tells her part of the truth about her parents and their transgressive liaison, she is ecstatic: 'Didn't I know always I came from great people!'.⁸ The spectacle of Katie receiving her history from her father, however, is brutal. The story is accompanied by a series of threats to prevent her getting above herself; he uses the authority of fatherhood to excuse acts and threats of violence alongside the injunction 'Be a good wife'.⁹ Hence the familial returns to punish Katie.

Carr is in a position to represent women's experience beyond the circumscribed lives of Katie Roche, Nan Bowers and Deevy's other women. What might be perceived as problematic in Carr's recent work – her challenge to the attractiveness of the ideal of undisrupted feminine communication when it comes to representing, and theorising, female solidarity – might also reinforce anxieties about her conservatism; a

charge also levelled at Deevy. It is the case that the mother/daughter relationship is negative in *Portia Coughlan* and that *The Mai* is punctuated by stories of flawed motherhood (Grandma Fraochlán to her daughters; Millie's representation of the Mai's distracted mothering). The fact is that Carr, in *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan*, turns dramatic space over to a series of women's performances that assert the right of the speaker to the identity being claimed in the face of the tyranny of the (any) familial model. At key points these resisting narratives, summed up by Portia's words to her mother that 'Y' ave me suffochahed!',¹⁰ challenge the notion that a strong feminine identity rests on the familial, female kinship model. That these resistant performances of self-representation occur within a masculine tradition of representation (theatre) is doubly powerful and doubly dangerous. That the principal resisting voices of Portia and the Mai are silenced in self-inflicted deaths spells out the difficulty of dissent when self-identity is caught between conflicting versions of feminine freedom: both women feel profoundly misunderstood by their family communities. All the women tell their stories in such a way that, in their voices, Carr challenges dominant theories of female communication, *at the same time* transforming the masculine domain of theatre into a space (albeit troubled) for women's self-representation, mediated in a range of dissenting, independent women's voices. In this way narrating the self and women's self-representation are collapsed into each other. This directed form of self-conscious self-representation happens most effectively on the stage as, effectively, Lyotard's '*disreal*' space.¹¹ From the benign acts



Sean Campion as Stanislaus Gregg, Caoilfhionn Dunne as Katie Roche, Siobhan McSweeney as Amelia © Ros Kavanagh

of ventriloquism that characterise the performing women satirised by [James] Joyce, the focus has shifted to a theatre which at times attempts to make self-conscious (and claim ownership of) contemporary Irish women's self-representation. Whether or not this is called 'feminist theatre' is a moot point.

Conclusion

In real time history puts women in families. In 'disreal' space, perhaps, theatre has been known to put women in families with the effect of subjecting to a specific pressure the hierarchical structures and assumptions – the master/slave models – that continually define them, and according to which they continually define themselves: how they think and speak, what they think and speak who they are. Regarding the very narrow contexts of 1930s Irish drama, if we accept interpretations of her work that privilege Deevy's conservatism then we must say that Deevy concretises the tyranny of family structures unconsciously as she writes from the position broadly defined by recent critics who have strictures of the Constitution in full view; critics who have attempted to articulate the 'woman issue' even while the competing patriarchies that comprise the male community behind, say, the articulation of the Constitution, are not always brought out in full. Carr, it could be argued, takes things a step further in her representations of familial trauma. She is then in danger, because of the prevalence of familial metaphors, of being regarded as Deevy's disciple – learning at her feet – which may be a distortion. It would signify the often repeated distortion reading women's writing in relation to their literary 'mothers', a position which may close down rather than open up investigation. It is this risk attached to familial metaphors generally that at any rate underpins both *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan* as family drama. Carr may be addressing the tyranny of familial metaphors in how women's lives are evaluated and articulated, in the broadest sense, by having her key mother-figures

choose death over life. Portia ultimately understands self-definition only in terms of her dead twin brother; the Mai kills herself when a conventional family structure finally eludes her. The fact that there is no alternative to the familial except death is the irony that informs Carr's work here; work which also forewarns of the difficult position of the female artist as inscribed into a theatrical matrilineage which is not necessarily productive.

1 Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-1985* (London: Fontana Press, 1985), 159.

2 Anthony Roche, 'Woman on the Threshold: J. M. Synge's *Shadow of the Glen*, Teresa Deevy's *Katie Roche* and Marina Carr's *The Mai*', *Irish University Review*, (1995) 25, 1: 143-62, 155.

3 Roche: 153.

4 Christopher Murray, *Twentieth-century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation*, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 238.

5 Murray, 1997: 237.

6 Murray, 1997: 238.

7 In Deevy's 'Pinteresque' silences see Christopher Murray, 'Introduction', *Irish University Review* 1995, 25, 1 special issue, 'Teresa Deevy and Irish Women Playwrights': 8 and Judy Friel, 'Rehearsing Katie Roche' *Irish University Review* 1995, 25, 1 special issue, 'Teresa Deevy and Irish Women Playwrights': 111-25.

8 Deevy, 1939 *Katie Roche* in *Three Plays* (Macmillan) 21.

9 Deevy, *Katie Roche* 60.

10 Marina Carr, 1999, *Portia Coughlan* in *Plays One* (London: Faber and Faber) 301.

11 See Lyotard 1989: 156. Thanks to Kate Malone-Smith for this reference, and for discussions more broadly on theatre and representation. J-F Lyotard, 'Beyond Representation' in *The Lyotard Reader* ed. A. Benjamin (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell: 1989), 155-68.

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