Active Speech

Critical Perspectives on Teresa Deevy

Edited by
Úna Kealy and Kate McCarthy

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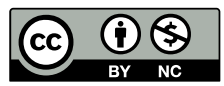

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 Suzanne Savage and Lianne Quigley performing in Teresa Deevy's *Possession* which was created and directed by Amanda Coogan in collaboration with Lianne Quigley, Alvean Jones, Linda Buckley, Dublin Theatre of the Deaf, and Cork Deaf Community Choir. Creative producer Lynette Moran produced *Possession* at the Project Arts Centre 21–24 February 2024, while Susan Holland produced the production at the Granary Theatre for the Cork Midsummer Festival performances, 21–23 June 2024. *Possession* was funded as part of ART:2023: A Decade of Centenaries Collaboration (the Arts Council and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media).

1. 'Why Would Anyone Be Interested in My Old Aunt Teresa?':[1] Illuminating Teresa Deevy's Legacy

Eileen Kearney

In one of my favourite moments from Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Holly Golightly, while touching up her makeup in the back seat of a New York City cab, remarks that 'certain shades of limelight wreck a girl's complexion'.[2] It is also true that being relegated to the shadows dims one's reputation. I am thrilled to see Teresa Deevy take centre stage as the star of *Active Speech: Critical Perspectives on Teresa Deevy*, and I am confident her complexion will sustain the bright lights shining upon her now. This collection focuses and adds extra illumination to Deevy's well-deserved limelight.

So many aspects of Teresa Deevy's life, plays, and personal challenges merit focus. In reflecting on her embarrassing lack of recognition, I remember attending a lecture in New York City by Thomas Cahill, author of *How the Irish Saved Civilization*.[3] Citing various examples, he pointed out that although many people believe history is made up of major, huge events and movements, it is actually made up of a sequence of many small events, which interconnect and lead to the

1 Interview with Jack Deevy, 1984, as part of my PhD research.

2 Truman Capote, *Breakfast at Tiffany's and Three Stories* (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 81.

3 Book signing lecture at New York City's Upper West Side Barnes and Noble bookstore, 83rd and Broadway, in the autumn of 1995; Cahill was promoting his new book, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Nan A. Talese, Doubleday, 1995).

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major event most people remember. Mulling over his words, I recall the considerable kvetching of my university theatre students about being required to study theatre history. They were often frustrated by the thought of memorising centuries of the who, what, when, and where of theatre history, when in fact the why was always far more interesting. And so, the question of why a playwright as talented as Teresa Deevy was kept for so long in the wings instead of onstage still begs to be addressed.

Having devoted much of the past forty years to writing, publishing, and lecturing about Irish women playwrights in general, and Deevy in particular, I have dreamed of the day when she would become known and recognised among scholars, actors, directors, and readers alike. I chronicle now how I ran across the name of this seemingly obscure 1930s Irish playwright, and how I proceeded to unearth information about her life and works.

As my name might suggest, I have had a life-long fascination with my Irish heritage and, subsequently, with Irish theatre for nearly fifty years. After finishing my undergraduate major in theatre studies in 1971, I made the first of what would evolve into a dozen trips to Ireland. Inspired by an unforgettable visit to the Aran Islands, I became fascinated by J.M. Synge's work there, and in 1976 my Master of Arts degree from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC focused on Synge and his women characters. After a brief stint of acting in Los Angeles and New York City, naively hoping to take the Broadway stage by storm, I decided to refocus my spotlight on an equally lofty, but perhaps more attainable goal. I embarked upon doctoral studies hoping to discover an Irish woman in theatre who merited serious recognition. But if the woman is not already in the spotlight, how might one find her and bring her out of the shadows?

Flash back with me to the early 1980s when I was a graduate student at the University of Oregon searching for an unexplored dissertation subject that would place an unrecognised, but deserving, woman centre stage in Irish theatre. In October 1983, I unexpectedly discovered Teresa Deevy's name in Micheál Ó hAodha's 1974 book, *Theatre in Ireland*. Near the conclusion of the chapter 'The End of the Beginning', which focused on the Abbey Theatre in the 1930s, two sentences at the bottom of the right-hand page caught my eye:

> After the death of Lady Gregory in 1932, several women dramatists vied for a place in the sun. The most interesting was Teresa Deevy, who, in her one-acter, *The King of Spain's Daughter*, and in her full-length *Katie Roche*, wrote sensitively of wilful and romantic young girls who try to come to grips with the workaday realities of a man's world.[4]

My heart skipped a beat. Who was this woman, and why had I never heard of her? Excitedly, I turned the page, eager to read more about this amazing woman whose name I had never encountered, but I disappointedly discovered that the topic had shifted to Frank O'Connor's Abbey Theatre battles with W.B. Yeats. That was it. I saw nothing more about Deevy, or, for that matter, any of those other women who 'vied for a place in the sun'. Hence began my uphill challenge, pushing the rock, like Sisyphus, trying to find information on women in the shadows of Irish theatre history.

In those early 1980s pre-Google, pre-internet days, I looked in the indexes of every book I could find on Irish theatre, in general, and the Abbey Theatre, in particular, but found no mention of Deevy. With the encouragement of Richard Heinzkill, an enthusiastic reference librarian at the University of Oregon, I also consulted the good old *Reader's Guide to Periodic Literature* and came upon a 1956 journal article by Irish poet and critic John Jordan entitled 'Teresa Deevy: An Introduction'.[5] Next, I found Irish poet James Liddy's entry on Jordan in *The Macmillan Dictionary of Irish Literature*.[6] Then, via the almost bygone phenomenon of 'snail mail', I proceeded to write to Liddy, whose Wisconsin whereabouts my sleuthing skills had unearthed. Liddy kindly wrote back and furnished me with Jordan's Dublin address. In December 1983, I wrote to Jordan, and was delighted to receive his gracious reply two weeks later. Hopeful, I opened the letter only to feel my heart sink with the second sentence:

> Dear Miss Kearney,
>
> Thank you for your letter in re T.D., and your kind words about my article. Alas, I can give you little help. I met T.D. only once, in 1955 or 6. The only friend of hers I ever met was Lennox Robinson, who of

4 Micheál Ó hAodha, *Theatre in Ireland* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), p. 131.

5 *The Readers' Guide Retrospective: 1890–1982*, ed. by H.W. Wilson; John Jordan, 'Teresa Deevy: An Introduction', *Irish University Review*, 1.8 (1956), 13–26.

6 *The Macmillan Dictionary of Irish Literature*, ed. by Robert Hogan (London: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 317–318.

> course was to die in 1958 [....]. Micheál Ó hAodha of the Abbey Theatre may also have memories. But at the moment [...] your safest contact is a young Waterford man who has been researching T.D. on [...] a non-academic basis. He is Seán Dunne [....]. He has been in contact with the Deevy family in Waterford [....]. I will let him know by the same post that I have given you his address. It will be up to him of course to decide how cooperative he can be.
>
> I'm sorry not to have been of more help. I would be very glad to hear of your progress.
>
> Yours sincerely,
> John Jordan.[7]

The truth is Jordan helped me immensely by putting me in touch with Seán Dunne, the Waterford-born poet and journalist who resided in Cork: I promptly contacted him. At that time, Dunne was working on an article for the *Cork Examiner* entitled 'Rediscovering Teresa Deevy'.[8] With the most wonderful New Year's wishes, Dunne responded in January 1984 and graciously offered to share his wealth of Teresa Deevy materials. He also opened his family's home to me and offered to arrange meetings with any members of the Deevy family. Ecstatic, I started planning a visit to Cork that summer.

Through the openhearted generosity of Dunne, in the summer of 1984 I was introduced to Jack Deevy, Teresa's nephew who lived at Landscape, the lovely Waterford home in which Deevy grew up. After I answered Jack's bewildered question, 'Why would anyone be interested in my old Aunt Teresa?', he graciously granted me access to all of Deevy's estate papers, a treasure trove of letters, documents, scripts, and reviews that had sat for several decades in a suitcase under a bed at Landscape. Although these five men who sequentially guided me, Heinzkill, Liddy, Jordan, Dunne, and Jack Deevy, have 'gone west', I am forever grateful to them.

Thus began the litany of saints and scholars to whom I wrote, whenever possible, including a self-addressed stamped envelope in order to encourage replies. In addition to contacting Liddy, Jordan, Dunne, and Jack Deevy, I corresponded with notable poets, professors, theatre directors, and biographers, among whom were: Robert Hogan, Mary Rose Callaghan,

7 Maynooth, Russell Library (RL), Letter from John Jordan to Eileen Kearney, 28 December 1983. My archive of Deevy-related material is now conserved within the Teresa Deevy Archive, Maynooth University.

8 Seán Dunne, 'Rediscovering Teresa Deevy', *Cork Examiner*, 20 March 1984, p. 10.

Richard Fallis, Maurice Harmon, Frank McEvoy, Michael O'Neill, Garry Hynes, Jack and Noeleen Deevy, Miriam Deevy Clarke, Kevin Whelan (National Library of Ireland), Gerald Dawe, and M.J. Molloy. Armed with my faithful pocket tape recorder, I also pursued and was granted interviews with Jack Deevy (Teresa's nephew) and his wife Noeleen; Miriam Deevy Clarke (Teresa's niece and Jack's sister), her husband, Brendan Clarke, and their son, Peter; John Jordan (Dublin poet and critic); Tomás Mac Anna (director at the Abbey Theatre); Christopher Casson (Dublin actor who reminded me, time and again, that he was actress Sybil Thorndike's son!); Phyllis Doolan (Waterford friend of Teresa's); Colbert Kearney (Professor of Literature at University College Cork); Michael J. O'Neill (Lennox Robinson's biographer); and James Cheasty (contemporary playwright and friend of Teresa's).[9] With each inquiry, I asked for research direction and with each reply, I pursued those suggested avenues, along with the many side streets (and sometimes dead ends) to which they invariably led.

I remind those younger scholars and performers that this research process was incredibly slower and more painstaking than that of today's world: writing letters, mailing them to the other side of the pond with expensive international postage, setting up interviews, and walking through the inimitable Irish mist towards a pay phone box, pockets full of heavy coins and lists of phone numbers. It was a different world and a slower process for sure. I emphasise this to illustrate how far removed this experience was from the instant gratification of the internet: weeks and months would pass before I received responses.

When I reflect on how research is conducted, I am struck by its many similarities to directing a play, another enterprise I have done for decades. The director is best served by a play that speaks to her, with which she can identify, and to which she can sense a true connection; she can thereby cast, rehearse, and produce a finished project that moves its audience and inspires insight. The truth is that the more I gathered information about Teresa Deevy in the early 1980s while researching in her family's house in Waterford, the more I felt connected to her. She was one of thirteen children—I was one of nine. She was, like me, educated in Catholic schools, taught by nuns, and won awards for knowing her catechism so well—I think memorising all those long answers is what made me a quick line study! She was a single woman, working in a male-dominated theatre world in which she succeeded

9 Recordings of many of these interviews and documents relating to them are conserved within the Teresa Deevy Archive, Maynooth University.

to a certain degree: I had encountered the challenge presented by a male-dominated world in both the theatre and academia. She was fascinated by language and character development—as an actress, these had always been of top importance to me. And, probably most impressive of all, she wrote and published in spite of developing Ménière's disease, which left her totally deaf—I had endured epilepsy throughout my childhood. In essence, I recognised her struggle, was impressed by her ambition, shared many interests with her, and was inspired by her indomitable spirit. But as I got to know her dramatic works, I gained a deep respect and admiration for her quiet, understated, subtle character development of strong, suppressed women who, more often than not, lived in the shadows of the powerful men surrounding them.

As I continued my correspondence sleuth work, I received one of my most memorable replies from Micheál Ó hAodha, RTÉ Radio producer and Abbey Theatre board member. I had referred to his correspondence with Deevy, which I read in her estate papers in Landscape. He sent me this letter in care of Seán Dunne, who once again had graciously invited me to stay in his family's home in Cork during my second summer of Deevy research in 1985.

> Dear Eileen Kearney,
>
> Just as I received your letter, I was putting together a collection of Teresa Deevy's correspondence for the National Library. I have found… letters and 4 pages of a manuscript connected to her play *Supreme Dominion* which cover the period 1947–1963. Some of these are the originals which relate to the correspondence from me which you saw at Landscape.
>
> It occurred to me that you may like to purchase these for your own use […] and later for sale to the University of Oregon or some such institution. Because of your special interest you can have these all for £250, which is less than the going rate.
>
> If you are interested, let me know when you can call here (I suggest some afternoon). I shall be here for a fortnight at least. My personal recollection will be slight in contrast to the importance of this new source material to which you can have exclusive access.
>
> With best wishes,
> Micheál Ó hAodha[10]

10 Maynooth, Russell Library (RL), Letter from Micheál Ó hAodha to Eileen Kearney, 10 August 1985).

Remember that, at this point, I was still a financially-challenged graduate student who had become accustomed to the culinary limitations of soup and noodles, which is why the Dunne family's hospitality was so greatly appreciated. After Dunne and I had a good laugh about Ó hAodha's sales tactics and asking price (which was roughly equivalent to $800, or €740, today), I declined to answer the man with the treasure. Some folks just aren't into sharing.

Two of my favourite interviews were conducted with Teresa's niece, Miriam Deevy Clarke, and Teresa's nephew, Jack Deevy. After Teresa's well-deserved success at the Abbey was waning, Miriam came to live with her aunts Tessa (as Teresa was called) and Nell in Dublin from 1942–1948. Miriam recalled her Aunt Tessa wearing unfashionable clothing including 'ghastly frocks and mismatched socks'.[11] In horror, Miriam witnessed Tessa riding her bicycle to meet someone in Grafton Street, oblivious of course to any traffic noises, wearing an old woollen coat that still had the wooden hanger on its back. Miriam also recalled her aunt as often so absorbed in her writing that she would only have toast and tea at mealtimes; she described Teresa as a terrible cook and recalled that 'If Tessa's life depended on her cooking, she would have starved': that fact may explain Teresa's life-long slenderness.[12] Her nephew Jack commented that, although Teresa never smoked, she would occasionally 'take a sherry'.[13] Perhaps these idiosyncratic traits resulted from a sense of being disconnected or shut off from the world. Although Teresa's deafness might be considered a challenge, it may have freed her from external distractions and supported her access to her rich interior world.

I remember a story Jack shared with me about his aunt's early days in Landscape when the family was aided by their live-in nurse-servant, Mary Ryan. The maid's room was above the kitchen, and Deevy family legend has it that the room was only accessible by ladder up to the trapdoor in the ceiling of the kitchen; the ladder was promptly removed after the maid's retirement every night, making it impossible for her to

11 Maynooth, Russell Library (RL), the Teresa Deevy Archive, Miriam Deevy Clarke, interview with author, 26 August 1984.

12 RL, Miriam Deevy Clarke, interview with author.

13 Maynooth, Russell Library (RL), the Teresa Deevy Archive, Jack Deevy, interview with author.

escape to see her boyfriend. Perhaps this story inspired some of Deevy's future characterisations of frustrated, confined servant girls. By the time I met Jack and his wife Noeleen, the trapdoor had long since been boarded up.

By now, I am quite familiar with the main events which shaped Deevy's childhood, early education, university years, and adulthood.[14] I recall her Catholic upbringing as the youngest of thirteen children in the comfortable surroundings of Landscape, her love of music and sports in her early education, and her hopes of an Arts degree and teaching. I marvel at her not allowing being deafened by Ménière's disease to hinder her ambition. I admire her steadfast determination to learn lip-reading while living with her sister Josie in London in the last days of the First World War, and I share the interest she took in the lively theatre scene during those years. I appreciate her return to Landscape, where she began her serious playwriting. I applaud the success of her six plays at the Abbey, and her decision to live as a writer in Dublin, where she and her sister Nell, who served as Teresa's interpreter until Nell's death in 1954, lived in Waterloo Road, not far from St Stephen's Green.[15] I imagine, through Miriam's recollections, Tessa and Nell's hosting many gatherings with the best of Dublin's theatrical and cultural circles, where guests included playwrights Lennox Robinson and M.J. Molloy; painters Jack B. Yeats and Patrick Hennessy; violinist William Shanahan; writers David Marcus and Terence Smith; and, actress Ria Mooney. Tessa would lip-read, but Nell would often interpret for her, in a sort of code that had developed between the two and which many of their friends found mystifying.[16] And I mourn Deevy's surprise and hurt from the Abbey's 1942 rejection of her next full-length play, *Wife*

14 Eileen Kearney, 'Teresa Deevy (1894–1963): Ireland's Forgotten Second Lady of the Abbey Theatre' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oregon, 1986); Martina Ann O'Doherty, 'Teresa Deevy, Playwright (1894–1963)', *The Waterford Archaeological and Historical Society Journal* (1995), 108–113 (p. 111); Martina Ann O'Doherty, 'Deevy: A Bibliography', *Irish University Review*, 25.1 (1995), 163–170; Cathy Leeney, 'Themes of Ritual and Myth in Three Plays by Teresa Deevy', *Irish University Review*, 25.1 (1995), 88–116 (p. 90); Cathy Leeney, 'Ireland's "Exiled" Women Playwrights: Teresa Deevy and Marina Carr', in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*, ed. by Shaun Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 150–163.

15 Dunne, 'Rediscovering Teresa Deevy', p. 10.

16 Ibid.

to James Whelan, realising that when that theatre rejected her work, she successfully redirected her playwriting muse toward the studio theatre network in Dublin and elsewhere, and continued to give voice to her uniquely complex characters who sought to challenge the prevailing and increasingly State-sponsored conversations.[17] I reflect on her decision, as a single woman without children, to write children's stories, among which was 'Strange People', which appeared alongside two other stories, one by Patricia Lynch and one by Helen Staunton, in a collection entitled *Lisheen at the Valley Farm & Other Stories*.[18] During this time, Deevy also published several essays, short stories, and religious-themed radio scripts in *Irish Writing* magazine, alongside such noted contributors as Liam O'Flaherty, Frank O'Connor, Seán Ó'Faoláin, James Stephens, Patrick Kavanagh, and Myles na gCopaleen.[19] Finally, I recall the irony of her ending. Even though in 1956 she received the distinguished honour of being elected to the Irish Academy of Letters, only seven years later she died alone in a Waterford nursing home, during one of the coldest winters in Ireland's history, two days short of her sixty-ninth birthday.[20]

The Abbey had a complex history of fostering new playwrights and then dropping them once the relationship was no longer fresh.[21] Having enjoyed the limelight for most of the 1930s, Deevy was stunned by the rejection of *Wife to James Whelan* in 1942, a play which John Jordan praises for its 'psychological profundity'.[22] It was later produced on radio by both the BBC and Radio Éireann, and received its first stage

17 Kate McCarthy and Úna Kealy, 'Writing from the Margins: Reframing Teresa Deevy's Archive and her Correspondence with James Cheasty c.1952–1962', *Irish University Review*, 52.2 (2022), 322–340; see also Chapter 6 in this volume.

18 Patricia Lynch, Helen Staunton, and Teresa Deevy, *Lisheen at the Valley Farm & Other Stories* (Dublin: Gayfield Press, 1945).

19 David Marcus and Terence Smith (eds), *Irish Writing: The Magazine of Contemporary Irish Literature*, 1 (Cork: Irish Writing, 1946).

20 Dunne, 'Rediscovering Teresa Deevy', p. 10.

21 Besides Deevy, these playwrights included Seán O'Casey, Denis Johnston, and Paul Vincent Carroll. Excellent sources which illuminate this trend include Richard Fallis, *The Irish Renaissance* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1977); Robert Hogan, *After the Irish Renaissance* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1967); Christopher Fitz-Simon, *The Irish Theatre* (London: Thames, 1983); Hugh Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904–1979* (Dublin: Gill, 1979); Frank O'Connor, *A Short History of Irish Literature: A Backward Look* (New York: Capricorn, 1967); Ó hAodha, *Theatre in Ireland*; and, Lennox Robinson, *Ireland's Abbey Theatre: A History 1899–1951* (London: Sidgwick, 1951).

22 Jordan, 'Teresa Deevy', p. 25.

production in Madame Cogley's Studio Theatre Club in Dublin on 4 October 1956.[23] Madame Cogley's production was hailed by critics for its 'sturdy homespun quality'[24] as well as its originality, sensitivity, and character-revealing dialogue.[25] But the Abbey's rejection caused Deevy to change tack, evidenced by Jordan describing Deevy's focus between 1939 and 1949 as on writing and adapting her existing plays for radio.[26] However, although Deevy's works virtually disappeared from the Abbey repertoire in her lifetime, the Abbey's experimental Peacock Theatre did produce her stage play, *Light Falling*, in 1948.[27] On the grand scale, however, it is obvious now that by the 1940s Deevy's heyday at the Abbey was over.

Someone once asked me how the rejection of one play could cause the undoing of a playwright; after all, most writers must deal with rejection. But bearing in mind the Abbey's prestigious distinction as Ireland's prominent national theatre, this was much more than a rejection; it was a divorce. In theatre lighting terms, it was the sudden beginning of a slow 'fade to black'. In examining the post-Abbey correspondence from Teresa Deevy to her friend Florence Hackett, we know Deevy understood that Yeats had never been the biggest fan of her work.[28] In fact, years later, Frank O'Connor, who adored her work, recollected what he caustically termed 'the Yeats repair-and-maintenance service'.[29] In discussing Deevy's work once with Yeats and Lennox Robinson, O'Connor recalled:

> Once when he [Yeats] was grumbling to me against the charming plays of Teresa Deevy and muttering that 'she wouldn't let us rewrite them for her', Robinson said rudely, 'Teresa Deevy rewritten by you would be like Chekhov rewritten by Scribe'.[30]

23 BBC radio produced *Wife to James Whelan* in 1946; Radio Éireann produced it on 18 May 1947.

24 'Studio Theatre Club Success: Fine Production of New Play by Teresa Deevy,' *Irish Independent*, 5 October 1956.

25 'Teresa Deevy's New Play,' *Evening Mail*, 5 October 1956.

26 Jordan, 'Teresa Deevy', p. 13.

27 *Light Falling* by Teresa Deevy, directed by Seán Mac Shamhrain (Jack McGowran), and produced by the Abbey Experimental Theatre, Dublin, 25–30 October 1948.

28 Dublin, Eavan Boland Library (EBL), Florence Hackett Collection, Teresa Deevy to Florence Hackett (undated), MS 10722, item 13.

29 Frank O'Connor, *A Short History of Irish Literature: A Backward Look* (New York: Capricorn, 1968), p. 169.

30 Ibid., p. 179.

Ironically, while Yeats was alive, most of Deevy's submitted plays were accepted. Only after his death in 1939 did the Abbey reject her work. The arrival of Ernest Blythe as Managing Director of the Abbey in 1941 redirected the theatre's policies and priorities with the result that the theatre produced work that reflected Blythe's own interests in the promotion of the Irish language in particular.[31] As a centre of artistic innovation and experimentation, the Abbey Theatre did not hold under Blythe's management and Deevy's work suffered as a consequence.[32] As Seán O'Casey would wittily express it, 'The terrible beauty', that was the Abbey, began to 'lose her good looks'.[33]

Deevy was and is universally remembered by those who knew her for her kindness, generosity, and unworldliness. Her Catholicism was deeply rooted, and while she had continually challenged Catholic traditions in her plays of the 1930s, her own faith remained unquestioned. For most of her life, she attended daily Mass, said the rosary, made novenas, and, in her later years especially, made pilgrimages alone to Lourdes (where she volunteered her services by carrying invalids on stretchers), and to Italy in honour of Padre Pio. Her later plays have strictly religious themes, and her estate papers contain cards commemorating different saints. Because Deevy rarely made reference to her deafness in her correspondence, and her friends and family simply referenced it as a fact when they spoke to me in the 1980s, it may be that Deevy made peace with being deaf. It is intriguing and impressive that she progressed as far as she did in an art form, which often begins with written verbal expression and manifests in a theatrical production where the sound of dialogue interspersed with silences is at the very core of the performance. It is through writing that she chose to be heard, albeit with a sense of the detachment created by her deafness. As Dunne speculated, this no doubt opened up dimensions to her as a writer.[34] Her interest in other people inspired her

31 Tomás Mac Anna, *Theatre and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Ireland*, ed. by Robert O'Driscoll (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 100.

32 In analysing the Abbey Theatre minute books, Tricia O'Beirne argues that F.R. Higgins'—Blythe's predecessor—approach to theatre management 'was integral to shaping the plodding artistic policies generally associated with Blythe's subsequent tenure'. See Tricia O'Beirne, '"In a Position to be Treated Roughly"', *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua*, 22.1 (2018), 120–134 (p. 134).

33 Seán O'Casey, *Innisfallen, Fare Thee Well*, in *Autobiographies II* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 72.

34 Dunne, 'Rediscovering Teresa Deevy', p. 10.

invention of characters who expressed their conflicting desires through her richly subtextual dialogue. It was her gift in expressing the subtle, often unspoken truths of her characters that invited so many to refer to her as 'the Irish Chekhov'.[35]

In thinking of how far we have come in recognising the work of more women playwrights, I am acutely aware of the vast number to whom we yet owe that duty. In the late 1980s, a few years after I had written about Teresa Deevy, my friend Kathleen Quinn asked the sales assistant in Fred Hanna's flagship bookstore on Nassau Street, opposite Trinity College Dublin, where she could find plays written by Irish women. He led her to a lone volume by Lady Gregory, to which she replied that she meant women *other* than Lady Gregory. He chuckled and dismissively replied, 'Women don't write plays', blatantly embracing the stereotypes and strictures inflicted upon women. His response prompted our grand detective challenge, and in a couple of years Quinn and I had unearthed seventy-five of these playwrights, Deevy of course being one of them, and we knew there were many more to come.[36] This launched the project I started with Quinn, which later evolved into the 2014 annotated anthology, *Irish Women Dramatists 1908–2001*, which I co-edited with Charlotte Headrick, and to which Quinn contributed substantially in its critical introduction.[37]

As we celebrate the current resurgence of scholarly (as well as production) interest in Teresa Deevy, we need to ensure that she holds a permanent place in the limelight rather than hovering in the wings. I am privileged to have laid the groundwork in the 1980s for much of this appreciation, and I applaud the creation of the Teresa Deevy Archive at Maynooth University and the *Active Speech: Critical Perspectives on Teresa Deevy* project through which present and future researchers can continue to honour her legacy.

With gratitude, I reflect once again on the providential sequence of events which guided me forty years ago in learning about Teresa Deevy. I acknowledge again Seán Dunne, without whose introductions I would not have been able to research Deevy, and without whose generosity we might not be experiencing this wonderful research celebration. Had Seán

35 Ibid. Abbey director Tomás Mac Anna also expressed this in my interview with him on 24 August 1984. See also Chapter 3 in this volume.

36 Eileen Kearney, 'Current Women's Voices in the Irish Theatre: New Dramatic Visions', *Colby Quarterly* 27.4 (1991), 225–232.

37 *Irish Women Dramatists 1908–2001*, ed. by Eileen Kearney and Charlotte Headrick (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014).

been a territorial academic, or an author looking to cash in on his research by selling it to an interested but impoverished graduate student, he might not have shared it with me. But Seán was a poet, the kindest of sensitive souls, who gladly shared the wealth of his findings with me. Like Deevy herself, he appreciated the detachment of silence and reflection, and was intensely interested in what made people tick—traits evident in his poetry. May we tread softly on those dreams common to both of them.

Perhaps most important, however, is a renewed commitment and determination to recognise the gifts, the 'many small events' as Cahill articulated, that women have contributed to history.[38] It is no coincidence that Deevy's contributions were shelved for so long. It is no coincidence that several academic presses which focused on Irish Studies in the 1980s and 1990s, including that of my MA alma mater Catholic University, rejected the publication of my revised dissertation, dismissing it as unimportant, echoing Jack Deevy's query of why anyone would ever be interested in this unknown and, therefore, to them, unimportant woman. Driven by the necessity of rectifying this pattern of neglect and exclusion, I continue to champion the vast contribution women have made to theatre, and question the tacit requirements implied for membership in what theorist Annette Kolodny once termed the 'canon of "greats"'.[39] And as for the venerable book sales assistant's questionable comment that 'women don't write plays', let me assure him that 'oh yes they do'!

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