

# Active Speech

Critical Perspectives on Teresa Deevy

Edited by  
Úna Kealy and Kate McCarthy





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Cover design: Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

Cover image: Photo by Jed Niezgoda ([www.jedniezgoda.com](http://www.jedniezgoda.com)). © All rights reserved. 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).

# 12. Teresa Deevy and Contemporary Performance Practice: Edited Transcript of Teresa Deevy Practitioner Panel Discussion

*Jonathan Bank, Caroline Byrne, Amanda Coogan, and Lianne Quigley<sup>1</sup>*

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In their discussion, Jonathan Bank, Caroline Byrne, Amanda Coogan, and Lianne Quigley, share insights into their performance-making processes and their experiences of working with Deevy's texts.

*Úna Kealy (ÚK): Jonathan, how did Deevy come into your life? Tell us a little bit about your work with the texts that you've produced.*

**Jonathan Bank (JB):** Deevy came into my life in 2009. I couldn't think of the names of any Irish women playwrights from the first half of the last century after Lady Gregory—and that puzzled me, that felt wrong

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1 Hosted by Úna Kealy and Kate McCarthy as part of the Active Speech: Sharing Scholarship on Teresa Deevy conference, the Practitioners' Panel took place on 10 December 2020. The panel was facilitated online and comprised Jonathan Bank, Amanda Coogan, Alvean Jones, and Lianne Quigley with Irish Sign Language translation from Isabella Walsh and Amanda Coogan, and technical support from Ken McCarthy (South East Technological University Waterford). The panel was funded by Maynooth University, SETU, and Waterford Libraries. A captioned and Irish Sign Language (ISL) translated recording of this panel discussion is available (see *Practitioners' Panel*, online video recording, YouTube, 10 December 2020, <https://youtu.be/fSX7FqOVFXk>). In recasting a live, online conversation as prose, some parts of the discussion herein are edited and adapted from the original conversation.

to me, that felt unlikely to me. At the Mint Theater, I'm in the business of finding neglected plays and, usually, a play comes to me just through serendipity, where I'll run across a reference to a title, or an author, and that reference is not because I'm looking for it. I'm reading about one play, and a critic mentions another, and I think, that sounds interesting. But in this case: I set out looking.



Fig. 12.1 Richard Termine, production image from Teresa Deevy's *Temporal Powers* (2011), directed by Jonathan Bank, Mint Theater, featuring Rosie Benton as Min Donovan. © Richard Termine. All rights reserved.

I sat down with the production history of the Abbey Theatre. It was Lennox Robinson's 1951 volume, which has great indexes—there's a list of every play, author, and dates—and I started looking for women's

names.<sup>2</sup> I decided right from the start that I was going to ignore the fact that a woman might be masking her identity with initials, or with a pseudonym, and that I would look for the Marys and the Katherines, and see what I could find. I made a list, not of every name, but of every name that had multiple occurrences. And I was only looking at the Abbey production history and not anything broader than that.

To the best of my recollection, I think I had eight names—it might have been six names—but it was not two, and it was not twelve. But Deevy's name occurred six times over the course of about five years. Once I started Googling these names—I mean, it's tricky! I don't have that list anymore and I don't remember everybody who was on it, but there are some names that are just so common that they [the playwright I was looking for] might have been on page twelve of the search results as an author. But basically, Deevy was the one author who returned any pages, and she was the one author who returned pages [and] who had work published. And, in fact, more than published—she had her volume of three plays published by Macmillan, and it was on the shelf at the New York Public Library.<sup>3</sup>

And I was able to just go from reading a sentence of description about this playwright to get on the subway, grab a copy of the book, take it home, and within three or four pages of the first play I looked at, which was *Katie Roche*—one of three plays in that volume—I knew that I was in the presence of a writer, of a compelling voice, a surprising voice. And, as is my wont as a play picker and as a producer and as, I guess, a historian, I knew I wanted to produce Deevy, but I wanted to read everything before I decided on what I would work [on first].<sup>4</sup> I set about looking for the rest of her work and I found a copy of *Temporal Powers*, which had been published in the 70s or 80s.<sup>5</sup> I think there were five hundred copies of that published, but I managed to find a used one and have it shipped, and I used the *Irish University Review* edition—the

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2 Lennox Robinson, *Ireland's Abbey Theatre: A History 1899–1955* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1951).

3 Teresa Deevy, *Three Plays by Teresa Deevy: Katie Roche, The King of Spain's Daughter, The Wild Goose* (London: Macmillan, 1939).

4 For more on the Mint Theater's productions of Teresa Deevy's work, see the Mint Theater, *Production Archives*, <https://minttheater.org/production-archives/>

5 Seán Dunne (ed.), 'Teresa Deevy Special Number', *Journal of Irish Literature*, 14.2 (May 1985).

Deevy jubilee edition—to read *Wife to James Whelan*.<sup>6</sup> That was the play that I was most eager to read because I knew that was a great story—the story of the play not being done—the Abbey rejected this play. And I read both of those plays and I loved them both and, truthfully, I loved them both more than I loved *Katie Roche*. I think that’s kind of a purely personal, artistic perspective, but it may be informed by my kind of warped view of the dramatic canon. *Katie Roche* was the famous play, even though it was not famous! It was published in *Famous Plays of 1935–36*—the Victor Gollancz series of plays—and the publisher felt the necessity of adding a note in that edition to say we’re including it because we think it’s really good, even though we know we can’t call it famous because it hasn’t been produced outside of Dublin.<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 12.2 Carol Rosegg, production image from Teresa Deevy’s *Wife to James Whelan* (2010), directed by Jonathan Bank, Mint Theater, featuring Aidan Redmond as Tom Carey and Janie Brookshire as Nan Bowers. © Carol Rosegg Photography. All rights reserved.

**ÚK:** So what you’re saying is that the importance of publishing, the importance of the records, the importance of availability of scripts—that was what brought

6 Teresa Deevy, ‘Wife to James Whelan’, *Irish University Review*, 25.1 (1995), 29–87.

7 *Famous Plays 1935–6* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936).

*Deevy to you. You talk about getting on the subway in New York, of being able to go to the library to get a copy of the play, and that immediate sense of access. Lianne, maybe you'd talk about your entry point.*

**Lianne Quigley (LQ):** I heard about Teresa Deevy in 2014, so relatively recently after you, Jonathan. I was really, really interested in theatre—being a theatremaker [myself]—and [in] what was going on in the Dublin theatre scene. And there was a series of lectures in Trinity about theatre and disability, theatremakers and disability, and that's when I first heard of Teresa Deevy.<sup>8</sup> And to be honest, I nearly fell out of my standing—a woman writer who was deafened! As a Deaf theatremaker, this is astonishing.<sup>9</sup> And so, I came across *The King of Spain's Daughter*, which was the play that I couldn't get out of my mind.<sup>10</sup> Now, in 2014, this was pre #WakingTheFeminists, and there was very little when I was Googling, and having a look around for her; but I got my hands on a script.<sup>11</sup> At the time, I was working with Amanda on another project

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8 Lecture Series 2014–15: Disability & Literature, Trinity Long Room Hub Arts & Humanities Research Institute.

9 Fiona Murphy explains that: 'Identity is a fluid concept and a personal choice. Lowercase deaf refers to deafness as a medical condition. It does not indicate the degree of hearing loss an individual may have. Some people with hearing loss may prefer to use the term "hard of hearing". Uppercase Deaf refers to people who identify as culturally Deaf and may use sign language. Given the ongoing suppression of sign-language education, not all Deaf people are fluent signers or even have access to the Deaf community. Again, this word does not indicate the degree of hearing loss an individual may have'. See Fiona Murphy, *The Shape of Sound* (Melbourne: Text Publishing Company, 2021), n.p. Thus, our capitalising of the word 'Deaf' here recognises Deafness as a social category and Deaf people as a group who share a particular history and culture. In line with Dublin Theatre of the Deaf, the Irish Deaf Society, the Irish Deaf Youth Association, the Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College Dublin, and researchers in the field, we capitalise the letter D in the word Deaf, when appropriate, to signal accord with the positive values within the Deaf community and Deaf culture. We use a lowercase d when referring to audiological status. When we determine that the reference is to both audiological status and Deaf culture we use the term d/Deaf. For more on d/Deaf, see the entry on 'Deaf, deaf', in the Centre for Integration and Improvement of Journalism, *The Diversity Style Guide* (2024), <https://www.diversitystyleguide.com/glossary/deaf-deaf/> and the entry for 'Deaf' in The National Centre for Disability and Journalism, Arizona State University, *Disability Language Guide* (2021).

10 Teresa Deevy, 'The King of Spain's Daughter', in *Irish Women Dramatists 1908–2021*, ed. by Eileen Kearney and Charlotte Headrick (New York: Syracuse University, 2014), pp. 44–58.

11 From November 2015 to November 2016 #WakingTheFeminists functioned as a grassroots movement and campaign that called for equality for women in the Irish Theatre sector. #WakingTheFeminists commissioned a study entitled *Gender*

that we were doing in the Project Arts Centre, and we said that our next one is possibly this [*The King of Spain's Daughter*]. And we just couldn't get over that it was a deafened person who was a writer, who had this history in the Abbey, who was forgotten, neglected, and we wanted to reclaim her. I began working with Amanda because the aim of our collaboration was to tell the story of Deaf people and to tell the story of the Deaf community in Ireland on a mainstream stage.

Amanda is a CODA, which means her mum and dad are Deaf, and sign language is her first language—this is her heritage, her culture as well.<sup>12</sup> We wanted to talk about—to speak to what we call the mainstream, to hearing people—about the richness of our [Deaf] culture and our language. And we started breaking down *The King of Spain's Daughter*, which was written in the 30s. And we started looking at the history of Deaf women in the 30s and tried to draw a kind of a parallel. This is when the Constitution—Bunreacht na hÉireann—came into our lives.<sup>13</sup> And we really believe that Deevy was one of the women who suffered under that constitution.

So, we paralleled a reading of the play with what was happening in Irish Deaf women's lives and picked up on the themes of oppression. We really looked at the character of Mrs Marks in the play. I'm signing her like this [three loops around the head]. This is the sign we gave Mrs Marks because we had these funky costumes on her. We put her as the symbol of oppression—so not specifying the oppression, not just as a

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*Counts: An Analysis of Gender in Irish Theatre 2006–2015*, ed. by Brenda Donohue, Ciara O'Dowd, Tanya Dean, Ciara Murphy, Kathleen Cawley, and Kate Harris (Belfast: Ulster University, 2017). The study demonstrated the underrepresentation in key roles (e.g., director and costume designer) of people who identified as women and men and analysed the relationship between public funding and representation in ten organisations funded by The Arts Council of Ireland (An Chomhairle Ealaíon). For more on #WakingTheFeminists, see Patricia O'Beirne, 'A Gendered Absence: Feminist Theatre, Glasshouse Productions and the #WTF movement', in *Perspectives on Contemporary Irish Theatre: Populating the Stage*, ed. by Anne Etienne and Thierry Dubost (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature, 2017), pp. 269–290; Claire Keogh, *#WakingTheFeminists and the Data-Driven Revolution in Irish Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009523066>

12 Georgina Heffernan and Elizabeth Nixon define CODAs as hearing children of one or two Deaf parents in 'Experiences of Hearing Children of Deaf Parents in Ireland', *The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 28.4 (2023), 399–407.

13 Bunreacht na hÉireann (Constitution of Ireland) was ratified on 29 December 1937. Government of Ireland, *Constitution of Ireland*, January 2020.

patriarchal moment—and we took the oppression to be the oppression of [exercised also against] our language, Irish Sign Language (ISL), but there’s even more detail than that. I will talk about women’s signs and the gendered vocabulary in Ireland that we have in our sign language [ISL], which is also awesome.

There were two deaf schools [in Ireland at the start of the twentieth century]: St Joseph’s for Boys and St Mary’s for Girls—[which were] completely segregated.<sup>14</sup> In St Mary’s, they used a vocabulary that we now call women’s sign, but it kind of died out, was left by the wayside, because St Joseph’s signs are what we call normal ISL.<sup>15</sup> That is the vocabulary that we use now. So, in parts of our production, we were remembering [women’s sign] this very specific, gendered language of sign language that we have in this country that is dying out. These women who still know it and used it in school are in their 70s and 80s at this stage. Let me give you an example [of women’s sign]: this is the sign for black [draw first finger down the left forearm], and the women’s sign for black is this [first two fingers curved and brought down over the eyes]. So, we littered our translations of the play, or any vocabulary that we used, with women’s signs only.

And you might wonder why we called it [our production] *Talk Real*

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- 14 St Mary’s School for Deaf Girls opened in August 1846, ‘St Mary’s School for Deaf Girls, Cabra, Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Report, 2.15’, in *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Report*, 6 vols (Dublin: Stationery Office, 2009), II, 551–556. St Joseph’s School for Deaf Boys was founded in 1856 and the school opened in 1857, ‘St Joseph’s School for Deaf Boys, Cabra (‘Cabra’), 1857–1999’, in *ibid.*, I, 555–580. The Mary Immaculate School for Deaf Boys (later renamed as Mary Immaculate School for Deaf Children) was located in Stillorgan, County Dublin. Recognised on 10 April 1956, the school prepared children aged three to ten for St Joseph’s. The school closed in 1998, ‘Mary Immaculate School for Deaf Children’, in *ibid.*, II, Child Abuse Report, 557–560.
- 15 Women’s sign is also referred to as ‘female sign’. For more on the gendered nature of Irish Sign Language see Barbara LeMaster, ‘Language Contraction, Revitalization, and Irish Women’, *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 16.2 (2006), 211–228; Barbara LeMaster, ‘School Language and Shifts in Irish Identity’, in *Many Ways to Be Deaf: International Variation in Deaf Communities*, ed. by Leila Monaghan, Constanze Schmalig, Karen Nakamura, and Graham H. Turner (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2003), pp. 153–172; Úna Kealy and Kate McCarthy, ‘Shape Shifting the Silence: An Analysis of *Talk Real Fine, Just Like a Lady* (2017) by Amanda Coogan in Collaboration with Dublin Theatre of the Deaf, an Appropriation of Teresa Deevy’s *The King of Spain’s Daughter* (1935)’, in *The Golden Thread: Irish Women Playwrights, 1716–2016*, 2 vols, ed. by David Clare, Fiona McDonagh, and Justine Nakase (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), I, 197–210.

*Fine, Just Like a Lady?*<sup>16</sup> So we removed it from *The King of Spain's Daughter*, and we called it *Talk Real Fine, Just Like a Lady* because we went to the Nina Simone 'Mississippi Goddam' song, this blistering anthem of civil rights.<sup>17</sup> It was really a beautiful pop culture link with our production, which aimed to strive for justice and social equality. So, our production fronted ISL and our sign language users completely.

We played in the Peacock which is underneath—the smaller theatre in the Abbey. What we wanted to do is immerse [the audience] completely into a Deaf, sign-language-using world. Jimmy is a character from the play *The King of Spain's Daughter* and we had multiple Jimmys, and we called them the comrades. And they were walking around in these brown overalls, very much taken from the script, walking around the audience, and they brought the audience into the auditorium. We had a character who was dressed up as Teresa Deevy, just walking around chatting—in sign language obviously, [to the] Deaf [audience members]. And now, in terms of our exploration of oppression, we folded this into the experience, too. This is the sign in ISL for oppression [clenched fist in one hand—outstretched palm in the opposite hand pressing down on the fist].

So, when you came into the auditorium, we had this massive piece of fabric that was propped up by these three Mrs Marks characters who had a sign for authority, authoritarianism, and oppression. And we had five Annies, dotted within the seats of the auditorium. And this big piece of fabric was over everybody. So, you walked in, and you were settled down under the fabric and then at an alarm bell cue, which flashed lights, the fabric came down and the audience member popped their head through it.

So, in terms of the parallel with Irish d/Deaf history and why we really forefronted the oppression of Mrs Marks on Annie—in our examination of the experience of Deaf women in Ireland, we [Deaf people] were forced really to learn how to speak [verbally]. And, as you can imagine, as Deaf women, this is the disability we cannot overcome.

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16 *Talk Real Fine, Just Like a Lady* created by Dublin Theatre of the Deaf in collaboration with Amanda Coogan, produced by Live Collision, Peacock Theatre, Amharclann na Mainistreach, 19–23 September 2017.

17 Nina Simone, *Nina Simone: Mississippi Goddam*, online video recording, YouTube (recorded 24–25 July 1965, uploaded 26 February 2013), [www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJ25-U3jNWM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJ25-U3jNWM)

And so, it was recognised in the Ryan Report on institutional abuse that this was an abusive experience within the deaf schools in Ireland.<sup>18</sup>



Fig. 12.3 Patrick Redmond, 'Talk real fine', production image from *Talk Real Fine, Just Like a Lady* (2017), created by Dublin Theatre of the Deaf in collaboration with Amanda Coogan, produced by Live Collision, Peacock Theatre, Amharclann na Mainistreach, featuring Ann O'Neill as Mrs Marks. © Patrick Redmond. All rights reserved.

We [Deaf women] used to be told to 'talk real fine'—so this is the sign for talk real fine [outstretched palm tapped under the chin]—this is what the teachers and nuns in St Mary's would say to us at all times: 'talk', 'speak up', 'hold out your chin', 'try and articulate with your voice'. And we really included the processes of religion as we experienced them in the deaf school when we signed a translation of the Hail Mary at one stage, which we subverted then in the middle of the lines.<sup>19</sup> Mrs Marks

18 Published on 20 May 2009, the *Final Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse* (the Ryan Report) includes two chapters relating to St Joseph's and St Mary's Schools: Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, 'St Joseph's School for Deaf Boys, Cabra ('Cabra'), 1857–1999', in *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Report*, I, 555–580; and 'St Mary's School for Deaf Girls, Cabra', in *ibid.*, II, 551–556.

19 The 'Hail Mary' is a devotional prayer to Mary, mother of Jesus, traditionally prayed by Roman Catholics as a standalone prayer or as part of the Rosary. For details of the Rosary and the full text of the Hail Mary, see 'The Mysteries of the Rosary', vatican.va, [https://www.vatican.va/special/rosary/documents/misteri\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/special/rosary/documents/misteri_en.html). For more

was delighted with it. She gestured to us—us, the Annies—her delight in it. Then once we inflected the Hail Mary, when we hit [the word] ‘womb’, we woke up in our play and realised we were embodied people with ideas, fantasies, sexual fantasies, ideas beyond the structure that was imposed on us; then she, Mrs Marks, came down hard on us.

And we opened the play with the sign for looking [outstretched palm held over the eyebrow], which is [taken] directly from the script, where Jimmy is looking around the field. And this sign beautifully inflects [through a slight but distinct physical movement] to become Ireland. Looking at Ireland, I suppose, is how we completely opened our production, marking it from the first utterances.



Fig. 12.4 Patrick Redmond, ‘The men shade their eyes and look left and right’, production image from *Talk Real Fine, Just Like a Lady* (2017), created by Dublin Theatre of the Deaf in collaboration with Amanda Coogan, produced by Live Collision, Peacock Theatre, Amharclann na Mainistreach. © Patrick Redmond. All rights reserved.

**ÚK:** *Caroline, while Amanda and Lianne were working in the Peacock, you*

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on the rise of the figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Ireland in the early twentieth century see Susan O’Brien, ‘The Blessed Virgin Mary’, in *The Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism, vol. IV: Building Identity, 1830–1913*, ed. by Carmen M. Mangion and Susan O’Brien (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 154–172.

were working upstairs in the Abbey, so maybe talk to us a little bit about that.

**Caroline Byrne (CB):** I had just directed a play at Shakespeare's Globe called *The Taming of the Shrew* and that coincided with the #WakingTheFeminists movement was taking off in Dublin. Our production was very much in conversation with that movement and with the promises made to Irish women in 1916 that were unfulfilled one hundred years later as we celebrated the centenary [of the 1916 Rising].



Fig. 12.5 Patrick Redmond, 'The sign for Ireland', production image from *Talk Real Fine, Just Like a Lady* (2017), created by Dublin Theatre of the Deaf in collaboration with Amanda Coogan, produced by Live Collision, Peacock Theatre, Amharclann na Mainistreach. © Patrick Redmond. All rights reserved.

Neil [Murray] and Graham [McLaren] saw the show and asked if I was interested in reviving a significant canonical play, which piqued my interest, and when they said it's *Katie Roche*, I confessed I'd never heard of it.<sup>20</sup> They presumed, as an Irish theatre director, that I would know this play and I felt like I should, too, but it had never crossed my path. I guess that when they saw my work on *The Taming of the Shrew* at

<sup>20</sup> Murray and McLaren occupied the roles of co-directors of the Abbey Theatre from 2016 to 2021.

the Globe—a woman being tamed—and *Katie Roche* could very well be considered another shrew and I seemed like a good fit for the play.

Graham spoke so enthusiastically about *Katie Roche*, comparing it to *Hedda Gabler* and *A Doll's House*.<sup>21</sup> I do, however, recall my response to it as not so enthused as his. I found it really challenging to grasp the syntax, the style, the characters, and what message it was delivering. It felt sometimes overwritten and underwritten; poised somewhere between the three-act modern play and an expressionistic drama. It confused more than compelled me. But I was intrigued by it, by Katie, and also by Deevy.



Fig. 12.6 Ros Kavanagh, production image from *Katie Roche* (2017), directed by Caroline Byrne for the Abbey Theatre, Amharclann na Mainistreach, featuring Caoilfhionn Dunne as Katie Roche. © Ros Kavanagh. All rights reserved.

I sought permission from the Abbey to reimagine it for 2017, and draw out the expressionism that I felt Deevy was exploring. There were some negotiations around whether I could make some cuts and changes and

21 Henrik Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler*, in *The Norton Anthology of Drama*, shorter edition, ed. by J. Ellen Gainor, Stanton B. Garner Jr., and Martin Puchner (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010), pp. 716–771; Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, in *The Harcourt Brace Anthology of Drama*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. by William B. Worthen (Florida: Harcourt, 1993), pp. 601–624.

employ a dramaturg (Morna Regan) to do so.<sup>22</sup> I didn't want it to be a museum piece, nor did I want it to be programmed as a reaction to #WakingTheFeminists. I wanted the play to stand alone and be its own thing rather than redressing something. That permission was granted by the Abbey and the Deevy estate, and Morna and I made some small changes to distill it and draw out its expressionism.<sup>23</sup>



Fig. 12.7 Ros Kavanagh, production image from *Katie Roche* (2017), directed by Caroline Byrne for the Abbey Theatre, Amharclann na Mainistreach, featuring Siobhán McSweeney as Amelia. © Ros Kavanagh. All rights reserved.

I talked to as many experts as possible about [Deevy's] work. I visited the archives in Maynooth.<sup>24</sup> I consulted with Professor Christopher

22 For more on Morna Regan's dramaturgical approach to *Katie Roche*, see 'Interview with the Dramaturg: Interview with Morna Regan by Maire Kelly (August 2017)', in *Abbey Theatre Research Pack: Katie Roche*, researched and compiled by Marie Kelly, School of Music and Theatre, University College Cork (Dublin: Abbey Theatre, 2017), pp. 41–43.

23 *Katie Roche* by Teresa Deevy, directed by Caroline Byrne, and produced by the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 28 August–23 September 2017. Amongst the dramaturgical decisions made by Regan and Byrne were the decisions to cut the characters of Margaret Drybone and Frank Lawlor from the theatrical text.

24 The Russell Library in Maynooth University, National University of Ireland, Maynooth houses the physical archive of Teresa Deevy. Some documents held by the Russell Library, Maynooth can be accessed online via a Digital Repository of Ireland website page entitled 'The Teresa Deevy Archive'. Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI), The Teresa Deevy Archive, <https://doi.org/10.7486/DRI.95944b38t>

Morash. These conversations were instrumental to my understanding and appreciation of Deevy. The result was I could then see the play, its importance, its originality, and I loved working on it. Morna and I began working on the text, workshopping it many times before we went into rehearsals with it.<sup>25</sup>

**ÚK:** *Amanda, would you take on that point that Caroline made around getting into the syntax, the underwritten, the overwritten.*

**Amanda Coogan (AC):** Lianne was the great discoverer of this little, gold nugget and, in terms of our practice together, it was manna from heaven, in terms of a deafened writer, a woman writer. I, gloriously, come from the visual arts. I'm a performance artist, but I come from the visual arts, so I don't care about literature. I have a fabulous disregard for words—syntax. I am almost really bold about it as well—how I throw this [syntax] against the wall and smash it. So, it was never, with me as the artist—and I'm loath to say director because I think Lianne and Alvean [Jones] are more of the actual theatre directors. I am more of the, 'oh let's try this', 'let's try that', kind of person. I always call myself the artist within our collaborations, but with something that was going to come through my practice—it [my interpretation of Deevy's text] was never going to be a straightforward reading.

And so, I cannot tell you the zeal of the Dublin Theatre of the Deaf—the zeal of that lady there, Lianne Quigley, they're bursting to tell their stories—it [our discovery of Deevy's work] was a brilliant opportunity for somebody [like me] who doesn't care about literary theatre. I think the Irish theatre canon is castrated by the word (but that's a whole other conversation). I was just so excited to start drawing the parallels [between d/Deaf experience and the experience of women in Deevy's dramatic text]. In the first instance we sat down, and we translated the play into ISL because the company are all ISL users. So, myself and Alvean Jones did a reading of it, we translated an equivalent in ISL—you know, Jimmy said this, and Annie said that, and Mrs Marks. And then a match was lit in terms of 'that sounds like what happened in St Mary's', 'that sounds like the way that this happened here, or there'. Like a great example is in *The King of Spain's Daughter*, I think the

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25 For more on Byrne's directorial approach to *Katie Roche*, see 'Interview with the Director: Interview with Caroline Byrne by Maire Kelly (August 2017)', in *Abbey Theatre Research Pack: Katie Roche*, researched and compiled by Marie Kelly, School of Music and Theatre, University College Cork (Dublin: Abbey Theatre, 2017), pp. 36–40.

original script talked about the flame red dress...

**ÚK:** *The 'flamin' red' and the 'shimmerin' green' and the 'pale, pale gold'.<sup>26</sup>*

**AC:** Dreaming of these great, glorious dresses that she wants to wear, and I read it as this kind of fantasy moment. And I wanted to inflect it [our interpretation] with a sexual fantasy as well because we are an embodied company: everything comes back to the body. I wanted to read everything with the body, and a female body, an oppressed female body—I wanted to inflect it with the sexual reading. And so, what we did was, we projected a film in the background. We took the performance off the stage—of course, so oppositional—I took it off the stage and so the play happened within the seats of the auditorium, so the audience [were immersed within our interpretation]. And the Annies are in blue, but we had a screen and so, as part of our show, we took one of the Annie characters, and behind her on the screen is an image of a naked woman swimming underwater.



Fig. 12.8 Patrick Redmond, production image from *Talk Real Fine, Just Like a Lady* (2017), created by Dublin Theatre of the Deaf in collaboration with Amanda Coogan, produced by Live Collision, Peacock Theatre, Amharclann na Mainstreach, featuring Paula Clarke as Annie. © Patrick Redmond. All rights reserved.

26 Teresa Deevy, 'Temporal Powers', in *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed*, I, p. 19 and 21.

**AC:** It's this great, glorious, female sexual dream, orgasmic dream. And she, this girl is, or this Annie, this version of our Annie, is trying to sing like an opera singer. So, with us, we saw the oppression not as Annie having to choose between getting married or going over to the mainland to work in a factory, it was all about the experience of learning to speak, or [of] being a really good girl [simply] because you could articulate something [with your voice], or being a really bad girl because your vocal cords couldn't articulate these sounds that you can't literally hear as a Deaf person, and also [about] being punished for signing, which was the experience of all of our company members. So, this girl just falls into a reverie.

We had a piece of opera beautifully sung by Michelle O'Rourke and I, up at the top of the auditorium, did a [reference to Samuel Beckett's play] *Not I*—I'm also a magpie in terms of my references—where I put a torch on my mouth so that Paula, a Deaf actor, could read my lips at the start.<sup>27</sup> It was an Italian opera piece, a Monteverdi, and she could follow my lips. Then I closed the light off and our Annie just fell into this beautiful reverie about what the equivalent for us was—the flaming red dress, the green, emerald dress.<sup>28</sup> Deevy's Annie has a couple of terms for her great fantasy of expressing herself and being free and being liberated—so this was where we made that happen within our production, I suppose.

**Kate McCarthy (KMCC):** *Jonathan, we've heard a lot of examples of the many opportunities Deevy's work presents, and some of the challenges. From your experience, what were some of those opportunities that you saw in that work and bringing it to audiences in America?*

**JB:** For me, I don't find a distinction between opportunities and challenges—I think they're synonymous. I think most theatremakers feel that way. You have to consider your challenges to be opportunities, and an interesting opportunity is probably a challenging opportunity. But for me, the key thing with Deevy goes, maybe, to that question of

27 Samuel Beckett, 'Not I', in *Collected Shorter Plays of Samuel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), pp. 213–223.

28 Áine Fay's score incorporated pre-recorded excerpts from Beethoven's final unfinished symphony and included a version of Monteverdi's *Si dolce è'l tormento*. See Kealy and McCarthy, 'Shape Shifting the Silence'.

overwritten versus underwritten. I guess where I land is that it's neither—it's perfectly written—in the sense that what I think Deevy does that has, I think, very little to do with being Irish, or female, or d/Deaf, but has more to do with her genius as a writer—or maybe has everything to do with all those things—but I understand it as her genius as a writer, is her ability to create real humans who hold contradictory desires and feelings in every moment. So, the challenge of the work is really—for an actor—to be able to live that contradiction; and the opportunity is to create a real human being, or to live up to the psychological complexity of the writing.



Fig. 12.9 Richard Termine, production photo from *Strange Birth* as part of *The Suitcase under the Bed* (2017), directed by Jonathan Bank, Mint Theater, featuring Aidan Redmond as Bill and Ellen Adair as Sara Meade. © Richard Termine. All rights reserved.

I never thought about, I mean, there was no place for me to think about how am I going to translate this work for an American audience? I'm an American—I consider a director to be kind of straddling, standing in for the audience and representing the author, or not representing the author, but attempting to *understand* the author, but from the perspective of the audience. I mean, what I really feel is that my job as a director is to deliver to the audience the experience I have in reading

the play, so that my first exposure to the play becomes the touchstone of what I'm trying to make sure happens for an audience. And so, my first exposure to Deevy's work was kind of wonderment and not clarity, but confusion. And I didn't think that...I never felt that my job was to choose between multiple interpretations, [but rather] that my job was to allow, or to enable, or to hope that the living contradictions in every moment breathed and that an audience had the experience of being in the room with humans who were struggling.

**AC:** This is an interesting point, Jonathan. Lianne, maybe you can help here because we desperately wanted to make a feminist piece of work. Of course, we were literally in the wave of #WakingTheFeminists, but we found our experience, the company's experience [was similar], and also in the play was this great idea of the young woman who wanted to be liberated and the older generation of women stopping her doing that. So, this Mrs Marks/Annie dichotomy was not a nice, tidy narrative of all women working together—we know this is the fantasy [of feminism], but that complexity was really interesting as it allowed us to speak to the actuality of real life and real-life experiences in some way—that it's [life is] not all beautifully tidied up and with neat hems.

**LQ:** I think that we really looked at how women oppressed other women—whether it's hearing women oppressing Deaf women—but we really reflected on our experiences as d/Deaf children being brought up in the way that we were forced into oralism.<sup>29</sup> I think at the end of our production we did a scene with hair brushes where Annie, as Amanda just described, [exposed] this fantasy. She is bashed by the other Annies with hairbrushes—the symbolic female prop or object. She is literally bashed in those terms—in a parallel way—to the way that Mrs Marks tells Annie to get over herself and marry. But we then inflected it again; we turned the hairbrushes around as they were white hair brushes with the rectangular back and we made them into these placards for protest, which is the glorious thing that we did.

At the time when we made the production, we really wanted to promote awareness of ISL to the mainstream audience as ISL was not

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29 Oralism is a teaching methodology that focuses on lip-reading and speech rather than sign language. St Mary's School introduced oralism in 1946 (*Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Report*, II, 551).

legally recognised at the time: actually, we got legal recognition literally three months after.<sup>30</sup> We do say that the arts community's acceptance of our language was certainly an amazing way of giving us confidence in our language, giving a kind of recognition and, certainly, in the National Theatre of Ireland, recognising our language and putting it on stage was really significant in those terms as well.

*KMcC: Caroline, you mentioned that you were trying to find a way of responding to the expressionistic elements, and you mentioned that you worked with a dramaturg, and the more you got into the text of Katie Roche, the more you found your way, so what were some of the crucial decisions for you in responding to that text, and particularly around the style since you mentioned that?*

**CB:** When I first read the play, Reuben (Katie's father) was the key character for me that was signalling the expressionism of the play because he's kind of magical—a conjured strange and mythic creature that fulfils a psychic rather than naturalistic function for Katie. He is borne out of her need, out of her mind. So, I started with him. I asked myself: 'what visual world would he fit in?' That was the beginning of building a psychic space for the play—that the world we see expresses Katie's mind, not her reality. Once I began with this, everything came alive to me. The domestic (the cottage) could be housed inside of the expressionistic world very comfortably, but not the other way round.

I started with the design elements of it and how the materials that Katie is surrounded by are an expression of her inner life. I used soil to represent her relationship with the earth and the outside. I coupled that with marble to explore her greatness, her expansiveness. How marble forms were so apposite of her journey; it's formed from fossils. I also loved how great architects used marble as a statement of grandeur and beauty and, to me, Katie has this potential in her—to be an architect, and to be grand. I was interested in glass because when I spoke to Chris Morash, he talked about Deevy's lived experience as a deafened woman. He shared that when Deevy moved into radio dramas, she would sit

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30 The Irish Sign Language Act was enacted on 24 December 2017 and recognises 'the right of Irish Sign Language users to use Irish Sign Language as their native language'. See Irish Statute Book, *Irish Sign Language Act 2017*, (Article 3.1). The Irish Sign Language Bill commenced on 23 December 2020.

behind a glass booth, lip-reading the actors. This image of her, behind a layer of glass, really struck me and felt like Katie too. So, glass, soil, and marble were the materials that I used to express Katie's dilemmas and aspirations.



Fig. 12.10 Ros Kavanagh, production image from *Katie Roche* (2017), directed by Caroline Byrne for the Abbey Theatre, Amharclann na Mainistreach, featuring Caoilfhionn Dunne as Katie Roche, set and costume design by Joanna Scotcher, and lighting design by Paul Keogan. © Ros Kavanagh. All rights reserved.

Both with the dramaturg and the set designer [Joanna Scotcher], we created a world where the ideogrammatic language of the play would be really strong. Like Amanda was saying—there is a visual language that expresses the characters' desires that often bypasses the [spoken] language. The work I make uses the semiotics of the stage to comment on the character's dilemma. It's not just the language that's working the audience, but the non-verbal world. I also found the character's use of language untrustworthy at times, and so I wanted Katie to have a life beyond the verbal, which seemed to capture something of Deevy herself, too.

When I started work on the play, I put together all the stage directions in one document. From an eighty-page script there were twenty pages of stage directions, which was very revealing of the non-verbal world of the

play. I workshopped the stage directions at the Young Vic [in London] to reveal the choreography of Deevy's characters and world. It revealed a silent and rebellious world of movement and dance. I also noticed that there were fifty-three silences written into the stage directions. I used these clues to detect what Deevy wanted in terms of the action of the play. So, that's where I began: Reuben, the stage directions, and the silences. From there, I could create a visual world that would be like a playground for Katie to be able to express herself as an artist. Over the course of the play, she created with the set [using the soil on the stage] like an artist. Katie is without a platform because she is illegitimate and a woman so I tried to give her a canvas.

*KMcC:* One of the themes that has also come out of this discussion is the importance of the relationship with your creative team in bringing these plays to life, so that it moves beyond language into the visual. Jonathan, would you like to give us a little bit of an insight into how you worked with your creative team, staging Deevy's many works at the Mint.

**Jonathan:** Well, I've staged four complete productions, the fourth production was four short plays including *The King of Spain's Daughter*, so that's a lot of different creative teams having a lot of different conversations, although my set designer [Vicki R. Davis] has been consistent throughout, and she and I are long-time collaborators.<sup>31</sup>

And just to focus in on *Katie Roche*—we did have a cottage—we had a ground plan and knew we weren't done and it's kind of the most assertive I am, contrary to my colleagues here. For us, the question was how to help the audience see the end of the play the way we did—and when I say the way we did—the way we felt Deevy intended, and not with a concern for the year in which we were producing it, nor with a concern for the year in which she wrote it, but just with a concern for the text. And so, we made some very specific decisions about how to help tell the story. I would say it was something that I felt was really bold and, I think, it went completely unnoticed as a bold directorial move—which I think is, for me, a sign of its success and that it just felt like it

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31 Directed by Jonathan Bank at the Mint Theater (New York), Deevy's texts included: *Wife to James Whelan* (2010), *Temporal Powers* (2011), and *Katie Roche* (2013). *Strange Birth*, *In the Cellar of My Friend*, *Holiday House*, and *The King of Spain's Daughter* followed in 2017, comprising *The Suitcase under the Bed* production.

was intended. Basically, we just wanted to see a moment past the final moment of the play.

The directors who feel that the first thing they want to do is black out stage directions are interesting to me as there's so much information that Deevy wants us to have there. Having edited two volumes of her work, which means proofreading plays time and time and time again, her stage directions are critical. She doesn't tell an actor how to say a line; she writes the line and then gives the direction after the fact that you should understand—just in case you're confused about what was intended by that line, here's a little more information—but it's not really an instruction, it's additional information, by and large.

**LQ:** For our creative team, the big thing was that we were completely invested in promoting ISL awareness and we played, during ISL Awareness Week, an embodied piece of work, an immersive piece of theatre.<sup>32</sup> Audiences came into our world in both physical and visual ways. The sign language that was used in Ireland [in the] last century is very different to what we use today, so we mixed between women's gendered signs of the 1930s to young women/girls' signs now.

**AC:** The gendered nature of Irish Sign Language is anthropologically, sociologically unique in the world. ISL is the first language for the company [Dublin Theatre of the Deaf] and so, I think what we call women's signs was really a major conversation with the creative team. And a really major conversation because all of our creative team were

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32 Taking place annually, Irish Sign Language (ISL) awareness week aims to break down the barriers of communication between d/Deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing communities. ISL Awareness Week (16–24 September, 2017) ran in tandem with the third International Conference of the World Federation of the Deaf under the theme of 'Full Inclusion with Sign Language', making the case that full social inclusion of d/Deaf people was only possible when Irish Sign Language was recognised and used widely used within society. The ISL campaign argued that the failure by the Irish State, at that time, to officially recognise ISL as a language and to fully implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) had a detrimental impact on d/Deaf people's lives and prevented them from achieving their goals. For an overview of the themes of the campaign, see Irish Deaf Society, *Irish Sign Language (ISL) Awareness Week, 16th–24th September 2017*. Heath Rose and John Bosco Conama's analysis of ISL as the subject of linguistic imperialism in Ireland usefully contextualises the 2017 ISL campaign. See Heath Rose and John Bosco Conama, 'Linguistic Imperialism: Still a Valid Construct in Relation to Language Policy for Irish Sign Language', *Language Policy*, 17 (2018), 385–404.

women, all of us were sign language users, and most of us, except me, were Deaf. So, we had the resources within our company to do this first-hand research on how d/Deaf women said the Hail Mary, which is one of those ritual things that you just speak without considering the individual words. How did they do this? How did they say black? How did they say white? Why did they say white? We made the sign for white [index finger touching the middle of the opposite hand's outstretched palm] into a whole poetic gesture and, actually, very beautifully. This [women's sign for white came into being] because they used to wear white gloves—[we used] all of that lovely detail. We could really read [the historical context of] the 1920s and 1930s [within the lives of] the women in the deaf school [i.e. St Mary's]. Teresa Deevy didn't go to the deaf school, but her contemporaries [women of the 1920s and 1930s who did attend St Mary's and] who were deaf, wore white gloves when they went for their walks and that's why they designated the sign [described above] for white as in 'like my gloves'. We used the sign for water as we were translating the poem, 'A Drover', within the play.<sup>33</sup> Women's sign for water is this [both hands and fingers outstretched, shaking in quick succession]. This is the sign for water we use every day [middle finger bounced off the chin twice], which is the St Joseph's Boys' sign, in comparison to the women's sign for water, which is this shimmering, glittering, beautiful thing, so these decisions also helped to create and bring out the poetic gestures.

We were coming from our perspective as culturally Deaf people who are using sign language. It was really interesting that both Jonathan and Caroline talked about the stage directions, and I would say from a Deaf perspective that that's completely understandable—you contextualise everything in the visual, in the vision that you're seeing. In our research, we found that her sister [Deevy's sister, Nell] interpreted for her quite a lot. Her sister was very much a bridge to the world. There were some comments that when her sister died before her, she (Deevy) was very isolated. So, [as a d/Deaf person] there's a lot of those interrelationships with the world if you're facing into the world—like speaking from an embodied perspective—you're facing into the world and the visual is your most important sense.

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33 Padraic Colum, 'A Drover', in *Wild Earth and Other Poems* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1916), pp. 5–6.



Fig. 12.11 Patrick Redmond, 'The women's sign for white', production image from *Talk Real Fine, Just Like a Lady* (2017), created by Dublin Theatre of the Deaf in collaboration with Amanda Coogan, produced by Live Collision, Peacock Theatre, Amharclann na Mainistreach. © Patrick Redmond. All rights reserved.

**JB:** I think it's important to just clarify that her sister interpreted, but her sister didn't sign—they had a communication.

**AC:** It's not the formal way that we have sign language interpreters, but certainly, what we'd talk about is home signs. I think, Lianne, you came across some evidence of home signs—so, small, intimate gestures that two people would have the understanding for, and certainly her sister was a communicator—in whatever way that was—whether she spoke more clearly that Teresa could understand her, or whatever way it happened, she had a conduit within her sister to the hearing world, or the mainstream world.

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