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LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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WOMEN IN THREE PLAYS BY TERESA DEEVY:

A CRITICAL STUDY

by Patience Chika Ochu

Thesis presented to the School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

OTTAWA, CANADA, 1981

For my Father and my Mother

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

By appreciation we make excellence
in others our property.

Voltaire

I wish to thank

- Those relatives and friends who encouraged
me during the difficult times.

- My supervisors, Professor George Thomson
and Dr. D. Manganiello, for their assistance during
the writing of this thesis.

- Professor Michael J. O'Neill of Waterford,
Ireland, who faithfully and promptly responded to all
my inquiries and kindly directed me to useful sources
of information.

- The staff of the University of Ottawa
Inter-Library Loan Service for their dependability
and efficiency.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In Ireland, for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent, and tender; so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the springtime of local life has been forgotten, and the harvest is a memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks.

J. M. Synge¹

Literary criticism of modern Anglo-Irish drama centres, invariably, on the appreciation of the works of the major figures such as W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge and Sean O'Casey. However, there are other less well-known dramatists whose contributions to the Irish dramatic movement are also significant. This thesis hopes to encourage interest in one of these dramatists, Teresa Deevy.

The significance of Teresa Deevy to the Irish dramatic movement lies primarily in the fact that in its relatively distinguished history the Abbey Theatre--the bastion of the movement--could not boast of a woman dramatist writing about women. The major figures of the movement created heroines who made, and will always make, indelible impressions on the minds of students

of English literature. Yeats's legendary Kathleen ni Houlihan will always be the symbol for Ireland in her struggle for freedom from the English yoke. Synge's Pegeen Mike remains the epitome of the young and wilful Irish peasant girl. And O'Casey's Juno Boyle symbolizes the long suffering earth-mother figure that evokes sympathy in all of us. But these and other heroines were presented to Irish audiences and to the world at large from the male point of view.

Lady Gregory, the only famous woman dramatist in the Abbey, was more interested in the establishment of the mythic or folkloric qualities of her heroines. Thus, Dervorgilla is more supernatural than natural, while the women in plays such as Spreading the News or The White Cockade merely represent Irish traditional values. The heroines in the plays of Alice Milligan, a relatively famous woman dramatist, are often overshadowed by the nationalistic and dogmatic tendencies of their creator. Therefore, until the arrival of Teresa Deevy on the Irish dramatic scene in the early 1930s, there was no outstanding woman dramatist who placed special emphasis on her heroines. For this reason Teresa Deevy justifies our attention.

The present thesis will undertake a critical study of the women in three plays by Deevy: A Disciple, The King of Spain's Daughter and Katie Roche. It is important to indicate at the outset that the

following is not a feminist treatise, nor is it tendentious in any manner. Rather, I shall be intent on making a case for Deevy's positive achievements at each point. While I shall mention critical defects and problems as I see them, I have made it my objective to account for the best of Deevy's achievement within the scope of this thesis.

The study of these women immediately encounters a couple of problems. The first is the fact that Deevy, like Lady Gregory and a host of other Abbey dramatists, left us little in the way of comment either about her life or her plays. The second problem arises from the sketchy quality of the available biographical data on Deevy. The biographical information which follows in the next paragraph was arrived at only after careful and protracted collaboration with John Deevy, a nephew of the dramatist who is the current trustee of the Deevy estate.

Teresa Deevy was born on 21 January 1894 in Waterford, the capital city of County Waterford in Ireland.² Her parents, Edward and Mary (née Feehan), were well-to-do drapery store owners and property developers. Teresa was the last of thirteen children, three of whom joined religious orders. According to John Deevy, religion was a way of life for the family, and his aunt was particularly religious. However, as will be later seen, her staunch Catholicism does not manifest itself

strongly in her plays. Following the death of her father in 1896, Deevy was brought up by her mother and older sisters.

She attended the Ursuline Convent School in Waterford, where she is still fondly remembered by the nuns.³ In 1913, she was admitted into the First Year Arts programme at University College, Dublin. Deevy took First Year Arts courses in English, French, Irish, Latin and Logic and was immersed in the University's liberal arts curriculum. But she did not continue with her University education, in spite of her eligibility to do so, because of growing deafness.⁴ Instead, Mrs. Deevy arranged for her daughter to study lip-reading in London and it was during her stay there that Deevy discovered her true vocation.

Her family had wanted her to put her Catholic education and her piety to good use by joining a religious order but Deevy did not become a nun as her family had anticipated, although she maintained close ties with the Church. Instead, while in London, she made ample use of the freedom from family restrictions and made numerous radical acquaintances. Her stay in London also freed her from the strongly nationalistic and anti-British climate in her native Ireland and exposed her to foreign influences. She frequented the English theatres and was especially interested in plays by Ibsen, Shaw, Chekhov and, later, the French dramatist

Jean-Jacques Bernard.

Her interest in drama grew in spite of the fact that the medium required a keen sense of sound as well as of sight. For Deevy had gone totally deaf by the time she was twenty-three years of age. But she managed to adapt her handicap to a medium in which the auditory as well as the visual senses play an important part. She learned to remain attentive for the duration of every play and, in a letter written several years after her sojourn in London, she described how she would "read the plays beforehand," and then "watch them on the stage, watching the movements of the actors' lips."⁵ In this way she was able to understand the dramatic and technical aspects of the stage. She returned to Ireland in 1919, having decided to pursue a career in drama in spite of her handicap.

She frequented the Dublin theatres and was particularly interested in the activities of the Irish National Theatre Society. The Society was founded in 1903 by W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory and could boast of such acclaimed playwrights as J. M. Synge, Padraic Colum and William Boyle. The founding members, under the leadership of Yeats, had adopted the aims outlined in the preamble to the constitution of the Irish Literary Theatre which the Irish National Theatre Society replaced:

We propose to have performed in Dublin, in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience, trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in the theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism.⁶

By the 1930s, however, most Abbey dramatists including Deevy agreed with these aims in theory only. As the ensuing study of her heroines will convey, Deevy, among others, was interested more in drama than in showing that "Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment." But in the first ten years of its history, the society which was to bring Deevy into the Irish literary milieu adhered successfully to its dual policy of polishing the image of Ireland abroad through a dramatic literature that is marked by a high degree of literary excellence and of building up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature.

Plays such as Yeats's On Baile's Strand and Synge's The Shadow of the Glen, which were performed during the first week of the Society's premiere, are characterized by their 'Irishness' as well as by

their artistic merits. However, the definition of Ireland and the Irishman by members of the Society conflicted with that of the various movements for nationalism. So that instead of an "uncorrupted and imaginative audience" that would ensure a "tolerant welcome" for the Society, this one was comprised of nationalists and government officials on the one hand, and of apolitical intellectuals on the other. In the first place, the nationalists challenged the Society's right to use the title it had chosen for itself--the Irish National Theatre Society. The followers of movements for nationalism such as the Sinn Féin (translated "ourselves") contended that only a theatre using the Irish language solely to stage political plays could be both Irish and National.

Therefore, protests and antagonisms followed the performance or production of some plays by the Society. For example, charges of 'immorality' were laid by the extreme nationalists against Synge's The Shadow of the Glen. They felt that insult had been added to injury through the character of Nora Burke, the heroine of the play. Not only did members of the Society not use their medium for propaganda against England, but they defamed the purity of Irish women by showing Nora making plans with her lover while her 'dead' husband lies on the bed nearby. The nationalists were blind to the fact that, as Una Ellis-Fermor puts it,

There was perhaps nowhere in Europe a group of people qualified as were these by their genius and by the discipline they had accepted from their genius, to bring into being again a living theatre and a poetic drama, and supported by actors and theatre workers whose appreciation was such that they went on giving their services free.⁷

By the time Deevy arrived on the scene, such furore over the portrayal of the more realistic and human qualities of the Irish woman had quietened down. Ireland had won independence from Britain in the early 1920s and the mainstream nationalists had been somewhat placated. Thus, when Deevy dramatized Katie Roche's flirtations with her lover, which the heroine hoped would hurt her husband, Abbey audiences were interested more in the drama itself than in the consequences to or the judgements of the reputation of Irish women.

In the first two decades of the Abbey's history, however, the deeply religious Deevy family joined the Clan-na-Gael movement and the clergy in the denunciation of Irish womanhood as represented by Nora Burke. But their objection to Nora Burke remains insignificant compared to the riots that ensued when Synge's The Playboy of the Western World was first performed in January 1907, which are well-documented in The Irish Drama by A. E. Malone who was a witness to them. But these riots served only to highlight the genius of Synge's plays and to bring international recognition

to the Society and its theatre. As Lady Gregory comments in Our Irish Theatre,

. . . we would not allow any part of our audience to make itself final judge through preventing others from hearing and judging for themselves. We have been justified, for Synge's name has gone round the world, and we should have been ashamed for ever if we had not insisted on a hearing for his most important work.⁸

Despite increasing world-wide recognition, the protests against the Society did not stop. On the other side of the movement for Irish nationalism were a group of young Dublin intellectuals who attacked the Abbey for quite different reasons. These intellectuals, made up of graduates of University College and Trinity College, Dublin, protested against the Abbey's parochialism, its insistence on the production of only Irish plays. Their objection to the Society's "Irishness" policy was particularly significant since the rest of Europe was under the spell of the "Viking" dramatists--Ibsen and Strindberg. Furthermore, other important dramatists such as Pirandello, Hauptmann, Bernard and Lenormand were burgeoning elsewhere and their genius was recognized in all the major dramatic centres of Europe. Deevy, at the time, was already familiarizing herself with Chekhov, Pirandello and Turgenev and supported the complaint against

parochialism.

Earlier, a prominent member of these intellectuals, James Joyce, had recognized the threat of an hermetic Irish culture feeding on itself until it was devoured. In "The Day of the Rabblement" Joyce rails against the Society's insistence on a 'Celtic and Irish' dramatic literature:

The Irish Literary Theatre gave out that it was the champion of progress, and proclaimed war against commercialism and vulgarity. It had partly made good its word and was expelling the old devil, when after the first encounter it surrendered to the popular will [namely, nationalists who wanted the promotion of an idealized image of Ireland]. Now your popular devil is more dangerous than your vulgar devil. Bulk and lung count for something, and he can gild his speech aptly. He has prevailed once more, and the Irish Literary Theatre must now be considered the property of the most belated race in Europe.⁹

Although the Irish National Theatre Society deviated from producing plays designed to please its audience, it continued to neglect the works of other European dramatists. The sole motivation for this neglect lies in the belief in a "popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent, and tender . . . " which Yeats found wanting in the works of Ibsen and the Continental dramatists. However, the Society later acknowledged Joyce's warnings and produced plays by the European masters.

In the meantime, the Abbey began to experience the cumulative effects of all the protests and controversies. The years 1911 to 1920, which ended with Deevy's return to Ireland, also witnessed a decline in popularity of the Theatre in its own home, resulting in grave financial problems. A brief account of the important events of these years sets the scene for the introduction of Deevy to the Theatre. One of the founding members of the Society, Edward Martyn, had left over the furore caused by Synge's plays. His departure meant the loss of a source of considerable revenue to the Theatre. In order to relieve some of its financial woes the Society undertook a tour of both Britain and the United States. The British tour was, according to Malone, "an artistic triumph and a great financial success."¹⁰ However, the American tour which took place between September 1911 and March 1912 was unsuccessful. As expected, Irish-American audiences were as enraged as their native counterparts over the 'immorality' in Synge's The Shadow of the Glen and the use of the word 'shifts' in The Playboy of the Western World.¹¹

Moreover, such Abbey leading actors as Maire O'Neill, Sara Allgood and Arthur Sinclair demanded higher fees, while the formation of a School of Acting, first by the Fay brothers, then by Nugent Monck, served only to drain the Abbey's financial reserves. The final

blow came from Anne Horniman, an English woman who was the Abbey's leading benefactress. She withdrew her quite substantial subsidy of the theatre due to the fact that it was open on the night of King Edward the Seventh's funeral. She demanded the immediate dismissal of Lennox Robinson, who was in charge of productions, from his post at the Abbey. Both Yeats and Lady Gregory refused to comply with her wishes; they felt that it would be a great mistake if the Abbey succumbed to politics and lost Robinson's unquestionable managerial capabilities in the process. Their decision to rally behind Robinson proved wise for Robinson later became responsible for introducing new dramatists to the Theatre; Teresa Deevy was one of them.

As if the loss of a valuable subsidy and its attendant problems were not enough, the artistic quality of the plays produced by the Society also became an issue. The death of Synge in 1909 had deprived the Abbey of one of its foremost dramatists and Yeats's plays were not sufficient to fill the vacuum left by Synge's death. The plays by the "Cork Realistic" dramatists, which included those by Lennox Robinson, T. C. Murray and Seumas Kelly, emphasized only the harsher aspects of peasant life.¹² The situation and the social comment became more important than the characters. Malone comments:

The plays at the Abbey began to be derivative and imitative; the worst traits of the more important dramatists being copies, and the so-called 'peasant' speech reproduced with the accuracy of a gramophone record. This was supposed to 'be faithful' realism.¹³

"A.E." derisively described the Cork Realists as "this school of Irish dramatists who say they are holding up the mirror to Irish peasant nature," but who, in effect, "delight in the broken light of insanity, the ruffian who beats his wife, the weakling who is unfortunate in love, and who goes and drinks himself to death."¹⁴ These Cork Realists were greatly influenced by Ibsen and the trend towards realism in literature. They wanted to banish forever the image of the romantic Irish peasant advocated by "A.E.", Yeats, Lady Gregory, and others.

To "A.E.'s" criticism, J. Bernard MacCarthy, one of these 'Realistic' dramatists, replied in the Preface to his play The Long Road to Garranbraher:

To many honest persons the so-called 'Abbey' peasant in a serious play is anathema They are sunny, well-fed folk, who stoutly refuse to think that the Irish peasant is anything else save a good-natured giant singing at his work all day long out of sheer joy in existence, and dancing merrily at the cross-roads of evenings. It is a pleasant picture: pity it is not a true one You have not discovered the real peasant, and you never will. You have passed over the grim passions, the primitive hungers and desires beneath the crust.¹⁵

But the overriding emphasis by dramatists like J. Bernard MacCarthy on the physical hardships of peasant existence resulted in what can only be described as a monotony in the form of the plays and a stereotyping of character. In the study of her plays, it will be seen that Deevy does not turn a blind eye to the more 'realistic' aspects of peasant life. However, she dramatizes the character of her heroine relative to the rural setting. And she parallels the harsh existence of the peasants with the 'imaginative' attempts at escape by heroines. She thereby avoids the monotony of form and conventionality of character that was a feature of the majority of Abbey plays in the decade 1910 to 1920.

Recognizing the threat inherent in a continuation of the realistic peasant play and the crippling effect caused by the lack of sufficient finances, Yeats undertook a number of initiatives designed to improve the situation. At the instigation of Ezra Pound he turned to the Japanese Nō drama which he later called his 'mysterious art' written for a 'secret audience'.

Explaining the motives behind his initiative in a letter to Lady Gregory, he comments:

We set out to make a 'People's Theatre', and in that we have succeeded. But I did not know until very lately that there are certain things dear to our hearts which no 'People's Theatre' can accomplish.¹⁶

In other words, he was beginning to see the stunting effects of parochialism and the insistence on the perpetuation of Irish culture through the medium of drama. Still, he used and insisted on an Irish basis for the plays; thus while the form of his plays during these years would reflect the influence of the Japanese Nō drama, the content would be purely Irish:

A writer is not less national because he shows the influence of other countries and of the great writers of the world. No nation, since the beginning of history, has ever drawn all its life out of itself.¹⁷

Yeats's plea for the acceptance into Irish drama of 'international' influences is of particular significance to Deevy. In most of her plays, and Katie Roche in particular, the influence of Chekhov and other European dramatists can be felt permeating the basic 'Irish' situation.

In October 1918, Yeats cooperated with Lennox Robinson to found the Dublin Drama League, another initiative designed to amend the situation. The objective of the League was the introduction of foreign dramatists to Irish audiences:

Its purpose was to perform plays of international repute . . . indeed in its ten years' existence it only produced three plays by Irish authors, two by Lord Dunsany and

one by Bernard Shaw. Instead, it introduced Dublin to the work of Pirandello, Sierra, the Quinteros, Lenormand, Eugene O'Neill, d'Annunzio, et al; the League's performances were held in the Abbey Theatre on Sunday and Monday nights and they eventually became very important theatre functions where every seat in the Theatre was occupied.¹⁸

In retrospect, the League was an imaginative attempt to alleviate the monotony in the Irish Theatre. It permitted the Abbey to continue with its dedication to a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature, while providing a valuable training ground in modern dramatic techniques for Dublin's young theatre people. Deevy made ample use of the opportunity to increase her knowledge of the Continental dramatists and their works.

The arrival at the Abbey of Sean O'Casey in the middle twenties also helped to counterbalance the increasing production costs and actors' fees. With three plays--The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock, The Plough and the Stars--O'Casey rapidly demonstrated that he was the most controversial dramatist to appear in Ireland since Synge. Following up on its cooperation with the Dublin Drama League, the Abbey opened a small theatre, the Peacock, in its own building. The Peacock was under the direction of the famed actress, Ria Mooney, and was the site of the first Dublin production of Ibsen's Peer Gynt by the remarkable team of Michael

MacLiammoir and Hilton Edwards. Later, in 1928, these two men went on to found the Gate Theatre which introduced Denis Johnston to the theatre world.

Deevy maintained close contacts with all three Dublin theatres. Her friendship with Lennox Robinson, who replaced Nugent Monck as a chief producer of the Abbey, enabled her to foster life-long friendships with people at both the Abbey and Peacock Theatres.¹⁹ And she was a good friend of Christine, Countess of Longford; the latter's husband, Edward, had joined both Edwards and MacLiammoir in the running of the Gate Theatre. Deevy's contact with the Gate was instrumental in the development of her friendship with Denis Johnston, Shelagh Richards and James Cheasty.²⁰ However, her relationship with Robinson proved to be more beneficial in her attempts at playwriting.

Due to the cumulative effect of all these factors, Deevy suddenly found herself in a position to write plays for the Abbey. Among the most decisive factors was Sean O'Casey's sudden departure from the theatre amid great furore. His severance from the Abbey had been motivated by its, and particularly Yeats's, refusal to produce his experimental and expressionistic play The Silver Tassie.²¹ With O'Casey's departure, the Abbey was deprived of its most popular and most valuable playwright. Moreover, Yeats's dedication to the Japanese Nō drama meant that he became a less

visible figure in the theatre. Lady Gregory, the other important member of the Directorate, was forced by persistent illnesses to spend more time at her Coole Park residence in Western Ireland than in Dublin.

Finally, with the cessation of the activities of the Dublin Drama League in 1928, Robinson began to scout for new talent for the Abbey. He knew of Deevy's interest in Chekhov and the Continental dramatists; but he urged her to look to her native Waterford for material and to follow the guidelines set out in the "Advice to Playwrights who were sending plays to the Abbey" manifesto:

A play to be suitable for performance at the Abbey should contain some criticism of life, founded on the experience or personal observation of the writer, or some vision of life, of Irish life by preference, important from its beauty or from some excellence of style We do not desire propagandist plays, nor plays written mainly to serve some obvious moral purpose; for art seldom concerns itself with those interests or opinions that can be defended by argument, but with the realities of emotion and character that become self-evident when made vivid to the imagination.²²

Deevy was already aware of the Abbey's insistence on an Irish basis for any play it received. But she was determined to adapt her knowledge of the Continental dramatists to the Irish basis in her work. The most striking aspect of the manifesto was its preference

for plays dealing with the "realities of emotion and character," that manifest themselves when "made vivid to the imagination."

As this study of the women in her plays will endeavour to show, Deevy concentrates on the faithful dramatization of the conflict of various impulses in the individual and on the more primary conflict between the individual in question and the surrounding community. Her first play for the Abbey, The Reapers, still unpublished, is said to have evidenced the beginnings of such a concentration on character. Following the first performance of The Reapers on 18 March 1930, Andrew Malone wrote:

Probably the new dramatist from whom much may be expected in the future is Miss Teresa Deevy, whose play "The Reapers", demonstrated that she possessed a fine dramatic talent . . . she did prove that she can create living stage characters, write sprightly and natural dialogue and that she has a fine sense of the theatre.²³

This ability to create "living stage characters" distinguished her from the bulk of the new Abbey dramatists. Unlike Paul Vincent Carroll and Pauline Maguire, two playwrights who emerged around the same time as Deevy, she does not portray stock characters such as the respected priest or canon, or the wealthy landowner. And her "sprightly and natural dialogue" becomes even

more impressive in the light of her handicap. Her total deafness resulted in the ability to perceive the intricacies of dialogue and language more clearly than others. The following study of her heroines will show how she makes maximum use of language and speech to reflect the emotions of her characters.

The Reapers was followed by A Disciple, which was produced by Lennox Robinson on 24 August 1931.²⁴ Deevy's second play for the Abbey, though subtitled a "comedy in one act," also evidences her interest in the development of a character as a result of the conflict of various internal and external forces. Chapter two of this thesis, which deals with A Disciple, will attempt an elucidation of these various conflicts and their overall effect on Ellie Irwin, the first Deevy heroine. It will also discuss the effects of the comic basis of A Disciple on the characterization of Ellie Irwin. A Disciple was followed by Temporal Powers, which was not published. Temporal Powers was first performed on 12 September 1932 to an enthusiastic reception; but, as the trustees of the Deevy estate have not released the play, I will withhold comment on it.

Deevy perpetuates her concept of the "modern Irish heroine in her third play for the Abbey entitled The King of Spain's Daughter. This fourth piece, which will be the subject of chapter three, was first

produced by Fred Johnson on 29 April 1935 to an enthusiastic reception.²⁵ That astute critic of Irish drama, Joseph Holloway, calls the play "a clever little work" in which the "romantic ideas of a labourer's daughter are nearly brought to a commonplace end . . . but she runs away from it all."²⁶ Holloway's sentiments regarding The King of Spain's Daughter are shared by Andrew Malone who calls it "excellent entertainment" in its "original approach to what might be called an outworn subject."²⁷

Deevy's next play for the Abbey, Katie Roche, is also her most popular. It was first produced by Hugh Hunt and with settings by the famed Abbey designer Tania Moisiewitsch. As I will endeavour to show in chapter four, the heroine of Katie Roche is far more complex than her two predecessors, although she embodies some of their characteristics. Katie Roche is the quintessential modern Abbey heroine who, more than any other, symbolizes the Abbey's growing inclination towards dramatic art and universality, rather than drama as a cultural statement. Katie Roche remains the one Deevy play that is constantly revived by the Abbey Theatre. It was included in the programme of the First Abbey Festival which ran from 6th to 20th August 1938, and was produced during the Theatre's tour of America in the late 1930s.

Katie Roche was followed by the The Wild Goose.

The three-act play, which was first performed on 9 November 1936, is set in the seventeenth century, the period of Williamite Rule and Penal Laws in Ireland. Deevy shifts her focus from 'romantic', rural Irish girls to a young man by the name of Martin Shea, who embodies the symbolic connotations of the title, 'The Wild Goose'. This shift from the heroines to a hero will be discussed briefly in the concluding chapter. The Wild Goose is also significant in that it marked the end of Deevy's career as an Abbey dramatist. She left the Abbey on her own initiative and, between 1939 and 1950, she turned to writing plays for the relatively new medium of radio. The move to radio is unusual; her deafness made it impossible for her to hear her own plays being performed over the radio. However, according to Shelagh Richards, director of programming at Radio Telefis Eireann, she was called upon to give advice and direct the actors several times during rehearsals. These radio plays are listed along with others in the appendix that follows the conclusion.

Deevy, who never married, was deeply committed to the Irish theatrical scene. In 1954, her achievements in that respect were recognized and she was elected to the Irish Academy of Letters, founded by Yeats, Lennox Robinson and George Bernard Shaw in 1933. The Academy, in Richard Fallis' words, "gave a sense of

formalizing the literary movements he [Yeats] had nurtured and chastized for generations."²⁸ The Academy aims at the promotion of "creative literature in Ireland" and the support of "all work of fine intellectual or poetic quality written by authors of Irish birth or descent."²⁹ The Academy's election of Teresa Deevy, to its ranks marked the first step towards recognizing the contribution by one of the less prominent dramatists of the Irish Dramatic Movement.

Before her death in 1963 a number of Irish critics also recognized her significance to this continuous movement. For example, Lennox Robinson, the man to whom Deevy once said she owed everything, commented:

To my mind she is . . . the most important dramatist writing for the Irish theatre in 1930. Denis Johnston grows increasingly disappointing, an echo of an echo. Teresa Deevy keeping herself, directly in her line, never swerving for a moment from her individuality, keeps her integrity, owes nothing to no-one but herself.³⁰

And, in a conversation with Joseph Holloway, the Irish short story writer, Sean O'Faolain, spoke of his preference for Deevy's works over all other Abbey plays because "she comes nearest the Chekhov technique."

John Jordan, another critic of Irish drama, comments:

But the only genuine new voice of the thirties was Teresa Deevy The Irish Theatre has never been the place to look for the investigation of human personality on its subtler levels. Even in Synge the mysterious human being tends to be less important than a controlling myth. Teresa Deevy, in two plays, the unpublished Temporal Powers (1932) and Katie Roche (1936) treated with extreme delicacy the intangibles of human contact.³¹

Jordan in the above quotation points to another aspect of Deevy's significance; that is, her investigation of human personality on its subtler levels. The ensuing study of her heroines attempts an interpretation of Deevy's successes and failures in this investigation.

Introduction

Notes

¹ John Millington Synge, Preface, "The Playboy of the Western World," J. M. Synge: Collected Works, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), IV (ii), 54.

² Prior to my correspondence with John Deevy I found that there was disagreement among the chroniclers of the history of modern Anglo-Irish drama as to the exact date of Deevy's birth. For example, The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature, 1900-1950 gives her dates as 1900-1963. And in his Dictionary of Irish Writers (Cork: Mercier Press, 1967), Brian Cleeves says that Deevy was born in 1903. 1894 is the correct year of her birth not only because of her nephew's confirmation of it, but also because Deevy herself had mentioned it during her correspondence with Nathamal Sahal, when the latter was researching for his thesis on "Realism in Modern Anglo-Irish Drama."

³ Letter received from John Deevy, dated 27 February 1980, includes this information.

⁴ This information was contained in a letter to me from Maurice Kennedy, Registrar of University College, Dublin, dated 21 April 1980.

⁵ Teresa Deevy, letter to Nathamal Sahal, 27 October 1955, quoted in Sixty Years of Realistic Irish Drama: 1900-1960 (Bombay, India: Macmillan, 1970), p. 134.

⁶ Lady Isabella Augusta Gregory, Our Irish Theatre (New York: Capricorn Press, 1965), pp. 8-9.

⁷ Una Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 48.

⁸ Lady Gregory, pp. 115-17.

⁹ James Joyce, "The Day of the Rabblement", in The Critical Writings of James Joyce, eds. Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 70.

¹⁰ Andrew Malone, The Irish Drama (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), p. 109. Malone's book is considered by many to be the quintessential book on the Irish Dramatic Movement. He gives a first hand account of the events, the successes and the pitfalls of modern Anglo-Irish drama from the 1880s to 1929. The only drawback of this account is that it goes no further than 1929, when the book was first published.

¹¹ The colloquial term for ladies underwear 'shifts' which Synge uses towards the end of the third act of The Playboy of the Western World, was a decisive factor in the riots that marked the Irish and American premieres of the play. In their defence of what they called the innate purity of the Irish woman, Dublin and Irish-American audiences took offence at the very idea of the same Irish woman, standing almost naked from, as Christy says, "this place to the Eastern World." However, when Deevy's unconventional heroines came to the fore of the Abbey, Irish audiences had changed, primarily because independence from Britain had also meant a change in focus from an 'Irish' drama to a 'dramatic' literature. Thus, when Ellie Irwin actually propositions Jack the Scalp with the idea of sharing his bed in A Disciple, Abbey audiences were less concerned with the consequences of this bold proposition for the reputation of the Irish woman.

¹² In his book, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, Lennox Robinson explains these objectives of the Cork Realistic Dramatists. In the first place these dramatists were united by one geographical factor--they were all natives of Co. Cork. Secondly, as Robinson explains "We young men, a generation later than Yeats, later than Kathryn Tynan, later than Seumas O'Sullivan, didn't see her [Ireland] as a queen, didn't see her all fair and purple and gold, we loved her as truly as Yeats and Dora Shorter and the rest--maybe we loved her more deeply, but just because we loved her so deeply her faults were clear to us. Perhaps we realists saw her faults too clearly, perhaps we saw her too often as a grasping, middle-aged hag. She was avaricious, she was mean, for family pride she would force a son into the Church against his will, she would commit arson, she would lie. She would cheat, she would murder and yet we would write all our terrible words about her out of love." Ireland's Abbey Theatre (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1951), p. 48.

¹³ Malone, p. 265.

¹⁴ Quoted in Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 265.

¹⁵ John Bernard MacCarthy, Preface, The Long Road to Garranbraher (Dublin: Gill, 1928).

¹⁶ William Butler Yeats, "The Irish Dramatic Movement," Plays and Controversies (New York: Macmillan, 1924), p. 108.

¹⁷ Yeats, p. 199.

¹⁸ Robinson, p. 121.

¹⁹ In a letter to me dated 27 February 1980, John Deevy described his aunt as having been a great conversationalist and an avid theatre-goer.

²⁰ In his appreciation of Deevy on the occasion of her death in January 1963, the young playwright James Cheasty wrote of her kindness, simplicity, humility and helpfulness to young writers, and also complained that "the neglect by the Abbey Theatre of the work of Teresa Deevy is a sad reflection on that institution." Quoted from Robert Hogan, After the Irish Renaissance (University of Minnesota Press, 1967), pp. 39-40.

²¹ It is ironical that Yeats refused to produce O'Casey's The Silver Tassie on the grounds that it was highly experimental. The preamble to the constitution of the Irish National Theatre Society insists on "that freedom to experiment . . . without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed." The question that remains to be answered is why Yeats waived that right or freedom to experiment in O'Casey's case, especially in view of the fact that he himself was still experimenting with the Japanese Nō drama.

²² Lady Gregory, p. 101.

²³ Andrew Malone, "The Irish Theatre in 1935," The Dublin Magazine, 6 (1931), 1.

²⁴ Unlike the other two plays under consideration, A Disciple was first published by The Dublin Magazine. It was later published by other periodicals but under various titles. For example, in the Cork-based Irish Writing, it is called In Search of Valour, which is also appropriate in that the action of the play revolves around Ellie Irwin's quest for valour. This was also the title used by the British Broadcasting Corporation during its televising of the play. And the One Act Play Magazine, with minor modifications,

published the play as The Enthusiast--also applicable in that Ellie is an enthusiastic follower of Coriolanus and she pursues her search for his valorous qualities enthusiastically.

25 Like its predecessor, The King of Spain's Daughter was also televised by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

26 Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill, eds., Joseph Holloway's Irish Theatre (Dixon, California: Proscenium Press, 1969), 11, 42.

27 Andrew Malone, "The Irish Theatre in 1935," The Dublin Magazine, 11 (1936), 52.

28 Richard Fallis, The Irish Renaissance (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1977), p. 245.

29 Who's Who, What's What and Where in Ireland (Dublin: The Irish Times Publishing Co., 1973), p. 457.

30 Lennox Robinson, "Review of Three Plays by Teresa Deevy," The Dublin Magazine, 159 (1940), 71-72.

31 John Jordon, "The Irish Theatre--Retrospect and Premonition," in Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies IV, eds. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (London: Edward Arnold, 1962), p. 179.

Chapter Two

A Disciple

Cominius: I shall lack voice, the deeds
of Coriolanus
Should not be utter'd feebly. It
is held
That valour is the chiefest virtue,
and
Most dignifies the haver: if it
be,
The Man I speak of cannot in
the world
Be singly counterpois'd.

Coriolanus¹

Ellie: . . . Coriolanus . . . Caius,
Marcius
Coriolanus . . . he done things
proper
. . . trampling on the lot of them
to
The end of his life.

A Disciple²

Following the spectacular success of Deevy's first play, The Reapers, the Abbey directorate could not but accept A Disciple, subtitled a comedy in one act, for production. At that time comedies were a popular feature of the Abbey Theatre repertory. As Andrew Malone comments, the function of "comedy in the Irish Theatre was to be that which Socrates accorded to the jest, . . . a pleasant interruption

from the more serious dramatic work."³ Lady Gregory was the first dramatist to provide these pleasant interruptions. Her numerous comic-farŕical plays, such as Twenty-five, Spreading the News and Hyacinth Halvey, perpetuate the image of the carefree Irish peasant, getting himself into and out of tricky situations. There is always a happy ending to these plays, and there is little or no taxation on the imagination of the audience.

However, with the advent of such dramatists as J. M. Synge, William Boyle and Sean O'Casey, the interruptions became less pleasant. Members of the audience no longer laughed for the sake of laughter, they had to exercise caution:

In all the greatest Irish comedies there is always that dubiety whether anything has hurt: the laugh at Christy Mahon in Synge's Playboy or at Denis Geoghegan in Lennox Robinson's The Whiteheaded Boy must always be restrained by a lingering doubt whether some wound has not been inflicted.⁴

At times, members of the audience became overly-cautious and often misjudged the intentions of some of the dramatists. Thus it was that Synge's The Tinker's Wedding was fiercely attacked for its portrayal of nomadic Irish itinerants and for what was perceived as its total disrespect for priests and the Church.

And George Bernard Shaw's John Bull's Other Island was attacked for what was called English propaganda against Ireland.

In spite of these criticisms comedies still remained popular and most dramatists who wanted to enter into the mainstream of Irish drama wrote and submitted comic plays to the Abbey. Sean O'Casey established his reputation and saved the Abbey from financial ruin with Juno and the Paycock, his first comedy. In the early 1930s Deevy was seeking to establish her reputation, having found initial success with The Reapers. Consequently, she wrote and submitted A Disciple and was quickly accepted. However, on 24 August 1931, Deevy's only attempt to court "the rabblement" ended in failure. All the prominent critics of the time condemned the play, saying that it was pointless.

Joseph Holloway called it "the maddest farce of the pantomime rally sort of thing imaginable. All noise and no sense."⁵ Barry Fitzgerald, in a letter to Sean O'Casey, recalls that A Disciple was "really very bad," but that it had "a childish air about it . . . that made it fairly amusing."⁶ Indeed, Deevy found herself in a predicament similar to that which George Meredith describes as follows:

The aim and business of the comic poet are misunderstood, his meaning is not seized upon, nor his point of view taken, when he is accused of dishonouring our nature and being hostile to sentiment, tending to spitefulness and making an unfair use of laughter.⁷

She was accused of writing a play that tended to be more farcical than intellectual. This chapter does not purport to deny the farcical elements in A Disciple. My intention, instead, is to convey their significance in the study of the character of the heroine as well as the importance of the play itself in the mainstream of Deevy's works.

The controlling agent is detachment. Deevy says as little as possible and adopts an objective stance in the presentation of her heroine. In a letter written several years after her Abbey career, she cites the influence of Chekhov, among others, in her adoption of this stance of non-intrusion.⁸ Chekhov himself enunciates his stand on the matter in the following manner:

Of course it would be pleasant to combine art with a sermon, but for me personally it is extremely difficult and almost impossible, owing to the conditions of technique When I write, I reckon entirely upon the reader to add for himself the subjective elements that are lacking in story.⁹

Naturally, a number of problems arise with the maintenance of complete objectivity. It actively invites judgement of the actions of the heroine; but these judgements can be made only when the author hints at or subtly suggests where his sympathies or where his criticisms lie. For instance, despite Chekhov's claims to objectivity in his plays, it is clear that his sympathy lies with the three sisters in the play about them rather than with the new social force that overwhelms them. And there is more than a hint of sarcasm in his voice when he writes about Lopahkin in The Cherry Orchard. Thus, when making a judgement, the audience tends to support his view.

In A Disciple, however, Deevy takes this stance of non-intrusion to its limits; she does not help us to arrive at a judgement of Ellie Irwin. Our judgement is up to us; it is based solely on individual interpretation. At a first glance, Ellie Irwin appears to be nothing more than a crazed adolescent whose imagination runs away with her. But, underlying this, is an impression that her plight is genuine and that she should be taken seriously. Thus, we do not know whether to laugh at Ellie or to sympathize with her in her unhappiness. This uncertainty makes us uncomfortable when making judgements, and I believe it is at the root of the initial criticisms of the play.

The opening scenes of the play suggest that Ellie is not happy with her present life. She had been taken in as an orphan by Mrs. Maher who brought her up to be her maid. The sixteen-year old Ellie is characterized by an air of "smouldering fury" and a "contemptuous" manner (p. 29). This often breaks into a criticism of everything around her:

Ellie: What did you want taking this
 Ramshack?

Mrs. Maher: Ramshack? A real answer to
 prayer! I had promised five
 shillings to Saint Anthony's
 Bread if he'd find me a house
 in the right place--

Ellie: Right place! A bit of a lane
 between mountain and bog . . .
 and it flooded more often than
 dry!

Mrs. Maher: Between county and town, exact
 what I wanted--convenient for
 them that do be motoring to the
 town', and looking always for good
 cooks. Five shillings I promised,
 but I gave six pence more so's
 he'll send they'll stop here.
 Five and six I paid out--I'll make
 that up easy, and no need to stir
 out of myself from the fire. The
 girls glad enough to come here and
 they looking for a job.

Ellie: Often I look at the ones that
 come here: women with life in
 them, and all they ask to be took
 by someone till they're too old
 to be took at all. Then to draw
 the old age, and sit on the bench
 and the sun shining, and shivering
 when the sun don't shine, and
 spying on one another. Often I
 look at them.

Ellie criticizes their slum-like dwelling as well as the numerous women who come to Mrs. Maher, a kind of rural Irish personnel manageress, for work, usually as maids.

In her opinion, they are only turning the responsibility for their lives over to the hands of their prospective employers. Ellie's dissatisfaction with her life parallels the unhappiness and general loneliness of a number of other heroines seen at the Abbey. Mary Bruin in Yeats's The Land of Heart's Desire, who is said to be "restless and ill at ease" with her surrounding environment, is one of the earliest examples.⁹ Another, perhaps more well-known example, is Nora Burke in Synge's The Shadow of the Glen. Nora often contemplates the futility of her life and attributes it both to her marriage to the much older Dan Burke and to her isolation from the rest of the world due to living in the Glen.¹⁰ However, Synge gives us the reasons for Nora's unhappiness through a less than attractive painting of Dan Burke and a constant iteration of the loneliness of living in the Glen. On the other hand, any attempt at justifying Ellie's discontent is tempered by the comic framework in which Deevy deals with it.

Deevy's primary intention is to make her audience laugh. Therefore, Ellie criticizes the slum-like house and the women who came to look for work in a language

that is meant to induce laughter in the audience rather than sympathy. Yet Ellie's unhappiness is such that she would like to leave Mrs. Maher and her duties as a servant, just as Nora Burke's loneliness prompts her to look for means to remedy the situation. Nora's opportunity to escape presents itself with the entrance of the tramp, with whom she leaves at the end of the play. Ellie, however, first takes refuge in her imagination. This course of action in itself denies whatever pleasant interruption the play intends to generate. This resort to the imagination indicates that all is not as pleasant as we have been led to believe. A number of psychologists testify to the link between unhappiness or discontent with one's life and the recourse to the imagination. Freud, for example, elucidates the matter as follows:

We can begin by saying that happy people never make phantasies, only unsatisfied ones. Unsatisfied wishes are the driving power behind phantasies. Every separate phantasy contains the fulfilment of a wish, and improves on an unsatisfactory reality.¹¹

By taking refuge in her imagination, Ellie defines an alternative way of life and tries to use it to escape from her present one. She dreams of a life of heroic grandeur and then longs for it.

Moreover, she defines the nature of this heroic grandeur for which she craves. Ellie equates heroic grandeur with Coriolanus, the protagonist in Shakespeare's play of the same name. This equation stems from the irreparable jolt she received during a performance of Coriolanus at a nearby convent school two years before. The initial reaction to Ellie's equation is laughter, more especially the kind which Bergson describes as "an unavowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct our neighbour . . ."¹² It arises out of a sense of superiority over Ellie who grotesquely chooses a less than heroic figure as her hero. The action of the first two acts of Coriolanus centres primarily on Coriolanus, the brilliant military strategist, and on the execution of his ideas in his campaign against Tullus Aufidius and the Volscians. His friend and mentor, Cominius, articulates the admiration he has earned as a result of his victory:

Cominius: I shall lack voice: the deeds
of Coriolanus
Should not be utter'd feebly. It
is held
That valour is the chiefest virtue,
and
Most dignifies the haver: if it be,
The man I speak of cannot in the
world
Be singly counterpois'd.¹³

But the main thrust of the play emphasizes the destructive results of Coriolanus' tragic flaw, his excessive hubris. Menenius indicates the extent of Coriolanus' pride:

Menenius: His nature is too noble for the
world
He would not flatter Neptune for
his trident
Or Jove for's power to thunder.
His heart's his mouth
What his breast forges, that his
tongue must vent;
And, being angry does forget that
ever
He heard the name of death.¹⁴

Menenius' words prove to be too true as Coriolanus flaunts his pride in face of the citizens. They, in turn, manage to convince the Senators to banish him. Coriolanus' pride and anger with his rejection by fellow Romans prompt him to join Tullus Aufidius and the Volscians in their attack on Rome, with disastrous results. He recognizes his tragic flaw towards the end of the play but it is already too late. He vacillates between allegiance to the Volscians and love for Rome and his family, and his final attempt at a reconciliation of the two divergent factions culminates in his death. Thus, Coriolanus is not the figure one would ordinarily look up to. But, as far as Ellie is concerned, Coriolanus exemplifies pride and valour, two qualities she admires most: "Coriolanus . . .

Caius, Marcius, Coriolanus . . . he done things proper . . . trampling on the lot of them to the end of his life" (p. 31).

She appoints herself his disciple and vows to defend him against any criticism. This implies that any laughter at Ellie's equation should be checked, since she is obviously serious. But we are left in doubt as to how Ellie arrived at her heroic perception of Coriolanus. Deevy does not indicate whether Ellie misinterpreted the action of Coriolanus or not; nor does she give pointers as to how her heroine came to disregard the tragic qualities of Coriolanus' character. She merely raises this doubt of the authenticity of Ellie's ideal and leaves it up to her audience to interpret. But she had already made us uncomfortable by the initial juxtaposition of Ellie's grotesque equation with her seriousness in doing so. Holloway and Fitzgerald chose to cite it as another one of the nonsensical aspects of the play. However, Deevy's total objectivity as regards her heroine's interpretation of Coriolanus implies that such interpretation was deliberate. Ellie chooses Coriolanus as her hero, and, in the burning ambition to remain his true disciple, she refuses to concede to any flaws in him.

Ellie also wishes to negate the more realistic or ordinary aspects of the whole Coriolanus episode in favour of a more romantic or extraordinary viewpoint.

Her ideal of Coriolanus is romantic, in that he epitomizes the Shellyean concept of the individual non-conformist with a sense of superiority over others. Consequently, Ellie views his hubris, the tragic flaw that results in his downfall, in a positive light. A similar situation arises in The King of Spain's Daughter, when Annie Kinsella disregards the facts about the wedding launch in favour of an interpretation that is more symbolically viable for her. The positive qualities which Ellie recognizes in Coriolanus' character represent the standards towards which she must strive; that is, if she is to escape from the dejection with her life as a maid and from the religious conservatism of Mrs. Maher.

Ellie first directs her energies towards the identification of Coriolanus' valour and pride in certain members of her community. Charlotta Burke is her first candidate. She worships Charlotta Burke, the actress who played the title role of Coriolanus at the Convent production of the play, in much the same way that she worships Coriolanus.

The tendency towards the worship of a female figure is also characteristic of Katie Roche. In both cases, an heroic female figure represents the 'norm' towards which the heroines strive in order to actualize their longings. To Mrs. Maher and the rest of the community Charlotta was a "sinful, bad creature"

who scandalized both her parents and the nuns at the convent school by taking to the stage (p. 35). To Ellie, however, Charlotta is practically the female equivalent of Coriolanus, "the kind of person made for the world to be under her feet" (p. 35). She admires the actress's pride in her chosen vocation and finds confirmation of this pride and the courage to stick to it both in Charlotta's defiance of parental and religious authority and in her suicide:

Ellie: The nuns wouldn't leave her wear men's clothes, but she made up for that: no one could take their eye from off her face: she carried the house, --'twas only a room, but she carried it easy: no one in the end but was cheering for her--

Mrs. Maher: A pity but she gave heed to the voice of God--

Ellie: They thought to make a nun of her, thank you, says she, and went to London, and on to the stage-- and done well.

Mrs. Maher: Done well! God forgive you, Ellie Irwin! And she--

Ellie: Done fine--and took poison!
(Mrs. Maher groans).

Stasia: Look at that now! That was a mistake for her, the creature. Unbeknownst it might happen--

Ellie: Took poison for to do away with herself.

(p. 36)

Ellie sees Charlotta Burke's suicide as the fitting end to an 'heroic' life. In her defiance of the Church and the community, Charlotta actualizes the heroic individualism which Ellie had found in Coriolanus.

Ellie's admiration for Charlotta's suicide contrasts sharply with the response of Mrs. Maher and the rest of the community. They realize that the Church does not condone suicide and, in fact, judges it to be a sin. They, therefore, feel little or no sympathy for Charlotta. Moreover, they are shocked at Ellie's equation of suicide with courage. But Deevy does not take their side against Ellie. Once again, she sets up two opposing points of view without supporting one against the other or compromising them. She leaves that decision up to the audience. As Irish Catholics, both Holloway and Fitzgerald were shocked at the impudence of Ellie Irwin in suggesting that suicide is commendable. They were even more critical of what they perceived to be Deevy's failure to show, in one way or another, her disapproval of Ellie's equation.

In their dismissal of Ellie, however, both critics fail to realize the profundity of her discontent and her willingness to go to great lengths in order to acknowledge the alternative situation to that in which she finds herself. As far as Ellie is concerned, Charlotta Burke and the example she set is an alternative. The other two heroines also look for alternatives

in their efforts to define their preferred existence. The following chapters will also show that these alternatives often bring the heroines in conflict with members of the community. In spite of ridicule and intense pressure from Mrs. Maher and the others, Ellie does not relent in her world view. Indeed, she decides that Charlotta Burke will be the standard by which she will judge the female members of her community, while the men are to be set against Coriolanus.

Her first candidates in this respect are Mr. and Mrs. Glitteron, an English high-society couple whose jet-set activities are reported constantly in the newspapers; the latest news centres on their impending divorce. Mrs. Maher and Stasia Claremorris, being the staunch Roman Catholics they are, would rather not hear of the couple's activities. And they fear the scandal and disgrace to the community that would ensue from the divorce proceedings. However, it is precisely the jet-set life of the Glitterons and their "unconventional" divorce proceedings that attracts Ellie to them.

Ellie thinks that the Glitterons are courageous because they turn a deaf ear to the malicious rumours and gossip about them. In other words, they turn their back on the morality of the small Catholic community of which they are a part. Like Coriolanus and Charlotta Burke, the Glitterons are filled with a sense of pride

or importance; this contrasts greatly with the passivity and fear that characterize the likes of Mrs. Maher and Stasia. Ellie talks wistfully about the jet-set pace of the English couple and compares it to the humdrum life she leads:

Ellie: By private airie-oplane they went after the wedding from London to Paris, and that not six months gone, and them through and done with theirselves, and wanting someone new... 'Twould pierce you. Like fire they do be darting here and darting there, and we moulding our life away with every day the same shadow falling on the flag--!

Mrs. Maher: To save my soul by doing no harm is what I puts before me--better than flying into the mouth of the everlasting fire.

Ellie: If the likes of them knew how we lived they'd laugh! They'd say what was we but worms!

(p. 32)

Once more Ellie articulates precisely what she would like to get away from and the language she uses is meant to heighten the comic effect. Ther pronunciation of "airplane", and her alliterative use of "darting" are the surface humour beneath which is the pathos implied in such terms as "moulding away" and "worms".

Ellie is convinced of the superiority of the Glitterons and, since she has not actually met them, begins to imagine what they look like. She envisions

Mrs. Glitteron to be a highly sophisticated, well-dressed, or refined lady who is marked by an intense pride and single-mindedness that is reminiscent of Charlotta Burke. Thus, when Stasia tells her of the imminent arrival of Mrs. Glitteron, Ellie becomes wildly excited. Apparently she hopes that Mrs. Glitteron will look kindly on her and, perhaps, relieve her of her present boredom. However, Ellie is totally unprepared for the disillusionment that awaits her.

Mrs. Glitteron turns out to be a cheap, vulgar woman whose class and racial consciousness manifests itself in her attitude towards others. She reproves Stasia for so much as having accepted a ride from her husband; then she offers bribes to anyone who would be willing to spy on him:

Ellie: Spy! You spy!

Mrs. Glitteron: Who are you?

Ellie: Who's yourself? No great shakes by what I'm hearing now.

Mrs. Glitteron: How dare you--I'm Mrs. Glitteron . . .

Ellie: Mrs. a while don't make you his equal! With your spying and your bribes!

Stasia: Whisht now! Oh whisht!

Ellie: Whisht yourself! The likes of her to be paired with a Coriolanus of a man!

Mrs. Glitteron: Remember your place!--

Ellie: I remember me pride!

Mrs. Glitteron: You're an ignorant, impudent little thing--

Ellie: I see you now! Mrs. a while till you're thrun out.
(shrill)

Mrs. Glitteron: You'll be sorry for this!

Ellie: A twisting little worm eating at him--

Mrs. Glitteron: You'll suffer!

Ellie: A crawling little midget biting at him!

Stasia: Let you stop!

Ellie: A treacherous old reptile turning on him! and I putting the like on you of Miss Charlotta Burke!

(pp. 37-38)

Deevy obviously wanted her audience to laugh at this fierce exchange of words between the two women. She intended the comic effect to be engendered by Ellie's disappointment in Mrs. Glitteron and the language she uses to articulate it, and by Mrs. Glitteron's social affectation and its exposure by Ellie's outburst.

But the force of the insults which Ellie levels at Mrs. Glitteron, and vice versa, also shows how hurt she is. Dramatic irony reveals the pathos that lies beneath the humour. The situation parallels that found towards the end of Chekhov's one act farce, The Wedding.

Mrs. Zhiagalov's disillusionment with Revunov, whom she thought to be a five-star General but who turns out to be a mere naval Commander, results in a revelation of the real intentions of both parties:

Mrs. Zhiagalov: If you aren't a General, why take the money? We didn't pay good money for you to break up the happy home!

Revunov: (bewildered). Pay what money?

Mrs. Zhiagalov: You know very well what money. You got your twenty-five roubles from Mr. Nyunin right enough. (To Nyunin) You should be ashamed of yourself, Andrew. I didn't ask you to hire something like this!

Nyunin: Oh, I say, cut it out. Why make a fuss?

Revunov: Hired? Paid? What do you mean?

Aplonbov: I say, just one moment-- You did receive twenty-five roubles from Andrew Nyunin, I take it?

Revunov: Twenty-five roubles? (The truth dawns) So that's it. I see! What a dirty, rotten trick!¹⁵

The irony involved reveals the hypocrisy of the Russian gentry and the dismissive attitude which its members adopt towards anyone who is not of their class. Similarly, while Mrs. Maher and others laugh at the deflation of Ellie's expectations, they also betray

an incapacity for understanding the extent of her plight.

Following her disappointment in Mrs. Glitteron, Ellie pins all her hopes on Mr. Glitteron; she spends quite some time wondering what he looks like:

Ellie: . . . I don't know what would he look like? . . . a man with a great set to his shoulders for sure.

(p. 31)

Ellie is particularly impressed with Mr. Glitteron's reputation as a ladies' man and also with his numerous marriages:

Ellie: . . . The first one died right, the second he threw off from him. There was one--I disremembers what number--that he followed by land and sea, and got the better of her too in the end . . . And now, I don't know how it'll be. (Turns the paper over). How well I never seen his photograph, but ever them racers that do be getting killed. Dead they likes a man to be, better than living the way that would make your heart burn out with longing to set eyes on him!

(p. 31)

But Mr. Glitteron turns out to be an even greater disappointment than his wife had been.

In the first place, he is much older than she had anticipated, and of mean, small stature:

. . . he is bent and withered and his voice is cracked and wheezy. As he stands just inside the door leaning on his stick, coughing, and looking round at them all, he seems to be on the point of crying. Ellie is open-mouthed.

(p. 40)

Furthermore, he is as materialistic and class-conscious as his wife. The couple argue on such issues as the ownership of their car and Mrs. Glitteron's fur coat:

Mrs. Glitteron: I'm going!

Mr. Glitteron: (Shrill) Take off those things I gave you! Take off that coat I paid for!

Mrs. Glitteron: Shut up! (He snatches at her coat, she pushes him so that he falls back on to the chair, and she hurries out, bangs the door. Mr. Glitteron almost falls off the chair and catches wildly at Ellie for support).

Ellie: Leave go! --Remembering you paid for the coat!

Mrs. Maher. A wonder but you'd hold up the gentlemen! --(supporting Mr. Glitteron).

Ellie: That! --(an angry gesture).

(p. 42)

Ellie realizes that Mr. Glitteron is not "the Coriolanus of a man" she had imagined him to be (p. 39). He is, in fact, a weakling, characterized by a total

dependency on the women around him.

Ellie's disillusionment with the Glitterons is reminiscent of that of Pegeen Mike with Christy Mahon in Synge's The Playboy of the Western World. The reappearance of old Mahon towards the end of the third act of the play falsifies Christy's tale of patricide, by which he had become a hero in the eyes of the Aran Islanders. It, therefore, sets in motion the process by which Pegeen and the rest of the Aran society reject Christy:

Pegeen: I'll say a strange man is a marvel with his mighty talk, but what's a squabble in your backyard and the blow of a loy, have taught me that there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed. (To men) Take him from this, or the lot of us will be likely put on trial for his deeds today.¹⁶

Pegeen Mike is as bitterly disappointed with Christy Mahon as Ellie Irwin is with the Glitterons. But that is as far as the parallel with Synge's Playboy goes. For, while Pegeen Mike immediately attains maturity or a new sense of self following her realization of the discrepancy between illusion and reality, Ellie Irwin insists on the actualization of her dreams.

As will be seen in the study of the next two heroines, this insistence on the materialization of ideals or dreams is a unique feature of the Deevy heroine.

Moreover, in A Disciple, it acts to heighten the comic/farçical effect in that it is a repetition of a particular situation. Northrop Frye recognizes this principle of repetition and its relation to humour:

The principle of the humour is the principle that unincremental repetition, the literary imitation of ritual bondage, is funny. In a tragedy--Oedipus Tyrannus is the stock example--repetition leads logically to catastrophe. Repetition overdone or not going anywhere belongs to comedy, for laughter is partly a reflex, and like other reflexes it can be conditioned by a simple repeated pattern.¹⁷

In A Disciple, humour is engendered by Ellie's determination to resume her quest among certain figures in her community for "a Coriolanus of a man," or a man with spirit--this in spite of earlier failures. The picture that emerges, however, is that of a disturbed girl whose failures only intensify her attempts to escape from the source of her discontent.

Consequently, Ellie turns her thoughts to Jack the Scalp, a murderer on the run from the police and a terror to the community. The whole Jack the Scalp episode, though farcical, explicitly bears out the dark side of the humour. Jack derived his nickname, "the scalp", from the manner in which he scalped the heads of his murder victims, a technique, it is said, he "learned from the Injuns" (p. 36). This in itself

is farcical for native Indians are not a part of the Irish scene. Before her disillusionment with the Glitterons, Ellie had shown little or no interest in the activities of Jack the Scalp. On the other hand, Mrs. Maher always voiced her fear of his breaking and entering into her home. When Jack creeps in on the argument between the Glitterons, threatening death to all, Ellie comments "we have a man in it now" (p. 44). In other words, Jack now epitomizes the manhood and valour she had expected but failed to find in Mr. Glitteron.

In her opinion, Jack is as valorous as Coriolanus, primarily because he terrorizes people, murders and scalps. We have a farcical but pathetic situation that arises from Ellie's inability to differentiate individualism from down-right criminality. We laugh at her because we recognize that Jack is a criminal, while Ellie does not. However, Ellie sees Jack as a hero only in so far as it will serve her purpose; that is, to escape. Thus, while the others retreat into an adjoining room for fear of their lives, Ellie, unabashed, remains with Jack. She even implores him to tell her of his pursuit by the police; he obliges:

Jack: Like at daybreak this morning I near died with the laughing. They were stealing round the old shed they thought I was in, and myself looking down from the rock above--each was

waiting for the other to be first into the shed, and the thought of each one of them--to save his own skin. They ran off in the end.

Ellie: Ha! Ha! Twelve armed men running from you!

(p. 45)

As the above quotation suggests, the fact that Jack is a source of terror to the community and to the police reinforces her admiration for him and her growing perception of him as a brave Coriolanus. She does not relent in her worship of extreme individualism.

She actually insists that Jack live up to her new image of him. As far as she is concerned he is no longer Jack the Scalp but a second Coriolanus who has come to her rescue:

Ellie: Here's for you Marcius. (She has pulled the broken cover off the coal box and holds it out to him--for a shield).

Jack: Marcius? Jack's my name.

Ellie: Marcius is a name I likes. Hold that before you (the shield).

Jack: (Taking it). Jack the Scalp--(threateningly). A name that brings fear to all.

Ellie: Caius Marcius Coriolanus--(then, in dismay)--you're cut and bleeding. (There is blood on Jack's wrist).

(p. 44)

A similar situation to this can be found in Ibsen's Hedda Gabler, where Hedda insists that Eljert Lovborg live up to her conceptualization of him. His failure to do so constitutes one of the factors that prompts her suicide. Ellie does not take so drastic a course of action as suicide. Realizing that Jack is not about to accede to her interpretation of him as Coriolanus, she concentrates her energies on escaping with him.

Understandably, Jack loses his composure before this teenager who, despite her knowledge of his record and his reputation, is willing to risk all and spend the rest of her life with him:

Ellie: I knows a place; they'll never find us. We could stop for months, together, safe. (Turns quickly, gets her coat. When she turns back again Jack is pointing the revolver at her).

Jack: Clear out of this! Go inside with them! I'll blow out your brains!

Ellie: (Fastens up her coat). I knew you'd come. I was pining for you. A man like yourself (close to him regardless of the weapon).

Jack: (Lowers the revolver). I . . . What is it you want of me?

Ellie: A man without fear.

Jack: I . . . I had no dealing with a woman ever.

(p. 45)

Jack is determined not to be followed by "a girl with them piercing eyes . . . " (p. 46); and, as Temple Lane comments with reference to the dramatic irony, Ellie's "threat to follow him over the world affronts and terrifies him."¹⁸ Ellie, on the other hand, realizes that Jack is not the romantic individual she had imagined him to be. He is as conservative as Mrs. Maher and the rest of the community in that he calls himself "a respectable man" and professes that he has "had no dealings with a woman ever."

Fearing the loss of his 'respectability' through association with Ellie, Jack finally runs out into the arms of the police:

Jack: . . . Leave me go while I can!

Mrs. Maher: To the jaws of death? The police are outside.

Jack: What matter about the police if I gets away from that danger.

Stasia: Sure what would Ellie be doing to you?

Jack: (Bitterly) She'd follow me through weal and through woe! She'd cook my food, and stop by my side, and share a bed with me in the heather--with me, that was ever a respectable man!!

(p. 46)

Jack's claim to respectability now confuses us. It appears that the criminal would now join forces with us in our attitude of superiority towards Ellie. The Jack the Scalp episode is drama which, as J. L. Styan describes it, "impels the spectator forward by stimulus to mind and heart, then distracts him, muddles him, so that time and time again he must review his own activity in watching the play."¹⁹ The fact that it is a repetition of an earlier situation plus the nature of the action in itself, impels the audience towards laughter of the type which Bergson describes as a "corrective" instrument. But the final outcome of the episode is such that we become muddled and frustrated.

To make things worse, the playwright does not come to our rescue by taking one side against the other. Instead, she remains aloof, leaving her audience to add whatever subjective elements there are in the play. This impetus towards laughter, then frustration and confusion at the outcome, are responsible for the rejection of the play by both Holloway and Fitzgerald and for the poor reception of the play on its first performance. Members of the Abbey audience usually judge a play on the basis of their reaction to it, rather than taking into account the author's dramaturgy. Thus it was that Synge's artistry in The Playboy of the Western World was overlooked in face of the vehement

condemnation of its vision. Of course, the criticism of A Disciple was not on the same level or not as vehement as that of The Playboy. But Deevy learned her lesson and, as will be seen in the other two plays, she is very much on the side of her heroines so that it becomes easier to arrive at any judgements which the surface objectivity might invite.

Jack's identification with the forces of conservatism marks the turning point of A Disciple for the darker aspects of the humour become more prominent. Ellie laments the loss of manhood or individualism which she had seen in Coriolanus and Charlotta Burke:

Ellie: . . . There is no MAN living now.
Small wonder any woman to take
poison. Them were best off that were
born in the past. Why weren't I
born in a brave long-ago time?

(p. 47)

Her sympathies lie with women like Charlotta Burke, who took poison in order to escape from a world lacking in ideals and in courageous men. And her final question is, in essence, the articulation of the longing for grandeur or heroism which also characterizes the other two heroines. With her lament, Ellie seems to realize the futility of her efforts to actualize her dreams. It can be presumed that she attains a new maturity which evolves from her awareness of the

necessity to extricate herself from the "ramshack" existence she loathes. I can only say 'presumed', for Deevy prefers not to indicate Ellie's next course of action. This non-rounded ending is also a feature of the other two plays. It invites speculation and, therefore, the active participation of the spectator.

Deevy's invitation to active involvement in the action of the play is very laudable and Abbey audiences greatly appreciated her efforts in this respect in her two other plays. However, the fact that she subordinated the dramatization of her heroine to the comic structure of this play resulted only in criticisms and negative reviews. But the 'Deevy heroine' and the dramatic techniques by which she was to be developed first appear in the characterization of Ellie Irwin. It is, therefore, necessary to understand her before progressing to the study of Annie Kinsella and Katie Roche.

A Disciple

Notes

- ¹ William Shakespeare, "Coriolanus," The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, ed. W. J. Craig (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 713.
- ² Teresa Deevy, "A Disciple," The Dublin Magazine, 12 (1937), 31.
- ³ Andrew Malone, The Irish Drama (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), p. 221.
- ⁴ Malone, p. 228.
- ⁵ Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill, eds., Joseph Holloway's Irish Theatre (Dixon, California: Proscenium Press, 1968), I, 77.
- ⁶ "To Sean O'Casey," 8 October 1931, in The Letters of Sean O'Casey, 1910-1941, I, ed. David Krause (New York: Macmillan, 1975), p. 437.
- ⁷ George Meredith, An Essay on Comedy (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1972), pp. 138-39.
- ⁸ Teresa Deevy, Letter to Michael J. O'Neill, 24 October 1962: The Michael O'Neill Papers, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois.
- ⁹ "To A. S. Souvorin," 1 April 1890, in Anton Chekhov: Letters on The Short Story, The Drama and Other Literary Topics, ed. Louis S. Friedland (London: Vision Press, 1965), p. 64.
- ¹⁰ John Millington Synge, "The Shadow of the Glen," J. M. Synge: Collected Works, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), III (i), 49-51.
- ¹¹ Sigmund Freud, "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming," On Creativity and the Unconscious (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 47.

12 Henri Bergson, Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic, trans. Brereton and Rothwell (New York: Macmillan, 1937), p. 136.

13 Shakespeare, p. 713.

14 Shakespeare, p. 719.

15 Anton Chekhov, "The Wedding," The Oxford Chekhov I: Short Plays, trans. and ed. Ronald Hingley (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 130-31.

16 John Millington Synge, "The Playboy of the Western World," J. M. Synge: Collected Works, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), IV (ii), 169.

17 Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 168.

18 Temple Lane, "The Dramatic Art of Teresa Deevy," The Dublin Magazine, 21 (1946), 36.

19 J.L. Styan, The Dark Comedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 251.

Chapter Three

The King of Spain's Daughter

"Then the wet winding roads
Brown bogs and black water,
And my thoughts on white ships
And the King of Spain's daughter."¹

A total of four years elapsed between the date of the first performance of A Disciple and that of The King of Spain's Daughter, which premiered on 29 April 1935. Within those years Deevy wrote Temporal Powers (1932) and recouped some of the losses incurred by A Disciple. Temporal Powers--which, as I have already mentioned, was not published--was so popular as to win the first prize at an Abbey playwriting competition. This success meant that the next play by Deevy was eagerly anticipated, and when it was first performed, the Irish drama critics hailed it as one of the best plays in the Abbey for 1935.²

The favourable reception of the play was due not only to the unusual treatment of a common theme--the conflict of illusion and reality--but also because Deevy appeared to be in better control of her work. The action takes place not within a house or a four wall enclosure as in the other two plays but on a

grassy plain in the southern part of Ireland. The plain is marked by what once was a road, now overgrown with grass. A dilapidated wall with a centre gate stands on one side of the plain; the wall itself is very functional since it divides the plain from the rest of the vast, rolling countryside while the gate serves as the means by which the characters enter onto the stage and the plain. The most important aspects of the setting, however, are two symbols which are external to it; that is, they are not represented on the stage.

The first of these symbols is the April day on which the action occurs, and the other is the bridal launch that takes place down the river. In the Macmillan edition of her plays, Deevy dedicates The King of Spain's Daughter to an April day. And the fact that it was first produced on an April day adds to the significance of the month of April in the play. April, usually taken to be the beginning of spring, has traditionally symbolized fertility and rebirth. The opening lines of Geoffrey Chaucer's Prologue to the Canterbury Tales and the action of some of Shakespeare's romantic comedies reinforce this symbolism. In The King of Spain's Daughter, a wedding or the celebration of the start of a new life has just taken place. The whole community--especially the women--has gathered at the river bank to watch the launching of the bride and

groom to their new home further down the river. Everybody has turned out to celebrate with the bride and groom because of the fine April day. It is a simple and gay affair; the bride is dressed in grey, the launch is white, "the flags flying an' the sun on the water" (pp. 121-22). Having established the effects of the two symbols on the community, Deevy turns to dramatizing their unusual power over her heroine.

To prolong our suspense and anticipation of her heroine, Deevy introduces us first to Mrs. Marks, the antithesis of the heroine. Mrs. Marks is a big woman of fifty and is the resident busy-body and do-gooder in the community. The spring-day wedding serves only to remind her of her own marriage, which, apparently, was not a particularly exciting one:

Mrs. Marks: I was thinking of my marriage day when I was looking at them two. It is a thought would sadden anyone.

Jim: How is that, Mrs. Marks?

Mrs. Marks: That's how it is; the truth is the best to be told in the end.

Jim: Haven't you Bill and Mary and the little place? You didn't fare bad.

Mrs. Marks: Bad. What have bad or good to do with it? This is outside of the question. For twenty years you're thinking of that day, an' for thirty years you're

lookin' back at it. After that you don't mind--you haven't the feelin'--exceptin' maybe an odd day, like today.

(pp. 125-26)

Mrs. Marks remembers only the emotional stasis and lack of zest that characterized her own marriage. She is cynical by nature and she manifests this cynicism in her attitude towards the bride and groom. She emphasizes the fact that the bride had unwillingly agreed to the marriage, and that the groom himself had ulterior motives in proposing to her, since he was offered a huge sum of money to do so, presumably by the bride's parents.

Annie Kinsella, as I have already indicated, has a different view of the activities taking place down the river. She is about twenty years of age to Mrs. Marks's fifty-two; she has red/golden hair and, in the first and subsequent performances of the play, Deevy insisted that the actress who played her wear a vivid red dress.³ These colours are meant to hint at the personality of Annie Kinsella. In the opening scenes of the play she comes across as a bright, vivacious girl, the complete opposite to Mrs. Marks's stern and severe appearance. J. E. Cirlot in his dictionary of colour symbols describes red and gold as "warm, advancing colours, corresponding to processes

of assimilation, activity and intensity."⁴ These same adjectives are applicable to Annie Kinsella.

A closer scrutiny, however, reveals that there is a more serious side to this outward gaiety. It derives from her discontent with her life as it is. Annie is not an orphan, like her predecessor, Ellie Irwin, but the relationship she has with her father leaves a lot to be desired. Peter Kinsella typifies the domineering and sometimes cruel father; he treats his daughter like a slave. For instance he threatens to use physical force when she so much as forgets to bring his lunch on time:

Peter: (coming in). Is she there?
(Sees Annie). Ah - h!

Annie: (nervous, almost perky). I'm a bit late with the dinner; 'tis because of the weddin' I didn't hear the whistle: I didn't know it had gone one.

(Leaves his dinner-tin on the ground, not too near him, and moves away).

Peter: Hand me that tin.

(Annie hands it, keeps as far as possible from him. Peter taking the tin, hits out at her. Annie dodges and partly escapes, but cries out; Jim springs forward; Mrs. Marks catches Jim by the arm).

(p. 128)

Annie's relationship with Mrs. Marks is no better. The latter often collaborates with Peter Kinsella and condemns her. In the opinion of Mrs. Marks, Annie is nothing more than a flirt who would rather "be romancin' all her life with whoever she can," than tend to her father's needs (p. 128).

Deevy emphasizes the tension in Annie's relationships with both her father and Mrs. Marks in order to win as much sympathy for her as possible, and to justify the subsequent search by her heroine for a means of escape. Her technique in this respect is much more solid than that found in A Disciple, where she paid very little attention to the clarification of the causes of Ellie's unhappiness. In this play, Deevy makes it clear that the brutality of her father and the cynicism of Mrs. Marks are enough grounds for Annie's contemplation of escape. Annie, however, does not pack up and leave the difficult situation at home. Instead, she decides to try to arrive at some understanding with her father and Mrs. Marks and to infuse them with her joie de vivre. Her decision raises an issue: perhaps Annie lacks the courage to extricate herself or force an end to the obviously impossible situation.⁵ Deevy, however, did not intend that her heroine take drastic courses of action to remedy the situation. She purposefully portrays Annie's recourse to her imagination and the resultant achievement of

a form of escape that coincides with willingness to be reconciled rather than to break with her father and the community.

The two symbols, the April day and the bridal launch, are instrumental in this respect. They are the "current-impression(s)" or "event(s) in the present" which had the power to "rouse an intense desire to phantasy."⁶ They interact and act upon Annie in such a way as to induce a deliberate outburst of creative activity. In the process, she transforms an ordinary wedding launch into an extraordinary event, and then envisions herself to be the King of Spain's daughter. In other words, the Spanish princess is the most heroic ideal for Annie Kinsella, just as Coriolanus was for Ellie Irwin. The fact that Deevy had better control over her theme in this play is seen in her choice of a female figure as her heroine's ideal, rather than the male hero of A Disciple. In effect, she was no longer trying to please the tastes of the Abbey audience but concentrated on the dramatic unity of her work. Annie was present at the wedding launch; she saw that the whole event progressed with little fanfare and she probably knew about the bride's reluctance to enter into a marriage that had been pre-arranged for her. But in describing the bride and her launch to certain members of the community, namely Mrs. Marks and Jim Harris, Annie gives a different and a more elaborate

version. Some people may be troubled by Annie's decision to narrate the whole story to certain members of the community, for Deevy makes it clear that everyone was just as mesmerized by the activities as Annie.

However, Annie had been present at the wharf and had seen everything close up. Mrs. Marks and Jim Harris had seen the whole event from atop the grassy plain. Annie presumes that they are ignorant of the wedding launch because they were absent at the wharf. Therefore, she tells Mrs. Marks that the bride was dressed in "shimmerin' green from head to foot" (p. 130). She does not particularly like the older woman, so we find that the version she gives to Roddy Mann is a little more glamorous:

Annie: Wait first till I tell you how she looked (low, eager).

Roddy: You have told me already; you have talked of nothin' else.

Annie: She was like what you'd dream. I think I never seen anything so grand. She was like a livin' flame passin' down by us. She was dressed in flamin' red from top to toe, and (puts her hand to her breast)--here she had a diamond clasp.

(pp. 126-27)

The vivid, vital imagery she uses in her description reflects her excitement as well as indicating her basic vitality of nature:

Annie reserves her best version for Jim Harris for she includes a description of the whole wedding launch as well as of the bride:

Annie: You should have been on the wharf. The cheering an' the music, an' all the sun on the river, an' everyone happy--

Jim: We'd all be happy if you'd have sense.

Annie: She looked lovely passin' along, her hand restin' in his, and her body swayin' beside him down the path. The arms of the two families were painted on the launch; the sun was shinin' on it' everything was white or burnin' red, but she was dressed in pale, pale gold and--(hands to breast)-- two red flowers were crushed agen her here.

(p. 132)

A number of similarities can be drawn between Annie and Christy Mahon the protagonist in The Playboy of the Western World at this point. Both Annie and Christy deviate from actuality and turn an ordinary event into one with extraordinary proportions. They do this because they long for an idealized or a heroic perception of themselves. Both Annie and Christy embellish each succeeding version of the event that triggered their imaginative release.

Christy is overwhelmed by the interest and admiration which his tale of patricide generates in the Aran Islanders. Alan Price appropriately calls it

"the impetus to imaginative activity" and links it to "the admiration of the villagers when they hear this tale."⁷ Christy's narration of the event to Michael James Flaherty and friends in the shebeen is simple and straightforward:

Christy: (twisting round on her with a sharp cry of horror). Don't strike me . . . I killed my poor father, Tuesday was a week, for doing the like of that.

.
I did not then. I just riz the loy and let fall the edge of it on the ridge of his skull, and he went down at my feet like an empty sack, and never let a grunt or groan from him at all.⁸

When he recounts his tale to the Widow Quinn and the girls who came to see him he uses some imagery to make it more interesting than his earlier version:

Christy: (Impressively). With that the sun came out between the cloud and the hill, and it shining green in my face. 'God have mercy on your soul,' says he, lifting a scythe, 'or on your own,' says I, raising the loy.

Susan: That's a grand story.

Honor: He tells it lovely.

Christy: (flattered and confident, waving bone). He gave a drive with the scythe, and I gave a lep to the east. Then I turned around with my back to the north, and I hit a blow on the ridge of his skull, laid

him stretched out, and he split to the knob of his gullet. (He raises the chicken bone to his Adam's apple).

Girls: (together). Well, you're a marvel! Oh, God bless you! You're the lad surely!⁹

Annie, however, does not have the same adulatory audience that Christy finds; in fact, the reverse is the case for neither Jim nor Mrs. Marks are pleased with Annie's tall tales. They had been present at the wedding and had watched the bridal launch from afar, unlike the Aran Islanders who had no way of verifying Christy's story until the reappearance of Old Mahon.

Therefore, on learning of his daughter's 'lies', Peter Kinsella threatens her with a life of drudgery at a nearby factory. Mrs. Marks is particularly unimpressed. She harbours a deep resentment for Annie and this often manifests itself in the importunate warnings she gives to Jim Harris, who is in love with Annie:

Mrs. Marks: . . . Annie Kinsella--When I met her down there--was tellin' me how grand the bride looked. "She was dressed," said she, "in shimmerin' green from head to foot."

Jim: What's wrong with that?

Mrs. Marks: Didn't you hear her now to Roddy Mann, "she was dressed in flamin' red from top to toe."

Jim: So she did.

Mrs. Marks: That's the count she puts on the truth! I'm only tellin' you now so's you'll harden your heart! Whatever'll come easy is what she'll say. Now--for the sake of your mother--if you marry that girl, don't believe one word she'll tell you. That's the only way you'll have peace of mind.

(p. 130)

Mrs. Marks's criticism of Annie is not completely unfounded; Annie is lying.

However, Deevy's sympathies are with her heroine. She has already given us some insight as to why Annie is lying, and, by emphasizing Mrs. Marks's intense dislike for Annie, she makes us empathize all the more with her. Thus, Annie's lies are more attractive to us than Mrs. Marks's glaring truths. Deevy's manipulation of our sympathies is reminiscent of that found in the second act of The Playboy of the Western World. The Widow Quinn, whose affinities with Mrs. Marks cannot be denied, tries to discourage Christy from his infatuation with Pegeen Mike:

Widow Quinn: (scandalized). Have you no shame? (Putting her hand on his shoulder and turning him around). What ails you? Near crying, is it?

Christy: (in despair and grief). Amn't I after seeing the love-light of the star of knowledge shining from her brow, and hearing words would put you thinking on the holy Brigid speaking to the infant saints, and now she'll be turning again, and speaking hard words to me, like an old woman with a spavindy ass she'd have, urging on a hill.

Widow Quinn: There's poetry talk for a girl you'd see itching and scratching, and she with a stale stink of poteen on her from selling in the shop.¹⁰

Referring to the "itching", and the "stink of poteen on her," the Widow Quinn deflates Christy's idealized image of Pegeen Mike. But Christy's illusory perception of Pegeen Mike draws more attention than the Widow Quinn's realism. The action of the play progresses toward the final recognition of Christy Mahon as the Playboy of the Western World. Synge prepares us for that recognition and manipulates us so that we identify more with Christy's point of view than that of the widow. In much the same manner, the action of Deevy's play progresses towards Annie's vision of herself as the King of Spain's daughter.

Neither the threats from Peter Kinsella nor the cynicism of Mrs. Marks can deter Annie from this vision. The biggest obstacle to her vision, however, is Jim Harris. Jim rallies to Annie's side whenever she is threatened with violence from her father or when her

reputation is called into question by Mrs. Marks. He cannot, however, understand why she turns down all his proposals of marriage and why she frequently resorts to her imagination. He, therefore, treats Annie's longing to be like the King of Spain's daughter as mere child's play:

Jim: She was dressed in grey. Tell the truth!

Annie: It was in pale gold I saw her.

Jim: (furios) And in shimmerin' green, an' in flamin' red an' in milk-white when it will suit you.

(Silence).

Annie: (gets up slowly). You're a pack of blind owls--all the lot of you! I saw what I saw!

(Turns from him).

Jim: But why won't you tell the truth,--an' it just as easy?

(pp. 132-33)

By his confrontation Jim implies that Annie did not actually see the bride or the wedding launch, but merely decided to envision what it should have been like. However, his confronting Annie with realities is not the same as deflating her illusions.

In A Disciple, there was a conflict of illusion and reality; Deevey conveyed, successively, the discrepancies between Ellie's illusion and reality. In other

words Ellie, having never met them, was totally unprepared for the savage reality of the Glitterons. In The King of Spain's Daughter, Annie is fully aware of the realities surrounding the bride and her wedding launch, but she creates an illusion from them to suit her own purposes. Members of the community may be correct in their definition of Annie's versions of the events at the wharf as being nothing more than wishful thinking. Nevertheless, the validity of such a definition can be questioned when we consider the fine border line which differentiates mere fancy from the imagination in Coleridge's terms. In the thirteenth chapter of the Biographia Literaria Coleridge points to the essentially creative principle of the imagination:

It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate, or where this process is rendered impossible yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.¹¹

Coleridge's imagination recreates; it is a synthetic, a permeative, and "a blending, fusing power" as well as being essentially vital and assimilative.¹²

He differentiates this imagination from fancy which he defines as follows:

Fancy . . . has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with and modified by the empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.¹³

Elsewhere, he says that the memory is mechanical and the fancy is passive, "a mirrorment . . . repeating simply or by transportation." And where the imagination is a vital, living organism, fancy is "mechanical".¹⁴ The essence of Coleridge's distinction between the two lies, therefore, in his rejection of passive perception and "his recognition of perception as integrative, poetic, and necessarily correlative with feeling."¹⁵

Annie was not the passive observer of the wedding event. In fact, Deevy presents her as possessing the supreme quality which Coleridge attributes to poets. With her imagination she goes beyond the actual and changes a simple wedding event into a symbol that is more viable for her. Consequently, instead of grey, the bride was dressed in "shimmerin' green", "flamin' red"; the launch was white and the whole event was marked with trumpets and flourish.¹⁶ The threats of her father and the sarcasm of both Mrs. Marks and Jim Harris cannot dissuade her from her recreation of the events, and the escape from her present reality which

she derives from it. Therefore, the two symbols, the April day and the bridal launch, serve essentially to initiate Annie's imaginative release. This culminates or climaxes in the vision of herself as the King of Spain's daughter:

Annie: (to herself) "Then the wet windin' roads
Brown bogs and black water,
And my thoughts on white ships
and the King of Spain's daughter."

Jim: I'm sick of that thing! Who's the King of Spain's daughter?

Annie: Myself.

Jim: Yourself . . . (A laugh) And the bride beyond!

Annie: It is myself I seen in her--sailin',
out into the sun, and to adventure.

(p. 133)

Annie sees herself as the King of Spain's daughter and the bride functions to reinforce that image. In this new perception, she likens herself to the bride who was launched to the beginning of a new life further down the river. The only difference is that she is launching out to a life of adventure.

With this vision of herself as the King of Spain's daughter, Annie contemplates the alternative to her humdrum existence and achieves a form of escape from it, which is what Deevy suggests by the title. The

title itself is obviously a quotation from the quatrain of an unspecified ballad. Annie makes use of this ballad and blends and fuses the image of the King of Spain's daughter with her recreation of the wedding and the launch in order that she may arrive at a new, more viable definition of herself. Her imagination acts upon this quatrain and the bridal launch in order to, using Shelley's description of the imaginative process, "colour them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity."¹⁷

Deevy's use of poetry in this way is another aspect of her indebtedness to Chekhov. Symbolic poetry is as expressive of Annie's feelings and situation as it is of Masha Prozorov Kulygin in Chekhov's The Three Sisters. In act one of Chekhov's play, Masha recites three lines of a poem whose origin and import elude her:

Fedotick: You can move now if you want to,
Irina. (Takes another snapshot).
You do look nice today. (Takes
a humming top from his pocket).
By the way, here's a top. It's
got a wonderful hum.

Irina: Oh, how lovely!

Masha: 'A green oak by a curving shore
And on that oak a chain of gold--
And on that oak a chain of gold!

(Tearfully).

But why do I keep saying that?
Those words have been going through
my head all day.¹⁸

Towards the end of the play, she tearfully recites the same lines as they come to hold a special significance for her. Masha realizes that she is the oak by the curving shore whose instinct to grow, to branch out, is being thwarted by the calculating Natasha, to whom the "chain of gold" refers.

In The King of Spain's Daughter members of the community also try to thwart Annie's desire to express herself. I have mentioned already how they frowned upon her versions of the bride and her wedding launch. Their failure to make Annie conform to their own way of life, however, impels them to try harder. Peter Kinsella presents her with an ultimatum, to choose between a life of drudgery at the factory or to marry Jim Harris. Annie fears married life, but Deevy juxtaposes this fear with Mrs. Marks's advocacy of marriage. This, in itself, is ironical since she had earlier made it clear that the older woman had near-unpleasant memories of her own marriage.

Her intention, therefore, is to reveal the hypocrisy beneath the recommendations of Mrs. Marks. The latter is interested more in means of reforming Annie or tying her down to a humdrum life in the community

than in her happiness:

Mrs. Marks: . . . Well now, well, you'll be all right. A good sensible boy. And you'll have a nice little place. Mind you keep it well,--that'll give you somethin' to do. You won't feel the days slippin'. (Annie moves restlessly away from her) Well, well, if you could get to care for him that would be a blessin' from God. It might come to you later. Sometimes it do, and more times it don't. It might come with the child.

Annie: I dread that. .

Mrs. Marks: What's that you said? Fie on you then! Did you think you needn't suffer like the rest of the world? Did you think you were put here to walk plain and easy through the gates of heaven?

Annie: I dread it . . . dread it.

Mrs. Marks: Would you ask to get in on what others would suffer?

Annie: (to herself). I couldn't bear I'd be no more than any other wife.

(pp. 140-41)

Mrs. Marks would like Annie to have the same marriage as she herself had--a marriage that hardens one to the realities of life. Annie is aware of this and her dread of marriage and motherhood is essentially her fear of turning into another Mrs. Marks. We understand her fear in this respect, for, whether she chooses

marriage to Jim or hard labour in the factory, we know that either way she loses much of her freedom and her imaginative faculties:

. . . her spirit will be deadened or curbed, and the world will soon seem to her as grey a place as it does to the old wife who stands by as chorus. But worst of all perhaps is the realization that she will cease to be the person she is now; in taking up a new role she must leave behind the very qualities which define her.¹⁹

But, forced to choose between the factory and Jim, Annie reluctantly accepts Jim's offer of marriage.

In effect, the bride and her wedding launch no longer prompt a vision of herself as the King of Spain's daughter. Instead, the symbol serves only to remind her that she will soon become like the bride in grey, going into a marriage which her father and Jim Harris had arranged between them, and which she had no other option but to accept. Annie's fear of becoming another bride in grey induces feelings of restlessness and anxiety similar in nature to those of Nadya Ivanova in Chekhov's "The Betrothed." In other words, Annie felt "no joy, slept badly" and "her gaiety had deserted her."²⁰ But Nadya eventually breaks the restrictions of her mother and her grandmother. Deevy knew better than to blindly imitate Chekhov's technique. She knew that if she had shown that Annie follows in the

footsteps of Nadya, the uniqueness of her heroine would be lost and the structure of The King of Spain's Daughter would break down completely. She wanted to emphasize the assimilative and reconciliatory qualities of her heroine, and the role of the creative imagination in this respect.

Therefore, Annie does not run away from her dread of life with Jim or from the brutality of Peter Kinsella. Instead, she looks for a way to make her future as Mrs. Harris more bearable; she is resolved that her marriage to Jim "won't be all they'll say of me" (p. 141). She resorts once more to her imagination. This time, however, it is Jim's notebook that triggers the imaginative activity. Once more, Deevy makes Mrs. Marks the chorus to this activity as well as the representative of all that Annie wants to change:

Annie: (turning the pages). June . . .
 July . . . October . . .
 November . . . December.

Mrs. Marks: Poor Jimmy Harris I hope
 he's doin' a wise thing.

Annie: February, March, April . . .
 June, July, August . . . October--
 and I was black out with him
 then--November, December, April,
 June, August--

Mrs. Marks: A good, sensible boy.

(p. 141)

Apparently, Jim Harris had saved the sum of twenty pounds at two shillings a week for four years towards his marriage to Annie. He persevered, in face of rejections and admonitions from Annie.

But where Mrs. Marks praises Jim's perseverance, Annie perceives it to be an indication of an intense passion which could break out into violence when provoked:

Annie: Boy! (she laughs exultantly)
I think he is a man might cut your throat!

Mrs. Marks: God save us all!

Annie: He put by two shillin's every week for two hundred weeks. I think he is a man that--
supposin' he was jealous might cut your throat.

(Quiet, exultant, she goes).

(pp. 141-42)

To Annie Jim becomes no less than a romantic hero similar in nature to the Heathcliff of Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights. The intensity of his love for a woman matches that of his anger; he manifests, according to Peter Thorslev's definition of the romantic hero, "a sensibility . . . for the tenderness and passion of love" as well as a "satanic" quality which often results in a recourse to violence when provoked.²¹ Thus, Annie transforms a less than attractive picture

of Jim Harris into a perception which is more enriching for her, and which will make her life with him more bearable. Like Christy Mahon, she creates what Carolyn Jones calls with reference to Synge's plays, "an imaginative alternative."²² It is essentially the formulation of a lifestyle from the richness of her imagination. And with this imaginative alternative, she makes a triumphant exit.

The happy ending which Deevy implies by Annie's exultant exit can be questioned. In the first place, it is non-traditional, and secondly, we know very well that Jim, in reality, is the antithesis of Annie's perception. Though we wonder how Annie will maintain her vision of him as a romantic hero in face of actual banality, the fact that Deevy does not delve into this question hints at the ultimate success of her heroine. The title of the play, The King of Spain's Daughter, suggests the celebration of the creative imagination; naturally, the play ends with the triumph of the imagination over reality.

The King of Spain's Daughter

Notes

¹ Teresa Deevy, The King of Spain's Daughter, Three Plays (London: Macmillan and Co., 1940), p. 133.

² I have already given some of the glowing reviews of the play in the introduction to the thesis.

³ Ria Mooney was the actress who played the lead role of Annie Kinsella and, according to the reviews, did a very good job of it. Reviewing the play for The Irish Times, Andrew Malone wrote, "The rebellious dreaminess of Annie Kinsella gave Miss Ria Mooney very fine material and she made a memorable character of the girl."

⁴ J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. from the Spanish by Jack Sage (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 50.

⁵ Sigmund Freud, "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming," On Creativity and the Unconscious: Papers on the Psychology of Art, Literature, Love, Religion (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 48.

⁶ Alan Price, Synge and Anglo-Irish Drama (London: Methuen and Co., 1961), p. 162.

⁷ John Millington Synge, "The Playboy of the Western World," J. M. Synge: Collected Works, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), IV (ii), 73.

⁸ John Millington Synge, p. 103.

⁹ John Millington Synge, pp. 125-27.

¹⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, I, ed. John Shawcross (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 202.

¹¹ Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, II, p. 123.

- 12 Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, I, p. 202.
- 13 Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, I, p. 193.
- 14 Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, I, p. 193.
- 15 John Spencer Hill, Imagination in Coleridge (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 3.
- 16 Annie, essentially, is a "livin' flame," fuelled by a longing for heroic grandeur because she finds herself in a world filled with dying embers. Her father dominates this world and he is responsible for her desire to escape from it.
- 17 Percy Bysshe Shelly, "A Defense of Poetry," The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, eds. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (New York: The Gordion Press, 1965), III, 109.
- 18 Anton Chekhov, "The Three Sisters," The Oxford Chekhov, trans. and ed. Ronald Hingley (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), III, 90.
- 19 J. D. Riley, "On Teresa Deevy's Plays," Irish Writing, No. 32 (1955), p. 31.
- 20 Anton Chekhov, "The Betrothed," Anton Chekhov's Short Stories, ed. Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), p. 248.
- 21 Peter Thorslev, The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), p. 188.
- 22 Carolyn Sally Jones, "The Imaginative Alternative: A Study of the Plays of J. M. Synge," M.A. Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1970, p. 2.

Chapter Four

Katie Roche

Frank: Is she very religious?

Jo: Ah, she's very . . . very vegarious
. . .

Frank: Vegarious?

Jo: That's it.

Frank: I see. (obviously he does not).

Jo: She varies off and on.

Frank: Ah, yes. Yes.

Katie Roche¹

The audience at the first performance of Katie Roche on 16 March 1936 was both enthusiastic about and puzzled by Deevy's new heroine. As Temple Lane remarks, they had been expecting a heroine similar in nature to Ellie Irwin and Annie Kinsella.² But Deevy presented them with a character who turned out to be much more than they had bargained for. Joseph Holloway calls her "the strangest character I ever saw on the stage," and "a bundle of contradiction"; subsequently, he did not care to elaborate on his comments.³ Andrew Malone's review of the play for The Irish Times reflects the general enthusiasm and

confusion about the play:

It is difficult to criticize from a subjective point of view but to this reviewer the great charm about Miss Deevy's new play is the faint impression of unreality which it leaves "Katie Roche" is neither a dreamy-story nor a fairy tale, but it has enough of both qualities to give it a peculiar fascination.⁴

Sean O'Casey also remarks on the 'peculiar fascination' of the play. Following a New York performance of the play he comments that Katie Roche revolves around an "idea" that is "hard to put down on paper."⁵ In other words, he could not understand the message in the play, nor could he arrive at a decisive conclusion on the heroine. Brooks Atkinson felt the same way; in his review of the play for The New York Times he comments that the heroine is "torn several ways at once--religious, flirtatious, domestic; she is full of longings that trip each other up as they whirl through her head."⁶

This chapter endeavours to go beyond these critics and attempt a study of the obviously difficult heroine of the play. Katie Roche is the most complex of the Deevy heroines, indeed, one of the most puzzling characters ever to appear on the stage of the Abbey Theatre. This complexity is particularly noticeable when she is compared with her predecessors. Ellie

Irwin was a heady adolescent who, in order to escape from the humdrum life she led, sought refuge in her imagination. Annie Kinsella preferred either to ignore reality altogether or let her creative imagination interact with it. Katie Roche does not differ sharply from her predecessors; indeed, she evidences a number of similarities to them. However, she is more complex than Ellie Irwin and Annie Kinsella because Deevy dramatizes other factors which surround her basic quest for heroic grandeur.

The action takes place in the living room of Stan and Amelia Gregg in the village of Lower Ballycar. Katie Roche is the only one of the three plays where Deevy defines in geographic terms the community with which the heroine quarrels. The community of Lower Ballycar is not a united one. Deevy dramatizes the conflicts that arise from the various socio-economic divisions in the village. These conflicts coincide with and complement the inner turmoil of the heroine. Lower Ballycar lies half-way between town or city (presumably Dublin) and the open country. Therefore, city life-style and manners permeate the basically rural atmosphere of the village. Members of the upper-classes are city-bred sophisticates who often preach the advantages of city-life. The Fitzsimons are the aristocrats or the representatives of the upper echelon of society. They are in the initial stages

of the erosion of economic and social status which the Raneveskys experience in Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard.

Stan and Amelia Gregg, a Dublin-based architect and his unmarried sister, represent the middle-class. They fill the vacuum of influence or power in the community caused by the disintegration of the aristocratic Fitzsimons. They provide the moral tone in Lower Ballycar, much to the irritation of the lower classes or the peasants who question their suitability to do so. They also adopt a benevolent, almost patronizing, attitude towards the peasants, especially towards Michael Maguire and Jo Mahony whose rustic mannerisms and accent bespeak their lower standing in the community. Deevy also dramatizes the conflict of the generations, alongside the friction between the classes. In a letter written a year before her death in 1963, she cites the example set by Turgenev's Fathers and Sons in this respect.⁷ The youths, represented by the likes of Michael Maguire and Jo Mahoney, spend most of their time down at Riley's club, planning the community's social calendar. Their care-free life-style and devil-may-care nihilistic attitude towards everything is often frowned upon by the more conservative older group which includes Reuben, Stan, Amelia, Margaret and Hubert Drybone. These latter always harp on the importance of work, service and obligation to the Church and

to elders.

But Deevy adopts an objective point of view with respect to all these conflicts within the community she details for us. In this respect, she differs from Ibsen and Shaw who, as Robert Brustein describes their point of view, "were occupied with the friction between their personal rebelliousness and the opposing forces of the social, religious, and metaphysical reality."⁸

Like Chekhov, Deevy is careful neither to take sides nor to hint at solutions; she follows closely Chekhov's stipulation that, "it is the business of the judge to put the right questions, but the answers must be given by the jury according to their own lights."⁹

Like Chekhov, however, Deevy cannot refrain entirely from showing her feelings about her characters. For if, like Chekhov, she is a detached realist, permitting life to proceed according to its own rules, she is also an engaged moralist, arranging reality in a particular way in order to evoke some comment on it.¹⁰

This subtle arrangement of reality for a particular purpose which I have called 'surface impersonality', begins with her presentation of the conflict between Katie and the community of Lower Ballycar; one cannot help but feel that she is on the side of her heroine. This conflict of the heroine with the community is, as we have seen in the other two plays, an essential part of her dramaturgy. The character of her heroine

is often revealed within the context of such a conflict and tension.

In Katie Roche, however, this conflict arises out of a more subtle interior struggle within the heroine. Katie Roche is at odds with herself; she exemplifies what Albert Bermel terms a "contradictory character."¹¹ The various factions in Lower Ballycar are aware of this inner turmoil and they often forget their differences whenever she is introduced. They turn on her simply because she is different from them. It is necessary to point out that they are not particularly virulent in their condemnation of Katie, nor do they deliberately seek to isolate her. My point is that, however one looks at it, Katie does not belong to any sector of Lower Ballycar. The reasons for this are intricately linked to her illegitimacy, to her air of superiority towards others, and to her 'vegariousness' of character. Katie is illegitimate, the result of an affair between Mary Halnan, a reportedly beautiful peasant girl, and Maurice Fitzsimons. The outrage caused by this illicit union of a member of the aristocracy and a peasant girl was accentuated by the fact that Maurice Fitzsimons was already married, with children. The outrage and gossip subsided after Fitzsimons, taking into consideration the defamation of his family's name, rejected Mary Halnan from the scene.

For Katie, illegitimacy has meant preclusion from all activities in the community and non-acceptance by all classes. Therefore, she has worked as a maid all her life, from a babysitter cum-maid in her pre-teen years to her present servile position in the Gregg household. The other youths of the village do not accept her and deny whatever feelings they have for her. Michael Maguire, for example, is in love with Katie, but he can go no further than flirt with her when they are alone. He changes his behaviour towards her in the company of others. He practically ignores Katie before Reuben and denies whatever intimacy may exist between them to Stan Gregg saying, "my mother would die if I were to bring her in the door" (pp. 36-37). And her fellow teenage girls stay as far away as possible from her, for fear of tainting their reputations.

But members of the community notice that this subtle discrimination, far from procuring the intended effect, serves only to strengthen Katie's sense of worth. They notice that she adopts an air of superiority to them. Katie exudes an air of regality which contrasts both with the fact that she is a servant and that she belongs nowhere. When she learns that her real father was an aristocrat, she becomes as proud as Tess of the d'Urbervilles on learning of her ancestry. She talks to Stan and Amelia, not as a

maid would talk to her master and mistress, but as a forward adolescent would talk to her elders. But this pride serves only to further her exclusion from the community, as its members accuse her of suffering from delusions of grandeur.

The third and perhaps the most significant reason why the inhabitants of Lower Ballycar do not fully accept Katie derives from what they call her "vegariousness" of character. This chapter intends to delve into the possible meanings of this description. Our reaction on first learning of this adjective is similar to that of Frank Lawlor, seen in the quotation from the play which opens this chapter. We wonder at its uniqueness and ask ourselves in what special way does it apply to Katie. But it is the one word which comes closest to describing the character of Katie Roche. As Jo Mahoney explains to the curious Frank Lawlor, Katie is vegarious because she varies off and on. She vacillates between one course of action and another and she cannot maintain a particular point of view or opinion for very long. This differentiates her from the rest of the community, and, as far as its members are concerned, it is grounds enough for her preclusion from the society. Members of the community perceive themselves to be strong individuals who know what they want--life to them is just a matter of attaining one's goals.

They have definite opinions on certain matters and abide by them; and, despite the lack of socio-economic homogeneity, they all work towards benefitting the village of Lower Ballycar rather than concerning themselves with the search for their individuality.

On the other hand, Katie Roche, as Joseph Holloway describes her, is a bundle of contradictions. Deevy conceived her not as the embodiment of one passion or motivating force but as, in the words of Millet and Bentley, "a complex product of a rather considerable variety of impulses, moods, motives and emotions."¹²

This multiplicity of moods, motives and emotions accounts for the complexity of Katie Roche. It is also responsible both for the hesitation by Irish drama critics to undertake an in-depth study of the heroine and for the ongoing popularity of the play in the Abbey Theatre today. Deevy concentrates on the multiplicity of facets or vegariousness of her heroine in the first two acts of the play.

When we meet Katie, she appears to possess the same qualities as Ellie Irwin and Annie Kinsella. She is a girl of about twenty who is quite unhappy with her present life in Lower Ballycar. She attempts to alleviate this unhappiness by constantly taking refuge in her imagination. Therein, she defines the 'alternative' to her present situation and she views this alternative to be heroic or great. Having defined

this alternative, she then turns her efforts towards its actualization, or something close to a realization of this heroic grandeur. In other words, she directs her energies towards the achievement of what she calls "greatness".. But that is as far as Katie's affinities with her predecessors go. She has more than one version of what she wants--or, to put it in another form, Katie does not know exactly what she means by heroic grandeur. Ellie Irwin's ideal of heroic grandeur was Coriolanus and she sought the occurrence of what she saw as his valour and courage in certain members of her community. Annie Kinsella's ideal was the King of Spain's daughter; through the perception of herself as such, she was able to create a reality that was more viable or appealing to her.

Katie's first ideal of heroism is sainthood. Consequently she strives to become a saint: "wouldn't it be a good thing to save my soul--and to more than save it--so what else can I do?" (p. 10). She knows the "Spiritual Maxims off by heart," and has read "a lot of the Saints' lives" while working for the nuns at the convent (p. 13). In her aspiration towards sainthood, Katie is motivated by Reuben, whom Jordan aptly describes as a "ragged and impressive minor prophet."¹³ Reuben is an "old, small man with a short grey beard and white hair" (pp. 17-18). His appearance alone sets him apart from the other characters in the

play. Indeed, he functions more like a symbol than a full presence; he is the symbol that motivates the heroine, just as Coriolanus motivated Ellie Irwin in A Disciple and the bride initiated Annie's creative imagination in The King of Spain's Daughter. Katie wants to emulate Reuben in her attempts to become a saint primarily because he is a holy man and earns the respect of everybody around him.

But while we realize the fact that her aspiration towards greatness stems from her unhappy situation, we are puzzled by her first definition of this same greatness; it is unusual. We laughed at Ellie Irwin's unusual choice of Shakespeare's most anti-heroic protagonist as her hero and model not only because the choice was unusual, but also because Deevy intended that we should laugh at it. Katie's equation of sainthood with heroism is not only extraordinary but also jars with the impression of the non-conformist and proud peasant girl Deevy creates at the beginning of the play. When we first met Katie, she did not strike us as one who was religiously inclined. And, unlike her intention in A Disciple, Deevy was not aiming at a particular response to the uniqueness of her heroine's first ideal of heroism. She wants her audience to speculate as to the reasons behind Katie's expressed wish to become a saint. In speculating, however, we are torn between two possible interpretations.

It could be that there is a vulnerable Katie beneath the attitude of nonchalance and superiority she adopts towards the community. Or, she might be using this wish for sainthood as a ruse in order to be granted permission to attend the Coolbeg dance. Amelia had earlier denied her permission to do so. Following Katie's threat to join a convent, Stan Gregg decides that it is imperative for her to attend, since it would be her last chance to enjoy herself.

As if the confusion evoked by Katie's first definition of heroism was not enough, we are left to witness and ponder her change of heart regarding the matter. This about-face begins with her reconsideration of the saintly life. She wants to be a nun and, ultimately, a saint, but only on her own terms. She would not like to dress in black and look as stern and severe as other nuns, nor would she really like to lock herself up in a convent for the rest of her life. In fact, the idea of a regimented existence and a curtailment of movement and expression frightens her. But then we realize that another factor, other than fear of restrictions and self-sacrifice, is responsible for her change of heart:

Katie: . . . Well, . . . Well, . . . I long ago made up my mind I'd be a saint. I was trying to find one went before me in a way I'd like: the most of them entered the convent very young,

and I was wondering would I--
 But now there's a man came here and
 asked me to marry him--and I know in
 my heart I'd like that better.
(Silence)

(p. 19)

Katie is not sure of her aspirations to sainthood and this hesitation and uncertainty is dramatized in the pauses and breaks in sentences which characterize the earlier part of the above scene. But as she articulates the reason behind her change of opinion, the language begins to flow smoothly, ending with a finality that reflects Katie's certainty, however temporary, of purpose.

Now, we know that the reason why Katie mulls over her earlier desire to become a saint is the proposal of marriage Stan makes to her. Andrew Malone found Stan's amorous advances towards Katie to be one of the disconcerting qualities about the play.¹⁴ And we cannot help but agree with him, especially when we consider the circumstances surrounding his relationship to Katie. Stan had been in love with Katie's mother, Mary Halnan, but she had rejected him in favour of Maurice Fitzsimons. The memory of Mary Halnan haunts him, and is, perhaps, responsible for his attraction to Katie. We can only conjecture about Deevy's intentions in having Stan propose to Katie. Perhaps she was aiming to shock the sensation-loving

and scandal-prone Abbey audience of the 1930s. They would have been greatly attracted not only to the idea of a much older employer marrying his young employee but also to the knowledge that the same employer had made similar advances to his maid's mother. However, it is much more probable that she wanted to show how Stan's unusual move complicates things for Katie.

Katie knows of Stan's previous infatuation with her mother and threatens to "flout" him, that is, turn him down as her mother did if he persists in talking down to her. But she accepts his proposal despite Stan's steadfast adherence to his condescending attitude; and the reasons she gives for her agreement to marry Stan are, in themselves, ambiguous and contradictory:

Katie: I do indeed [care for him] . . . for a long time now when he'd come to the house the power would go out of my limbs. I didn't know that was love till he asked me [to marry him] just now, and I said to myself, "there's your convent." (Pause). But I'll tell you a queer thing--(lower tone)--I have another boy besides--Michael that works at Rileys. He asked me to go for a walk. He's a clever, handsome boy. But I don't know is he great in any way like Mr. Gregg is. Mr. Gregg draws plans for houses.

(p. 20)

Katie tells Reuben that she loves Stan and had done so for quite some time. But the comparison she makes

between Stan and Michael calls into question this supposedly overwhelming love for Stan. She compares Stan to Michael and deduces that the former is "greater", simply because he "draws plans for houses." She also talks about the desire to be "the woman behind" him, and "a help at his work" (p. 40). In other words, it is his work, rather than the man, that draws Katie to marriage with Stan Gregg.

Indeed, we begin to realize that Katie perceives 'greatness' in the fact that Stan is a famous architect. He becomes her latest ideal of heroic grandeur and her need to become his helpmate represents her aspiration towards this ideal. We become more puzzled as we try to reconcile Katie's first ideal to her latest, which is even more unusual. We know, already, that these attempts at a definition of heroism stem from her dissatisfaction with life as a maid in Lower Ballycar and that they represent her longing for an alternative form of existence. Yet she chooses, as her latest ideal of heroic grandeur, a man who represents all that from which she wants to escape. Like the other inhabitants of Lower Ballycar, Stan Gregg does not accept her as an equal because she is illegitimate, unreliable and in his own view, uneducated. We are not sure of his love for her; and Deevy aggravates the issue by not hinting at the reasons behind his attraction to Katie. Katie, obviously, does not know

what she wants and the resultant vegariousness could be attributed to a number of factors.

This uncertainty, in the first place, can be blamed on her illegitimacy and lack of real identity. Katie belongs neither to the aristocratic class of her father nor to the peasant class of her mother. Instead, she claims identity with the two as well as with the middle stratum of Stan and Amelia Gregg; her marriage to Stan makes her an official member of this middle class. Following her birth she was entrusted first to an old woman by the name of Mrs. Roche, who gave her her surname, presumably out of sympathy for the unnamed and unwanted child. But she spent the most formative years of her life working in a convent, where the nuns brought her up like all the other orphans in their care. When she was old enough she was sent to work for one of the few families in the community who could afford to keep a servant: in her case, Amelia Gregg took her in. This brief history of Katie's childhood and early adolescence shows that Katie was an unwanted orphan who was moved constantly from one 'foster' home to the next. This often results in an uncertainty of self and of purpose, both of which could be held responsible for her 'vegariousness' or 'contradictory' nature and for her longing for heroic grandeur.

Katie's age can also be held accountable. She is twenty, which implies that she is about to leave

childhood and embark on a new, adult life. This 'transience' stage and its attendant pressures is usually the most difficult of one's life. Anna Freud describes this period of late adolescence as one in which the subjects exhibit the coincidence of contradictory qualities:

Adolescents are excessively egoistic, regarding themselves as the centre of the universe and the sole object of interest, and yet at no time in later life are they capable of so much self-sacrifice and devotion. They form the most passionate love relations, only to break them off as abruptly as they began them. On the one hand they throw themselves enthusiastically into the life of the community and, on the other, they have an overpowering longing for solitude. They oscillate between blind submission to some self-chosen leader and defiant rebellion against any and every authority. They are selfish and materially minded and at the same time full of lofty idealism. They are ascetic but will suddenly plunge into instinctual indulgence of the most primitive character.¹⁵

Katie exhibits the coincidences of contradictory qualities which Anna Freud generally finds in adolescents. In the first act of the play Deevy dramatizes the attendant uncertainty of self and purpose which manifest themselves in Katie's attempts to define her individuality. Having made this statement, however, we are confronted with another problem. Ellie Irwin and Annie Kinsella were also adolescents, but they did not experience the same difficulties as Katie Roche;

Deevy did not dramatize their adolescence and its attendant problems. Indeed, both heroines knew who they were and what they wanted--it was just a matter of getting it. However, Deevy's dramatization of Katie's vegariousness and her search for definition of her individuality bears testimony to the maturity of her concept of the Irish heroine.

If the first act of the play affords us an introductory glimpse of the contradictory nature of the heroine, the second act elaborates on these contradictions. It is probably the most important phase in the dramatization of Katie Roche; it deals solely with Katie in her new role as Mrs. Stan Gregg. In the opening scenes, the "air of life and warmth" which now characterizes the living room implies on the surface that there is nothing wrong with the marriage. Katie fosters this impression of a happy marriage by her pride in Stan's work and her sense of duty towards him:

Katie: I am the proud woman this night. I know now for sure you're great.

Stan: I think it is good--so far (Anxious). I think it is a fine plan.

Katie: Fine. It is like what would come out of the head of a prince. (He laughs). I think that is it. (Takes a letter from him: reads) "The Commissioners are very pleased--" so well they might. You have taken the breath out of their body.

Stan: And my little wife's very pleased too.

(pp. 44-45)

It is as if Katie has finally found her niche as an individual in Lower Ballycar. She also gives the impression of having defined that longing for heroic grandeur which motivates her. She proves to be an invaluable asset to Stan's work, giving good advice where necessary and displaying a strong sense of good taste in her suggestions for the houses.

Yet, as the plot progresses, we see that Katie is as unpredictable as ever, the same victim of impulse. We find that she is not as secure as she first implies. She learns that a change of name and official acceptance by members of the middle-class does not necessarily define one's individuality. Katie says that she loves her husband, and intends to remain faithful to him, yet she flirts with Michael Maguire and others of her age-group. Indeed, she is torn between the desire to return to her old way of life as a simple, unwanted but proud maid under the care of Stan and Amelia Gregg, and her allegiance to this new responsibility as Mrs. Gregg. She grows ponderous whenever Michael reminds her of their carefree days: "oh 'tis grand to be free . . . to wander around with that wherever you'd like, to be at no one's bidding, but to please yourself"

(p. 54).

Katie finds herself in a predicament similar to that of Marceline in Jean Jacques Bernard's The Unquiet Spirit. The title of Bernard's play itself points to restlessness of spirit which characterizes both Katie and Marceline in their married life. Marceline, unsure of the reason why she married Philip in the first place, finds herself in a near-neurotic situation. She is motivated by a variety of impulses to look for something she knows is there but which keeps evading her. Marceline talks about "duty in marriage," and of "impulses one must check . . . hopes to be buried," but turns around and flouts the very conventions she expounds.¹⁶ Like Bernard, Deevy is careful not to suggest that Katie is the epitome of the heartless femme fatale, one who would have her cake and eat it too. Indeed, her attitude towards Katie's flirtations with Michael is sympathetic for she does not lay the blame squarely on Katie's shoulders. In the first place she suggests that her heroine's uncertainty of purpose in life and vagariousness of nature should be held partly responsible for the unfaithfulness to Stan Gregg. Secondly, she dramatizes other external factors which she suggests are also responsible for the difficulties in the marriage, namely, the middle class stuffiness of Stan Gregg.

I have already indicated that Stan Gregg does not appreciate his wife fully, and I agree with Temple Lane when she comments that Katie is "unjustly handicapped by everyone's notions about her, and fears for her."¹⁷ In Stan's view, Katie is no more than a very immature young adult and he treats her as such:

Stan: (putting her aside). I can't delay.
There's a good child.

Katie: Child! I am your wife that you married.

Stan: Then do what you're told! Keep out.
(Katie springs back--stands aside, stiff).

Katie: Is that what I am for?

(p. 50)

Moreover, he attaches more importance to his sister's wishes and opinions than to those of his wife. This course of action would cause problems in any relationship, let alone in such a marriage of incompatibles. In effect, Stan's attitude towards his wife parallels that of Torvald Helmer in Ibsen's A Doll House. In the beginning of the play, Torvald Helmer refers to his wife as the "little skylark chirruping out there," the "little squirrel," the "little spendthrift," with her "frivolous ideas."¹⁸ He loves his wife because she is helpless and always repentant. But when Nora

tells him of the lengths she had to go in order to save his and her father's life, he is ready to renounce his love for her. His main concern following Krogstad's revelation is the disgrace to his honour and the threat it poses to his new position at the Bank.

Ibsen presents this less than attractive picture of Helmer in order to justify Nora's departure/separation from the doll house and to reinforce the feminist message in the play. Deevy dramatizes the objectionable side of Stan Gregg so as to manipulate the audience's sympathies to favour her heroine. She wants us to realize that Stan does not exactly facilitate Katie in her striving for individuality. Deevy used the same technique in The King of Spain's Daughter when she justified Annie's search for escape from reality by presenting us with an ugly picture of Peter Kinsella. Deevy also suggests that the relationship between Katie and Amelia is responsible for Katie's infidelity.

Amelia is an old maid whose quiet, pious nature contrasts greatly with Katie's unpredictable nature. Temple Lane aptly describes her as "that homely, diurnal character of unspectacular selflessness," who earns the respect of everyone around her by virtue of her steadfastness and willingness to do good at all times.¹⁹ In other words, she exemplifies Burke's theory of "paradox of substance," whereby the character of the

hero/heroine is highlighted by its difference from that of another:

A character cannot "be himself" unless many others among the dramatic personae contribute to this end, so that the very essence of a character's nature is in a large measure defined, or determined, by the other characters, who variously assist or oppose him.²⁰

We have already seen Deevy's manipulation of this theory in The King of Spain's Daughter, where Mrs. Marks acts both as a necessary contrast to Annie Kinsella and as the step towards a greater understanding of Annie.

Katie finds it difficult to live with Amelia precisely because the quiet, conventional and spinsterly manners of her sister-in-law jar with her own impulsive nature and keep her on edge. She is very very conscious of herself and her weaknesses whenever Amelia is around. Deevy then hints that Katie's flirtations with Michael signify her attempts to escape, at least temporarily, from this nervousness and agitation induced by Amelia's presence. Katie's confusion and uncertainty is further aggravated by Reuben's revelation that he is her father, the supposedly dead Maurice Fitzsimons. The revelation results in another change of heart for Katie as Reuben becomes her latest ideal for heroism:

Katie: Oh--you're a great man! . . .
You're a saint!--

Reuben: Be good now. Be a good wife.

Katie: Good is it? (Laughs, wildly excited)
I'll be a great woman. I'll make
my own goodness. (He turns from
her). Don't go from me without
a word!

Reuben: I have nothing to give you.

Katie: And you a saint of God.

(p. 60)

It will be remembered that Katie had admired Reuben for his piety and good nature, and had expressed the wish to emulate him in her attempts to become a saint. That impulse was quickly dismissed soon after Stan's proposal.

With the new revelation, however, Reuben becomes in her view a saint. This implies that she has reverted to her original definition of greatness in terms of sainthood. She also decides to emulate him in her renewed efforts to achieve greatness by becoming a saint. Stan no longer measures up in her view and she subsequently hurts him by falsely telling him of her preference for Michael:

Katie: To see me he came--for old love's sake.

Stan: He wasn't here long.

Katie: It didn't seem long to me.

Stan: Don't give him drink here again.

Katie: (turns to him). 'Tis a terrible thing for a woman to marry an' she not very sure in her mind . . . And then the man she didn't marry to come in and sit down, and she by herself.

(p. 63)

Katie feels that she has finally found what she had been looking for, that is, she will follow Reuben on his messianic journey through Ireland. But this certainty of purpose, like the others before it, is short-lived, for Reuben tells her she can attain greatness only by becoming a good wife to her husband.

With this directive, Katie's confusion reaches new heights. She becomes neurotic, muttering to herself, or making incoherent sentences when spoken to:

Katie: We can only be great in our own way. You and myself couldn't ever be like two other people . . . (Pause) Is it in anger you're going?

Stan: It certainly is.

Katie: Because I went out? Well, I made my choice for this to-night, I won't cry now. (Then, in low tone) "Is it as snug as the turnips you'd have us live?" All the same--(she breaks)--I didn't think you'd go off from me in such a great hurry. (Silence, struggles for composure, looks towards the table; says in a lighter tone) You had a right not to tell me till after the tea. Now 'twill be spoiled . . . and your bit of sausage.

Stan: Take your tea.

(She hesitates, goes to the table, sits down, pours out her own tea).

Katie: Won't you have any?

Stan: No, not now.

(She sighs, sips her tea; then, after a moment).

Katie: 'Tis to Reuben I went that time, not to Michael. (Silence). I only made up about the hill of Knock. (Silence. Thinks again--then) It is you I love best. I never changed in my heart at all. (Silence). Ah, take a bit before you go. That would be good sense. I'll be that brave you can go off jaunty. I'd like you'd enjoy yourself wherever you'd be. (Silence. Frightened now). Will you come back ever?

(pp. 75-76)

Deevy's art in this second act lies in her dramatization of even the unconscious and involuntary movements of her heroine. At the end of the act, Katie realizes that her husband is about to leave her because of her flirtations with Michael and her frequent changes in behaviour and mood. She had also promised to make amends and must keep her promise to Reuben.

Her actions, therefore, reflect the inner struggle between her desire to follow Reuben, her attempts to detain Stan in Lower Ballycar and the unconscious fear of what lies before her if all else fails. For this scene, the actress who plays Katie must summon up all

her resources. She must show surprise, determination, incoherence, mock anger, hesitation, cheerfulness and conciliatoriness, all within the space of a few seconds.²¹ She must also convey how Katie tries to regain her composure and to explain her actions to her husband. Her efforts must culminate in the suggestion of Katie's final breakdown which results from her awareness of the consequences of her vegarious nature and from her fear of the future. Abbey audiences, from the inception of the theatre in the 1890s to 1936, had never been witness to such a dramatization of the momentary surfacing of a character's unconscious fears and desires, which, as Albert Bermel puts it, "clash with each other and with [her] conscious motives."²²

As the quotation also indicates, Katie's inner turmoil and her attempts to recollect herself result in a dialogue that is fragmentary and allusive in nature. Deevy learned how to perfect the technique of using dialogue and language to convey the inner conflict her heroine experiences through her interest in Jean Jacques Bernard's plays as well as in those by Chekhov. The dialogue in Bernard's plays is characterized by innumerable pauses and incoherent sentences. Kester Branford describes Bernard's technique as follows:

A noticeable feature of Bernard's theatre is the habitual omission of the last term of a progression (often in a sentence). It is this procedure that operates when in L'Invitation, Oliver and Marie-Louise fail to have the explication we were expecting, or when Martine, on the point of declaring her love, appears suddenly to lose her voice. This Bernardian version of 'brinkmanship' shows his disregard for the exigencies of the well-made play, his disdain for the cult of the scène à faire; but the denial of sure dramatic effects is also a sign of an attempt to de-theatricalize the theatre and to dramatize the undramatic--an attempt in which he was preceded by Chekhov.²³

In most of Chekhov's 'nastroenie' or 'mood' plays, the characters, as Maurice Valency comments, "communicate through innumerable pauses and silences; these silences are often singularly meaningful. The speeches themselves, on the other hand, are often insignificant. The lines of thought converge, but soon part company; quite often, they seem to run parallel to one other without making any contact."²⁴ In Katie Roche the technique of surface impersonality, by its subtle manipulation of language, enables Deevy to dramatize the inner turmoil of her heroine.

I have already mentioned that, prior to Katie Roche, Abbey audiences had never been witness to such a detailed dissection of a character's interiority. Therefore, they warmly welcomed what was hailed as Deevy's "special and original view upon character," and the accompanying impression that the theme of

the search for self is as important and entertaining as the fight for the cause of Ireland or the dramatization of Irish life as a conflict between peasant and aristocrat.²⁵ And over the years the Abbey directors have continued to revive the play known in Irish literary circles as one which deals with the "investigation of the human personality on its subtler levels."²⁶ But this description is applicable to only the first two acts of the play. It seems almost inaccurate when applied to Act Three. This third act, which should have been the grand, convincing finale to the special and innovative view of character, actually lets the play and the dramatist down. Act Three is flawed primarily because Katie Roche, who dominates Acts One and Two, suddenly takes a back seat, and Amelia Gregg emerges as the new heroine.

Deevy begins this act by introducing us to Amelia and Frank Lawlor. The latter was mentioned in the first act and we quickly forgot about him since our interest was centred on Katie. Deevy, now, decides to bring him back for no reason other than to function as the love interest for Amelia:

Frank: I love you, Amelia--be my wife.

Amelia: Oh!

Frank: There, I didn't mean it. Honest I didn't. Never meant to. Felt too damned nervous myself. Rotten feel.

(Pause). . . You'd better think about it.

Amelia: No, Frank; no, I couldn't . . .

Frank: You couldn't? . . . Won't even think of it?

Amelia: I . . . I'm not young enough . . .

Frank: Neither am I. I wish we both were . . .

Amelia: Frank, you must marry somebody young.

Frank: Good Lord--not if you paid me! I thought we were fond of one another.

Amelia: But . . . I'm too old.

Frank: Nonsense, woman. Do you think I want children. I want you. I've been a fool. Don't know why I didn't come before.

(p. 86)

After similar displays of humility and matronly protestations, Amelia agrees to marry Frank. The Frank and Amelia episode serves only to evoke irritation and antipathy in us rather than the warm-hearted feeling towards the romance between two old people that Deevy obviously intended.

Deevy increases our antipathy by deciding to introduce us also to Margaret and Hubert Drybone, Amelia's younger sister and husband. Furthermore, when Katie finally appears, well into the act, she has undergone an amazing transformation. She is no longer the impulsive, colourful and vegarious adolescent of the

preceding acts, but a humble, pious and dutiful young wife. The new Katie now concerns herself with the happiness of others and the comfort of her husband. Indeed, she goes to great lengths to prove that she has matured. As a result, she is surprisingly reticent, even in face of harsh criticism from Reuben:

Reuben: What did you promise me out there in the winter?--that you'd be good. Is that the way to keep your promise?

Katie: I was only trying to keep up my heart. (Pause). I would like that God would be pleased with me--I've tried for that.

Reuben: --But you'll please yourself! She'll 'serve God--when she's ready! She'll be a saint--in a way she likes! Full of false pride! (Turns to Stan) She's not to be depended on what she needs is humiliation,--if she was thoroughly humbled she might begin to learn.

(Stops abruptly: Stan is looking at him in surprise).

Katie: (turns to Stan, pleading). 'Twas a hard thing surely--saying to myself for so long, "He'll come to-night" . . . and again, "I don't mind," and that a lie. And all because I once tried to put my strength agen you. (Silence).

(pp. 105-106)

Katie is bent on proving to both Stan and Reuben that she is "not bad at all" (p. 105), and in that she succeeds, but we remain unmoved..

We already know of Katie's promise to Reuben to be a good wife and a good Christian. Her interest in community events and affairs, coupled with her humility and sense of duty towards Stan, are manifestations of her steadfastness to this promise. However, the transition from the unpredictable, confused and heady young girl we saw in Act Two to this humble young wife is far too abrupt. Deevy fails to dramatize the transition though she had led us to believe that she would do so through her depiction of Katie's search for individuality in Acts One and Two. Deevy adds to this glaring flaw in the structure of the play by trying to leave us with the impression that the process whereby Katie arrived at her present state of mind is not all that important. It seems that she wants us to believe that Katie changed during the eight months that she was separated from Stan. In other words Deevy is no longer the objective realist, one who arranges reality in such a way as to elicit the intended response from us. She becomes the omniscient dramatist who wants us to like Amelia Gregg, whom she describes as "the truly spiritual" character who is not driven to extremes by Katie's "faults and weaknesses."²⁷ In sum, it appears that by Act Three Deevy was no longer interested in her heroine. This contrasts with her technique in The King of Spain's Daughter where the action of the play demonstrates Annie's triumphant

and steady progress towards the creation of an imaginative alternative.

In Katie Roche Amelia assumes greater importance as the play nears its end. Deevy, perhaps acting under the impression that she has short-changed Amelia thus far, makes her responsible for the reconciliation of Katie and Stan, and, more important, makes her the ultimate factor in Katie's final perception of purpose. Amelia persuades Katie to see the 'challenge' in her moving to Dublin with Stan:

Amelia: Katie, you must be brave.

Katie: Brave is it? (bitter). There's no grandeur in this! Taken away . . . my own fault.

(Covers her face with her hands).

Amelia: . . . If you're brave, you can make it grand. My dear, you must!

Katie: (gazes at her for a moment, then). I think you're right! . . . (Pause) I'm a great beauty . . . after all my talk--crying now . . . (grows exultant). I will be brave!

(They catch hands).

Amelia: We both will!

Katie: (gentle now and suddenly perceptive). I think you were always . . . 'Tis a promise between us--whatever 'll come, good or bad.

Amelia: A promise, my dear.

Katie: I was looking for something great to do--sure now I have it.

In A Disciple Ellie Irwin, by herself, arrived at the conclusion that valour or courage belonged to the past and not the present. Annie Kinsella by herself, arrived at the decision to perceive Jim Harris as a romantic hero rather than a dull husband, and The King of Spain's Daughter celebrated the triumph of the individual's imagination over the conventionality of the community. In these plays the 'perception of purpose' scene served both as the climax to the play and as the 'recognition' point whereby the heroine decided on a more viable course of action.

The 'perception of purpose' scene in Katie Roche tells us more about Amelia's goodness of heart than about Katie's maturity. Indeed, whether or not Katie matures through this recognition of heroic grandeur is not the issue, for Deevy has already indicated that the maturation process took place during the eight months that Katie was separated from Stan. Thus, if we questioned the plausibility of Annie Kinsella's imaginative alternative in The King of Spain's Daughter, we are confounded even more by Katie's concluding remarks, "I was looking for something great to do--sure now I have it" (p. 113). We wonder if she has really defined that greatness. This grave doubt which the conclusion of the play induces in us is the only flaw in an otherwise innovative and successful investigation of the human personality on its subtler levels.

Katie Roche

Notes

¹ Teresa Deevy, Katie Roche, Three Plays (London: Macmillan, 1940), p. 79.

² Temple Lane, "The Dramatic Art of Teresa Deevy," The Dublin Magazine, 21 (1946), 36.

³ Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill, eds., Joseph Holloway's Irish Theatre (Dixon, California: The Proscenium Press, 1969), II, 52.

⁴ Andrew Malone, Review of "Katie Roche", by Teresa Deevy, The Irish Times, 17 March 1936, p. 6.

⁵ Sean O'Casey, Letter to George Jean Nathan, 14 February 1938, The Letters of Sean O'Casey 1910-1941, ed. David Krause (New York: Macmillan, 1975), p. 703.

⁶ Brooks Atkinson, Review of "Katie Roche", by Teresa Deevy, The New York Times, 17 April 1937, p. 4.

⁷ Teresa Deevy, Letter to Michael J. O'Neill, 24 October 1962. The Michael O'Neill Papers, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois.

⁸ Robert Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt (London: Methuen and Co., 1970), p. 138.

⁹ "To A. S. Souvorin," 27 October 1888, Letters on the Short Story, The Drama and Other Literary Topics, ed. Louis S. Friedland (London: Vision Press, 1965), p. 60.

¹⁰ Deevy was the first Abbey dramatist to employ this technique which I have called surface impersonality. She relied on her audience to add whatever subjective elements were lacking in the play, but at the same time, she manipulated their reactions to coincide with her own intentions.

¹¹ Albert Bermel, Contradictory Characters (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1973); Bermel considers the relationship of this phenomenon to modern drama.

¹² Fred B. Millet and G. Eades Bentley, The Art of Drama (New York: Appleton-Century-Crafts, 1953), p. 142.

¹³ John Jordon, "An Introduction to Teresa Deevy," Irish University Review, I (1956), 20.

¹⁴ Malone, p. 6.

¹⁵ Anna Freud, "The Ego and the Id at Puberty," The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence: The Writings of Anna Freud (New York: International Universities Press, 1966), II, 137-38.

¹⁶ Jean Jacques Bernard, "The Unquiet Spirit," The Sulky Fire: Five Plays, trans. John Leslie Frith (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939), p. 276.

¹⁷ Temple Lane, p. 40.

¹⁸ Henrik Ibsen, "A Doll's House," The Oxford Ibsen V, trans. and ed. James Walter McFarlane (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 201-202.

¹⁹ Temple Lane, p. 40.

²⁰ Kenneth Burke, Language as Symbolic Action (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1966), p. 84.

²¹ Eileen Crowe, the famous Abbey actress, played the lead role of Katie Roche when the play was first performed on 16 March 1936. Her performance was said to be electrifying. Andrew Malone comments on her acting:

"Katie Roche herself is most skillfully drawn--an almost impossibly childlike mind combined with a wild temperament--and is acted faultlessly by Eileen Crowe. It is a part of many moods, and whether she was being flirtatious with the young men of the village or trying to live up to her high position as wife of a genius, or perplexed at her husband's neglect, or merely foolish and boastful, Miss Crowe's Katie was vivid and convincing. It was undoubtedly 'her play' and she seldom acted better."

22. Bermel, p. 6.

23 Kester Adrian Branford, A Study of Jean Jacques Bernard's Théâtre de l'Inexprimé, Romance Monographs, No. 24 (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 1977), pp. 46-47.

24 Maurice Valency, The Breaking String: The Plays of Anton Chekhov (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 282-83.

25 Temple Lane, p. 36.

26 John Jordan, "The Abbey Theatre: Retrospect and Premonition," Contemporary Theatre, Stratford Upon Avon Studies, IV., eds. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (London: Edward Arnold, 1962), p. 179.

27 Theresa Deevy, Letter to Nathamal Sahal, 27 October 1955, quoted from Sixty Years of Realistic Irish Drama (Bombay, India: Macmillan, 1971), p. 144.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy, and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of musical comedy, that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality.

J. M. Synge¹

Teresa Deevy's significance to the Irish dramatic movement derives mainly from her timely emergence onto the Irish theatrical scene. In 1930, the year in which her first play The Reapers was written and performed at the Abbey, the Irish National Theatre Society was on the verge of a new beginning.

The twenty-six counties had been proclaimed a Republic and were under the leadership of Eamon De Valera. This meant that Catholic Ireland, at least, was finally free of the English yoke. This freedom from colonial rule was reflected, on the theatrical front, in a decreasing emphasis on nationalism and 'romantic' Ireland as themes for a drama.

The Irish National Theatre Society, the driving force behind the movement for the propagation of Irish drama, was subsequently besieged by plays

that were characterized by their affinities with the different literary and political 'isms' that post-World War I Europe spawned. For example, Yeats's adaptations of the Japanese Nō drama for his own purposes was followed closely by O'Casey's The Silver Tassie, which he wrote as a byproduct of his contact with the movement for expressionism in literature. The movement for surrealism in art and literature also found adherents in Ireland, because the number of 'fantasy' plays being submitted to the Abbey increased. George Fitzmaurice achieved fame through his predilection for and dramatization of surrealistic or 'fantastical' themes.

Given this proliferation of plays which appeared to be designed to keep abreast of the various literary and socio-political movements, the Irish National Theatre Society needed a starting point for its second beginning. Members of the Society did not oppose experimentation with new or old ideas; in fact, they encouraged it. However, they wanted plays that not only inculcated the dramatist's ideological or artistic preferences but also adapted these preferences to a basic Irish context or situation; so that the plays would be marked more by their 'Irish' quality than by their foreign extraction. In this regard, members of the Society could not immerse themselves fully in the pattern created by W. B. Yeats, the most respected dramatist in Ireland,

or in that of O'Casey and Fitzmaurice. They realized that their adaptations would not appeal to the Irish populace.²

With Teresa Deevy, however, the Society seemed to have found a solution to the precarious position in which it found itself. The difference between Deevy and the other Irish dramatists whose plays manifest foreign influences was that Deevy had a definite dramatic focus--the individual. A single character, rather than a group of characters or a community, dominates the action of her plays. Deevy's individuals are, in the main, young, adolescent girls on the verge of womanhood; being a woman, she felt she was a better authority on members of her own sex than on those of the opposite. The fact that she had pre-defined her dramatic focus facilitated her adaptation of the influence of such foreign playwrights as Chekhov and Bernard to the basic Irish context of her plays.

Deevy's dramatic vision is, in some respects, akin to that of her famous predecessor, J. M. Synge.

The actions of the three plays manifest a strong tendency towards Synge's belief that "on the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy."³ Deevy reinforced the realism of her plays not only by setting them in the Ireland she knew but also by introducing elements of the Irish landscape which Abbey audiences would readily recognize. However, she balanced this

realism with her celebration of the 'joyous' or 'imaginative' attitude to life.

Deevy's concept of an individual is intricately linked to the word imagination. In fact, we can safely assume that the most fundamental similarities between the three heroines derive from their recourse to the faculty of the imagination. This recourse to the imagination often results from their attempts to escape, albeit temporarily, from an existence which they find stultifying. Ellie Irwin in A Disciple and Annie Kinsella in The King of Spain's Daughter both try to change what they perceive to be a boring life. They cannot identify with the conservatism and often hypocritical piety of members of their community; thus, they resort to the imagination not only to escape from the harsh reality in which they find themselves but also to define their individuality.

However, Deevy's celebration of the imaginative attitude to life is more refined than that of Synge, primarily because her heroines also create viable alternatives. These alternatives are often modifications of the harsh realities from which they attempt escape or transformation of these realities. For example, Annie Kinsella's perception of Jim Harris as a potentially dangerous romantic hero at the close of The King of Spain's Daughter was the result of her imagination acting upon the evidence of his notebook and of

his persevering qualities; her perception facilitated her acceptance of an unattractive future as Mrs. Jim Harris.

Deevy's uniqueness and significance derives also from the dramatic techniques she employed in the portrayal of her heroines. From her readings of Chekhov and of Bernard, she developed a technique which I have called "surface impersonality" whereby she appeared to adopt an objective point of view in her plays but actually manipulated language to draw an audience to agree with the often sympathetic representation of her heroines.

Deevy was the first Abbey playwright to dramatize the unconscious or involuntary feelings of her heroines alongside their conscious or more obvious feelings. This also resulted from her interest in Chekhov and Bernard, both of whom explored the intricacies of the unconscious in their works, and developed techniques whereby these intricacies would become plausible to an audience. The most significant of these techniques was the development of a language and dialogue which would reflect the inner or unconscious conflict which the individual experienced.

Deevy adapts successfully this technique whereby, as George Lukács explains, "what is said becomes ever more peripheral to what is not expressible . . . the melody in dialogue is ever more submerged in the

accompaniment, the openly spoken in the allusion, in silences, in effects achieved by pauses, change of tempo."⁴ Deevy used this technique to a lesser extent in The King of Spain's Daughter, where Annie, in the middle of an argument with Jim Harris, suddenly articulates the symbolism which the bride and her wedding launch hold for her. But she made ample use of the technique in Katie Roche, which was lauded for its "special and original view upon character." Thus, as Katie tries to recollect her thoughts after Stan walks out on her, we are confronted with sentences as well as gestures that seem to make no sense at all but which nonetheless reflect the warring spirits within Katie.

Deevy's last play for the Abbey, The Wild Goose, also reflects her emphasis on the individual as a dramatic focus. A brief consideration of this play is needed for a more rounded understanding of Deevy's dramatic vision. Unlike the three plays which were studied in the course of this thesis, The Wild Goose refers to a young man, Martin Shea, around whom the action revolves. It refers also to a phenomenon in Irish history known as the flight of the wild geese when thousands of Catholic youths migrated to foreign lands in the seventeenth century. These youths were frustrated with the oppression of the English and joined foreign armies, notably the French, who were fighting

their own wars with the English.

Martin Shea is a 'wild' goose because he is torn between three very strong forces--his home, his fiancée and the cause, which is freedom for his country. Deevy attempts to make tangible the consequent internal struggle which the hero experiences by employing the same methods as in Katie Roche; but she does not succeed. The Wild Goose remains flawed primarily because of her conscious efforts to transfer a technique that was successful in the portrayal of a young adolescent female to the dramatization of a young man in seventeenth century peasant Ireland.

The silences and pauses, the fragmentary and allusive sentences which Deevy intended to convey the inner turmoil, are far too numerous. Martin Shea ends up saying nothing at all; and during the few occasions on which he talks, his emotions, despite Deevy's obvious attempts to make them otherwise, become too contrived to be believable. Indeed, our attention eventually diverges from Martin to the three women whose fortunes are bound up with his; and the interest in them grows as Martin's conflicts and vacillations lose interest for us.

As the play progresses we become more engrossed in Mary Kavanagh's simple and honest nature, in Hannah Power's sound judgment as well as in Eileen Connolly's attempts to make Martin honour the marriage proposal

he made to her. Martin Shea has only one course of action, open to him, one which was even implied in the title of the play, and that is, to join the rest of the wild geese on their flight to France. Deevy's attempts to introduce subordinate themes such as Martin's love for his home, his aunt Mary, and for Eileen Connolly, appear to be more of a commercial ploy than an intimate or fundamental part of the dramatic conception.

Nevertheless, Abbey audiences applauded Deevy's initiative in trying to convey a psychological and a human slant to a problem which a majority of nationalistic Catholic youths had experienced. They realized, for instance, that The Wild Goose was a more thorough play than Lady Gregory's The White Cockade, which also dealt with the wild geese phenomenon but failed to suggest the external and internal struggle which the average nationalist undergoes before making a final decision. Indeed, by her emphasis on individualism in drama, and specifically on the conscious and unconscious sides of an individual, Deevy led the Irish National Theatre Society out of the doldrums of various 'isms', conventional or commonplace themes, and out of the stock characterization techniques in which it found itself.

As I have already mentioned in the Introduction, Deevy turned to radio plays after November 1936.

These radio plays (listed in the appendix), most of which remain unpublished, all deal with the same subtle aspects of human emotions rather than with social themes; this, according to Shelagh Richards, accounts for their present-day popularity with Irish audiences.⁵

It has been the intention of this thesis to initiate interest in the works of Teresa Deevy, one of the less well-known dramatists whose contribution to the continuous Irish dramatic movement is nonetheless significant. It is hoped that this study of her three most popular plays will provoke greater critical interest in her life and works and in the lives and works of those other dramatists who admired and were influenced by her dramatic initiatives. In my view, the critical study of Teresa Deevy's plays as well as the works of these other less well-known dramatists, alongside the ongoing attention being given by critics and students alike to the works of Yeats, Synge, O'Casey and Lady Gregory, will very much enhance our understanding of the Irish drama. A recognition of the significance of Teresa Deevy will also, in my view, further our appreciation of the uniqueness and artistic excellence of the drama.

Conclusion

Notes

¹ John Millington Synge, Preface to The Playboy of the Western World, J. M. Synge: Collected Works, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), IV (ii), 53-54.

² At the same time the Abbey directors realized that those plays which dealt with popular themes, especially those by Paul Vincent Carroll and Lennox Robinson, were beginning to wane in popularity. Abbey audiences clamoured for a break from these plays which seemed to be successive re-enactments of Irish traditions.

³ Synge, p. 54.

⁴ George Lukács, "The Sociology of Modern Drama," The Theory of the Modern Stage, ed. Eric Bentley (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 443.

⁵ Letter from Shelagh Richards, Director of Programming, Radio Telefis Eireann, 18 April 1980.



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APPENDIX

Plays Produced by the Irish National
Theatre Society

The Reapers: A Play in Three Acts. Produced by
Lennox Robinson, 18 March 1930.

A Disciple: A Comedy in One Act. Produced by Lennox
Robinson, 24 August 1931.

Temporal Powers: A Play in Three Acts. Produced by
Lennox Robinson, 12 September 1932.

The King of Spain's Daughter: A Play in One Act.
Produced by Fred Johnson, 29 April 1935.

Katie Roche: A Play in Three Acts. Produced by Hugh
Hunt, 16 March 1936.

The Wild Goose: A Play in Three Acts. Produced by
Hugh Hunt, 9 November 1936.

Light Falling: A Play in One Act. Produced by Sean
MacShamhrain for the Abbey's Experimental Theatre,
25 October 1949.

Plays Broadcast by Radio
Telefís Éireann

Strange Birth

Dignity

In the Cellar of My Friend

Wife to James Whelan

Within a Marble City

Going Beyond Alma's Glory

ABSTRACT

The thesis is essentially an introductory study to the works of Teresa Deevy. She is among a number of modern Anglo-Irish dramatists whose plays have remained relatively unexplored by critics. These less well-known dramatists, who were active within a period of socio-economic and political unrests in post-Independence Ireland, also made significant contributions to the Irish Dramatic Movement. However, they have been overshadowed by the popularity of such pioneers of the Movement as W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge and Lady Gregory.

The thesis hopes to initiate greater interest in these other dramatists by undertaking a critical study of Deevy's plays, and more particularly of her heroines. These heroines are young, imaginative adolescents who are often at odds with the rural community in which they find themselves. Deevy's uniqueness as an Abbey dramatist stems from her portrayal of adolescence and the unusual individuality of her heroines. As well, she was successful in coordinating the various socio-literary and political influences of the time. As a result, she played an important role in the shift in modern Anglo-Irish drama from a propagandistic outlook

to a more artistic and literary intent.

The introductory chapter deals with the circumstances behind Deevy's role in this change. The change had actually begun before Deevy's arrival onto the Irish theatrical scene. Lennox Robinson had spearheaded the movement for a shift away from parochialism in Irish drama by founding the Dublin Drama League, and Yeats had seconded him with the introduction of elements of Japanese Nō drama into his plays. While in London to study lip-reading, Deevy was exposed to the works of the Continental dramatists. She was drawn particularly to Chekhov's technique in characterization. Chekhov assumed the role of objective realist in the presentation of his characters, who seemed to suggest their emotions more by silences and gestures than by words. At the same time, Deevy was aware of the literary conventions of the Irish National Theatre Society with which she had aligned herself, particularly its insistence on an Irish context for any play which was submitted to it.

A Disciple is Deevy's first attempt to dramatize her concept of the Irish heroine within a framework that not only fulfils the prerequisites of the Abbey Theatre but also reflects the foreign influences to which she had been drawn. She fails in her initial attempt primarily because, as chapter two argues, she loses track of her dramatic conception and concentrates

on pleasing her audience. Thus, her heroine, Ellie Irwin, makes us uncomfortable for we do not know whether to continue to laugh at her, as Deevy intends, or to sympathize with her, as the action of the play would sometimes lead us to do.

The King of Spain's Daughter, however, indicates that Deevy learns from her past mistakes for it is more unified, structurally, than its predecessor. The third chapter first surveys the glowing reviews which the play received after its first performance, then tries to justify the reviews. Deevy's depiction of Annie Kinsella is consistent precisely because she concentrates on the character. She introduces, in the course of the depiction, her adaptation of Chekhovian conflict within the self and conflict between the individual and the community. She also elaborates on the Syngian theme of the celebration of the imagination by investing her heroine with the mantle of the poet. Out of the richness of her imagination, Annie Kinsella creates an alternative form of existence.

Deevy's concept of the Irish heroine attains maturity in Katie Roche, which was the most popular and most complex of her works. Chapter four argues that Katie Roche is the quintessential modern Abbey heroine. She is both Irish and international and, as such, she exemplifies the new direction towards universality in characterization in the Irish drama.

Katie Roche's popularity with Irish audiences stems mainly from the complexity of her character. In the presentation of her heroine Deevy elaborates on the techniques which she had introduced in The King of Spain's Daughter. She dramatizes Katie's conflict with herself as well as that with her co-inhabitants in Lower Ballycar. Katie's inner conflict derives from uncertainty about herself; this uncertainty exacerbates the antagonism between herself and the community.

The conclusion is this: Deevy introduced a psychological and a more human slant to the definition of the Irish heroine through an imaginative dramaturgy that made the intangible aspects of her heroine plausible to Irish audiences. Despite an unsuccessful attempt to transfer this dramaturgy to an Irish hero in The Wild Goose, her significance to the Irish Dramatic Movement and to the study of Irish drama in general warrants greater critical attention. The Bibliography is followed by an Appendix listing those plays by Deevy which were performed at the Abbey Theatre and those broadcast by Radio Telefis Eireann.