

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN, TRINITY COLLEGE

**The Theology of Teresa Deevy,
Exhuming the Playwright's Life and Later Works**

Samuel James DeMattio

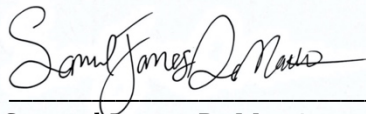
A Thesis submitted to the School of English at Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Letters, 2025.

Declaration

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Samuel James DeMattio", is written over a light blue rectangular background. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Samuel James DeMattio

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*She had said part of what she had to say, but there were other words burning inside of her
so I wonder, as she takes her place in the great beyond, was she supposed to say it all or
just put the lights on so that someone else might now step from the wings and continue the
dialogue... Give her, her immortality, for it was justly earned in a never ceasing no man's
land where the living is only easy in song.*

-Imani Perry, Looking for Lorraine

**Introduction:
The Woman Theologian**

In undertaking this dissertation my initial objective could be summarized in two words, *biography* and *erasure*. In the wake of new historicism, biographical considerations have become increasingly essential when re-examining an author's work, particularly authors whose lived experience existed within the intersections of historically marginalized identities, i.e., gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, religion, creed, caste, etc. Bearing this in mind, Teresa Deevy was an author obscured by the constricting gender realities of the Free State and early Republic, a complex period of postcolonial reconfiguration, exacerbated by the mass scapegoating and subjugation of working-class women by institutions of both Church and State. As a playwright whose work ostensibly disrupted this sociocultural framework, I began to position Deevy as a woman "celebrated in life, forgotten in death, and relegated to the margins of both literary and theatrical history." To this end, I was primarily concerned with the precarious nature of her literary legacy in the context of collective cultural memory and canonical configuration. However, I came to understand that said positioning summarily dismissed her life and work to something anecdotal. In centering the gender politics of her life and the "lost nature" of her death, I fear I inadvertently reduced Deevy from "subject" to "object," positioning her as a sacrificial offering to the very canonical discourse I sought to subvert.

Inevitably I moved beyond this thinking, and the work produced on these pages is far more concerned with Deevy's considerations of the metaphysical. Once I began to critically engage with her later works, specifically her final three plays, *Supreme Dominion* (1957), *In the Cellar of My Friend* (1957), and *One Look and What it Led To* (1962) I noticed an emerging theological framework that explored the profound

dimensions of historical revisionism, revision of the self, and feminist revisionist myth-making. To this end, I began to examine these three plays as not only the work of a dramatist, but also that of a theologian. Noted feminist liberation theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid defines “the woman theologian” as a *confessor*, because she “(authors) a belief located in the combination of some theological episteme,” in which she proffers both “challenges and continuations through different epochs.”¹ According to Althaus-Reid, the woman theologian “confesses the past by discerning a transmission of beliefs while expecting two things to happen.” The first is that “the continuation and representation that her theological praxis will happen again.” This is “a belief in resurrections,” i.e. her work will assume greater importance beyond her own lifetime. Althaus-Reid asserts that every theological community “deals with and elaborates on the memory of significative events which provide encouragement for new Catholic action and reflection, as well as forgiveness for the oppressive theological past.”

Second, the woman theologian expects “her encounter of communities from past and present to create a new understanding.”² Working within this framework, I began to reconsider the biographic in the context of the spiritual and religious quality of both Deevy’s upbringing and later life. This effort feels particularly pertinent as an “original contribution of knowledge,” as a comprehensive biographical overview of Deevy’s life is not extant.

In his 1956 essay “Teresa Deevy: An Introduction” the poet John Jordan introduces the observation that Deevy’s career should be categorized into two distinct

¹ Marcella Althaus-Reid, “Kneeling,” essay, in *The Queer God: Sexuality and Liberation Theology* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 13.

² Althaus-Reid, p. 14.

periods, the “Abbey period” (1930-1936) and the “post Abbey period” (1946 – 1963).³ The first chapter of this dissertation explores Deevy’s “Abbey period” and draws heavily from the biographic efforts of early Deevy advocates, particularly Frank McEvoy’s 1966 lecture to The Kilkenny Literary Society, “Teresa Deevy: Her Plays,” Sean Dunne’s 1976 biography in *The Journal of Irish Literature*, “A Teresa Deevy Number,” and Martina Ann O’Doherty’s 1995 essay in *The Waterford Archaeological and Historical Society Journal*, “Teresa Deevy: Playwright (1894-1963).” These three primary works, in conversation with extensive biographical research conducted through from various archival materials, seek to illuminate a more comprehensive understanding of Deevy’s life and work, and by extension, her theology. Additionally, this chapter explores how Deevy’s six plays produced at the National theatre can be grouped together, ostensibly, through a lens of gendered violence.

In positioning Free State women as the sacrificial objects of Church and State, and by extension as scapegoats of hypermasculine postcolonial reconfiguration, Deevy crafts a dramaturgy of ritualized performance which immortalizes the caste system of gender subjugation within twentieth century Irish theocracy. Heroines like Lena in *The Reapers*, Ellie Irwin in *In Search of Valor*, Min Donovan in *Temporal Powers*, Annie Sullivan in *The King of Spain’s Daughter*, Eileen Connolly in *The Wild Goose*, and the titular *Katie Roche*, each confront the precarity of marriage, and collectively represent a generation of women caged in by social convention and left with limited options. This observation is not new, as this framework of ritual, gender, and violence run concurrent throughout much Deevy scholarship of the past thirty years. This being said, there has

³Jordan, John. “Teresa Deevy: An Introduction”, *Irish University Review* 1:8 (Spring, 1956), p. 13.

been a great deal of attention paid to these early Abbey plays, in part due to limited access of Deevy's later work, the majority of which was published for the first time in the 2017 anthology, *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed, Volume II*.

My second chapter functions as an extension, or addendum to my first chapter, and seeks to examine Deevy's "Post-Abbey period" including her brief return to the National Theatre in 1945. I then address Deevy's dismissal from Ernest Blythe, and her subsequent progression towards new media, as she begins writing for radio and television. I pay particular attention to each radio play that was broadcast for public consumption, noting a through line of "observing the marvelous in the ordinary."⁴ Looking outwards, Deevy post Abbey period offers an introspective journey into the self. Jordan notes that it is during this time that she begins to work "in the field of pure, unexplicated, poetic statement."⁵ It is the quotidian nature of this poetic statement that fascinates, as her writing becomes less overtly political and more meditative, clearly rooted in an abundant inner life. Subsequently, my following chapters venture beyond the biographic, and seek to re-examine each of Deevy's final three plays through a unique theological lens.

My third chapter examines Deevy's antepenultimate play *Supreme Dominion*, first staged in 1957 at the Franciscan Hall of Merchant's Quay, during the Dublin Centenary Celebration of Fr. Luke Wadding.⁶ Utilizing a dual lens of medieval hagiography and Liberation theology, or "Liberation hagiography," I explore the

⁴ Chris Morash, "Introduction," essay, in *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed: Volume 2* (New York, NY: Mint Theater Company, 2013). p. xvii

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Martina Ann O'Doherty, "Deevy: A Bibliography," essay, in *Jubilee Issue: Teresa Deevy and Irish Women Playwrights*, No. 1, vol. 25 (Dublin: Irish University Review, 1995), 166.

dimensions of historical revision existent throughout the text. *Supreme Dominion* dramatizes the life of Wadding, a sixteenth-century Irish priest remembered as both a militant advocate for home rule and a progenitor of Irish liberation theology. The entirety of the play is set in Rome, spanning the duration of the Irish Confederate Wars, as Wadding labors to rally support from Europe's Catholic elite. To this end Deevy positions Wadding, a figure posthumously remembered as "the greatest Irishman of his century,"⁷ as a patron saint for Irish Nationalism. Much like her peers Kate O'Brien and Frank O'Connor, Deevy embraced "an impulse towards republicanism compounded by disillusionment for the gendered violence of the Irish Catholic state."⁸ Here Deevy embodies the woman theologian's impulse to "confess the past," with the keen understanding that "the continuation and representation of her theological praxis will happen again."

My fourth chapter examines Deevy's penultimate play, *In the Cellar of my Friend*, written in the late 1950s towards the end of her life. The play is, at its core, a comedy of errors in which each character is operating with a different understanding of the prior twenty-four hours. These various miscommunications unravel to illuminate what appears to be a tale of unrequited love. However, boiling just under the surface are elements of allegory and confession, both rooted in a delicious spiritual mysticism. Utilizing a lens of Queer theology, specifically the application of Miguel Diaz's *Queer God de Amor*, as well as Deevy personal correspondence and family biography, this chapter

⁷ Urban Flanagan, *Luke Wadding* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1957), p. 1.

⁸ Eibhear Walshe, "Lost Dominions: European Catholicism and Irish Nationalism in the Plays of Teresa Deevy," essay, in *Jubilee Issue: Teresa Deevy and Irish Women Playwrights*, No. 1, vol. 25 (Dublin: Irish University Review, 1995), p. 133.

seeks to illuminate new dimensions of the play that have previously gone unexplored. Here Deevy invokes the woman theologian's impulse "to embrace the memory of significant events," providing encouragement for new Catholic understanding, as well as "forgiveness for the oppressive theological past."

My fifth chapter examines Deevy's final play, *One Look and What it Led To*, written just before her death in 1963 and broadcast posthumously on RTÉ in 1964. The play functions as a dramatic biblical revision in which Deevy retells the four gospel accounts attributed to Mary Magdalene. Utilizing a dual lens of Midrashic literary criticism and feminist revisionist myth-making, this chapter expands outwards, as Deevy embraces an inclination towards a continental Catholicism in which women become the subjects of their own revisionist mythologies. Here Deevy embraces the woman theologian's final endeavor to engage with "communities from past and present in order to create a new understanding." In close reading *One Look and What it Led To* alongside *Supreme Dominion* and *In the Cellar of My Friend*, I set out to interrogate Deevy's relationship with the Catholic imaginary, as together these plays collectively explore a spiritual temporality that looks to the future by reconsidering the past.

Chapter One:

A Biographical Sketch: Early Life & “The Abbey Period” (1930 – 1936)

Teresa Deevy, known affectionately as “Tessa” throughout her life, was born on 21st of January, 1894, to Edward and Mary Deevy at “Landscape,” the family home in Waterford city. Born in Ballycloyne, Co. Kilkenny to a family of farmers, Edward Deevy represents a generation of middle-class Irish Catholics born before the famine of the 1840s who were able to achieve significant economic prosperity and upward class mobility.⁹ In the wake of both financial instability and burgeoning conversations surrounding land reform, Edward abandoned agriculture to pursue the life of a merchant. In 1867 he went into business with his friend John Upton and opened a drapery shop in Kilkenny town. Their flagship location proved lucrative and by 1876 the pair opened a second branch in Waterford city. After Upton's death, Edward became the sole owner of the business, re-constituting as Edward Deevy & Co. Ltd. He married Mary Deevy, neé Feehan, in 1874 and relocated to Waterford, purchasing a small house on Eldon Terrace.¹⁰

Mary Deevy has been described posthumously as “a woman who possessed considerable tenacity.” The daughter of John Feehan, a wealthy businessman and former Lord Mayor of Kilkenny, Mary was raised among the county's well-to-do Catholic elite. Her elder brother, Fr. Tom Feehan was a parish priest in the Diocese of Ossory, who rose to national prominence for his involvement with the Land League, a political organization of the late 19th century.¹¹ The Land League sought to abolish landlordism and enable low-income tenant farmers to own the land they worked and

⁹ Chris Morash, p. x

¹⁰ Sean Dunne. “The Journal of Irish Literature: A Teresa Deevy Number”, Proscenium Press, Volume XIV, No. 2 (May, 1985), p. 4.

¹¹ Ibid

cultivated. Historian R. F. Foster asserts that in the Irish countryside the league "reinforced the politicization of rural Catholic nationalism, partly by defining that identity against urbanization, landlordism, Englishness and — implicitly — Protestantism."¹² In 1882 Fr. Feehan utilized his clerical position to organize the wider community, urging his congregants to band together and combat the drastically increasing cost of rent, as well as the widespread eviction of tenant farmers. Fr. Feehan's sermons put him at odds with his Bishop, Patrick Moran, ultimately resulting in his censoring and imprisonment. "The Diary of Fr. Feehan" an account of his time in incarceration, was extant in *Landscape* until at least the 1970s.¹³

Three of Fr. Feehan's most pronounced attributes would later manifest in Deevy; namely, religious devotion, social consciousness through political activism, and a love for the written word. He has also been noted as having "a profound effect on his younger sister Mary, a deeply religious woman who passed her Catholicism onto her children;" two of whom became nuns and one who became a Jesuit priest. In addition to her piety, Deevy would later celebrate her mother's belief in the value of the imagination, recalling that during childhood Mary "would instruct her to invent small stories about the everyday happenings of their home."¹⁴ This would eventually serve as the inspiration for her short story "Flashback," which recounts the safe and creative space that *Landscape* afforded the Deevy children. This is one of multiple semi-autobiographical short stories Deevy authored towards the end of her life under the

¹² Robert F. Foster. *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*, Penguin Pr., London, 1988, p. 415.

¹³ Christie Fox. "Teresa Deevy." *Irish Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide*, edited by Alexander G. Gonzalez, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 2006, p. 84.

¹⁴ Sean Dunne. "The Journal of Irish Literature: A Teresa Deevy Number", Proscenium Press, Volume XIV, No. 2 (May, 1985), p. 4.

pseudonym “Will O’ the Wisp.”¹⁵ One of Mary’s greatest ambitions was for her daughter to produce a book. Though she died in 1930, shortly after Deevy’s debut at the National Theatre, Mary’s memory would be honored six years later on the dedication page of Deevy’s first major publication, Gollancz’s *Famous Plays 1935–1936*, which reads, “To mother, as we planned.”¹⁶

In 1881, Edward and Mary Deevy relocated from their small home on Eldon Terrace to a much larger house on Passage Road called “Landscape.” It was there that Deevy was born the last of thirteen children, with eight older sisters and four older brothers; Edward Nicholas (1875-1936), Ann Marie (1876-1939), Margaret I (1877-1877), Mary “Molly” (1878-1917), Agnes (1880 – 1952), Josephine “Jo” (1882 – 1960), Francis “Fan” (1883 – 1975), Margaret II (1885 – 1961), John Aloysius (1887 – 1969), William Anthony (1889 – 1967), Henry (1890 – 1890) and Ellen “Nell” (1891 – 1954), all raised in Waterford.¹⁷ Sean Dunne notes in his 1985 essay “A Teresa Deevy Number” that the Waterford of Deevy’s childhood, still split after the death of Parnell, was rife with political turmoil and social unrest. The year of her birth 1894, saw the rise of the indomitable John Edward Redmond “who inspired significant riots during a pig-buyers’ strike.”¹⁸ Redmond was an Irish nationalist politician, barrister, and MP in the House of

¹⁵ Deevy’s reasons for writing as “Will O’ the Wisp” are unknown, however manuscripts from the Teresa Deevy Archive at Maynooth University reveal that she did in fact attempt to publish at least two short prose pieces under said pseudonym, “Flashback” and “Adventure.” While ultimately, it appears that neither piece was selected for publication, both manuscripts containing encouraging feedback from journal editors for the quality of “Mr. Wisp’s writing.”

¹⁶ Teresa Deevy, “Katie Roche,” essay, in *Famous Plays of 1935 - 1936*, ed. Victor Gollancz (London, England: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1936).

¹⁷ Jack Deevy. 1980, June 17th. “Letter from Jack Deevy to Patience Chika Ochu.” The Teresa Deevy Archive, Maynooth University. PP/6/16 (1)

¹⁸ Dunne, p. 5.

Commons, remembered as the driving force behind the Home Rule Act of 1914.”¹⁹

While there is no known record of the Deevy family’s direct involvement with Redmondite politics, contemporary readers can trace a progressive journey from the public cycle of political violence at play throughout Deevy’s youth, to the interior cycle of domestic violence continuous throughout her later work at the National Theatre.

Despite Waterford’s political turbulence, Deevy enjoyed many comforts throughout her childhood at Landscape, a large stone house on a sizable estate with two live-in servants. In 1896 her father passed away rather suddenly, leaving behind a fortune that would keep the family financially stable. Deevy’s three brothers left home while she was still a young girl, leaving her to be raised exclusively by women; her mother and seven older sisters, each of whom would have a significant impact on her faith, sense of independence, and relationship with men.²⁰ Like her sisters before her, Deevy was educated at the Ursuline Convent in Waterford, a school renowned for their advanced curriculum and progressive ideology. Now in their fourth century of continuous operation, and rebranded as “St. Angela’s Ursuline,” the school is one of the oldest secondary-level institutions for girls in Ireland.²¹ Deevy stayed as a boarder despite only living thirty minutes from the campus, as this was the norm for girls from well-to-do Catholic families. Her elder sister Mary, known to the Deevy family as “Molly,” was a nun at the convent during the duration of Deevy’s schooling. Unlike Deevy, who was “robust and fit for much of her life,” Molly suffered from a “physically

¹⁹ Pat Muldowney, “Redmondism and Political Violence, The Pig Buyers of Ballybricken: Founders of Irish Democracy?,” essay, in *The Hidden History of John Redmond: Cover-Up or Incompetence?* (Belfast, Northern Ireland: Athol Books, 2018), p. 1.

²⁰ Dunne. pp. 5-6.

²¹ Ibid

weak constitution,” ultimately succumbing to the great influenza outbreak of 1917, just five years after Deevy’s graduation.²²

Deevy was a model student during her time at St. Angela’s, and was well-liked by both her instructors and peers. Dunne notes that Deevy’s “involvement in school life was total. She never seems to have been rebellious in the way of many writers, and her acquiescence in the school system was unquestioned. In her life and work she was a woman who observed and encouraged rather than one who rebelled and criticized, and she seemed really aware of the world as database to be explored rather than as a set of systems to be reacted against.”²³ As Dunne describes, Deevy was heavily involved in the school’s various extra-curricular activities, participating as a second soprano in the school choir, and as left half-back on the Hockey team during an undefeated season. Additionally, she was a gifted musician, having received an honors certificate in piano in 1910. Perhaps most notably, records of Deevy’s time at St. Angela’s pinpoint her early beginnings as a writer. During her final year Deevy authored two major contributions to the school magazine, *St. Ursula’s Annual*. The first of which functioned as a love letter to the school’s English department entitled “Books We Have Read.” She mentions several texts, among them George A. Birmingham’s *Spanish Gold* and Ian Hay’s *The Right Stuff*. The only play mentioned is Maeterlinck’s *Blue Bird*. Even in her youth Deevy’s criticism skewed towards the positive and sincere, qualities that remained throughout her adult life as a literary critic for various Dublin periodicals. Her second contribution was a “Diary of the School Year,” co-authored with classmate Kitty Sheridan, a comprehensive

²² Christie Fox. “Teresa Deevy.” *Irish Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide*, edited by Alexander G. Gonzalez, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 2006, p. 85.

²³ St. Angela’s Ursuline, *The St. Ursula’s Annual*, Waterford, Ireland. 1911.

account of everyday life at the school. Said diary offered insight into the extent to which “Catholicism infiltrated nearly every aspect of students day-to-day lives.”²⁴

The 1911 edition of *St. Ursula's Annual* also reveals “a formal and informal curriculum of music, sport, drama, critical writing, journalism, and debating. A debate in 1911 asked both audience members and participants to consider whether women should have equal social and political rights with men,” while a series of guest lecturers that year reflect a variety of topics including “the work of Sheridan Le Fanu, approaches to studying history, the development of Irish music, the origins of Saint Bridget, and the genre of the passion play.” Additionally, “regular school trips to musical recitals and concerts in the city occurred and students were encouraged to write and perform original plays.” Theatre historian Cathy Leeney references Deevy’s contributions to the *Annual* as evidence of an “optimistic, energetic and intellectually alive” young woman, while O’Doherty asserts that they attest to an “infectious ebullience.” Deevy graduated from St. Angela’s in 1912, and upon completion of her terminal examination certification, received honors in English and Music, and passed courses in Irish, French, Domestic Economy, and Hygiene.²⁵

In a 1944 essay for *The Dublin Magazine*, the writer Temple Lane identifies St. Angela’s as a formative environment for Deevy’s interpersonal and artistic development, stating “the fastidiousness of (Deevy’s) approach, partly inherent, is reinforced by early surroundings from which all of her plays derive — the Ursuline Convent in Waterford, the nuns with their names in religion making ‘sweet Symphonies’

²⁴ Dunne, p. 7

²⁵ Ibid

— Mother Christina, Mother Cecilia, Mother St. Kevin, Mother Austin herself the musician. Trees surrounded the convent above the estuary.” Expanding outwards to greater Waterford, Lane identifies Deevy’s fondness for the Waterford Harbor, “where the red-funneled, deep-throated steamers berthed near Reginald’s Tower, the older sailing ships tied up also, ships with fanciful figureheads and romantic names.” She then moves on to Deevy’s fondness for the River Suir, “elevated by green slopes into the approximate dimension of dream, a tenable castle presented its white facade, not deromanticized by its irreverent local appellation, Slettery’s Battery... It was the whole of life in microcosm. Nobody need say that Deevy’s plays happen in a non-existent world. Admittedly they move on two planes, but one of these is Waterford.”²⁶

In 1913 Deevy would leave her native Waterford to join the ranks of the first generation of Irish women to attend university. She matriculated at University College Dublin where she enrolled in an arts degree, with aspirations of becoming a teacher. Unfortunately, this dream would be cut short by the development of early onset Ménière’s Disease, a condition of the inner ear that resulted in hearing loss. She then transferred to University College Cork, presumably to be closer to home and to begin receiving treatment at the Cork Ear, Eye, and Throat Hospital. In a 1966 address to the Kilkenny Literary Society, Frank McEvoy claims that Deevy’s move to Cork was instrumental in her literary path, as then UCC President, Sir Bertram Windle had been “taken by the satirical bent of her essays and encouraged her to pursue journalism.” By

²⁶ Temple Lane, "The Dramatic Art of Teresa Deevy," *The Dublin Magazine* 21.4 Oct.-Dec. 1946

the time Deevy completed her studies in 1917 she had become almost completely deaf. She then went to London to study lipreading.²⁷

During her years in London Deevy began utilizing the theatre as a means of regaining verbal communication. Despite becoming completely deaf, she attended as many plays as she could, often reading the scripts beforehand in order to practice her lipreading. Ibsen, Chekhov, and Shaw became major sources of inspiration during this period. Deevy would later credit Shaw as an igniting source of inspiration, recalling

While in London I went very often to the theatre — reading the plays first, when possible, then following them on the stage... One night returning from the theatre I felt very strongly the urge to put “the sort of life we live in Ireland” into a play. The piece we had just seen depicted English life, and I felt how very different these are from the people I know. About this time one of the plays I read was *Heartbreak House*. Shaw had called it ‘a fantasy in the Russian manner on English themes,’ and I said proudly to myself my play will be ‘a fantasy in the Russian manner on Irish themes.’ — But there was a long way to go... I returned to Ireland — this was in 1919, and Ireland faced the Terror, my play pushed into the background.”²⁸

She returned to Waterford amidst the War of Independence in 1920. She first made a name for herself in a Waterford news office as a writer for the *Green and Gold Magazine* from 1920-1928. During this period, she also “contributed several articles to the national press, and completed a novel which was never published.”²⁹ In the wake of the War Deevy’s love of theatre became secondary to her growing interest in politics. Having been a great admirer of Constance Markievicz, she joined the Waterford Chapter of Cumann Na mBan, a Republican women's paramilitary organization subordinate to

²⁷ McEvoy, pp. 1-18.

²⁸ Matthew Hoehn and Teresa Deevy. “Teresa Deevy.” *Catholic Authors: Biographical Sketches*, St. Mary's Abbey, Newark, NJ, 1952, pp. 121–122.

²⁹ Hoehn and Deevy, p. 122.

both the Irish Volunteer Force and the Irish Republican Army. In this capacity she would visit with political prisoners at Ballybricken Jail, “incurring her family’s displeasure.”³⁰ Records of a Waterford Jail break in 1921 proffer a potential incentive for Deevy’s visits, as the women of Cumann Na mBan served as intermediaries between local organizers and the incarcerated.³¹ However, the degree of her involvement (if any) remains for the most part unknown. Ultimately, this period of social activism proved instrumental in Deevy’s dramaturgy, as politics, religion, and land would soon emerge as major themes in her plays.

In 1928 Deevy submitted her first play, a one act entitled *Reserved Ground* to the Abbey Theatre. The Abbey board ultimately passed on the play, with the rejection note reading; “The author showed power and promise. She has the gift of writing, but everything in the play should be psychologically true, and it should not have the sentimental ending of a third-rate novel.” Ironical feedback, considering the “Deevy style” would later become synonymous with psychological plays a provincial life, described by Lane as “utterly lacking sentimentality.”³² Deevy’s next play, the script of which has become lost and the title unknown, was also rejected, but this time one of the members of the reading committee was interested in helping her with her next piece. She hoped the mysterious and unnamed party was Lady Gregory but proved to be resident

³⁰ Walshe, Eibhear. “Ineffable Longings - the Dramas of Teresa Deevy.” University College Cork, Ireland , Mellen Press, 2003, p. 5.

³¹ Christina O’Connor, “Cumann Na mBan in Waterford and the Voice of Women,” *Waterford City & County Council, Online Talk Series* (lecture, Waterford County Museum , October 21, 2020).

³² Lane. pp. 1-4.

director Lennox Robinson. A life-long friendship followed, as did Deevy's career as an Abbey playwright.³³

1930 saw Deevy's first Abbey production, a three-act play entitled *The Reapers* which, set "shortly after the events of the War," dealt with "two families in Catholic big houses and the psychological conflict between them."³⁴ The script for *The Reapers* has since become lost, however excerpts of the play remain existent via reviews from the original production, academic writing on the play, and the Abbey Theatre's archival materials. A preserved line from Deevy's heroine Lena offers some insight into the author's early dramaturgical impulse when she remarks: "I'll marry. That's the best in the long run: you're settled then for life, or if it turns out unhappy you can take up something with real interest then, because you won't be thinking of marriage any longer: yes, I'll marry."³⁵ Here Deevy begins to examine a narrative at the heart of much of her early work, the status of marriage and women amidst the complex gender dimensions of a postcolonial Ireland.

The Reapers received somewhat mixed reviews and while deemed to "have many faults", was celebrated "for the author's unique voice and potential."³⁶ Drama critic Andre E. Malone in his summary of the theatrical year for *Dublin Magazine* wrote that "while the opening of the Gate Theatre was the significant event of the year, the new dramatist from whom most may be expected is Miss T. Deevy." Yeats later seconded this show of support by affirming that the play "showed great promise and was full of

³³ McEvoy, pp. 1-18.

³⁴ Shelley Troupe, "'TSI: Teresa Deevy, or What Do We Know about the Reapers?,'" Teresa Deevy Archive; National University of Ireland, Maynooth, May 23, 2014.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ McEvoy, pp. 1-18

interesting material.”³⁷ However, *The Reapers* was not universally admired, as evidenced by Joseph Holloway’s diary entry: “Some of the characters attacked religion and others the Republicans and so the prejudice of the (Abbey Theatre) Directors was appeased and a bad play accepted... One hoped against hope that something would come along to redeem it but alas nothing.”³⁸ Deevy would reflect on this moment towards the end of her life, writing;

The theatre was well filled, the play seemed to be liked: in a quiet, unenthusiastic way the audience showed interest... Without any illusions to this being a huge success, I was unprepared for the very severe notice in *The Irish Times* the next morning!... Other notices which followed in a more kindly vein and declared that the play showed ‘promise’ ...Promise! No word could have seemed more deadly to me! Had I not put into this play all that I had felt and thought and believed! (No wonder *The Irish Times* had complained of ‘a spate of words’!) This had seemed to me the outcome of my life’s work,— and they talked of ‘promise!...’ It took some time to realize that this was the start of a journey, not the road’s end, as I had thought. But the journey is worth the making, with all its ups and downs.³⁹

Deevy’s success at the Abbey Theatre continued in August of 1931 with the production of a new one-act comedy. The title of the play varies; originally entitled *A Disciple* when first staged in 1931, it was published as *The Enthusiast* in 1938, and was broadcast by BBC television in 1939 and later republished in 1942 as *In Search of Valour*. Leeney notes that

The three titles progressively redefine Deevy’s central character Ellie Irwin, from follower, to energetic zealot, to a more heroic implication: as one in quest of valour. *In Search of Valour* best expresses the central idea of the play: the female impulse towards heroism, and the psychological and ideological contortions that impulse must take. The play’s series of titles suggests the

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Matthew Hoehn, and Teresa Deevy. “Teresa Deevy.” *Catholic Authors: Biographical Sketches*, St. Mary’s Abbey, Newark, NJ, 1952, pp. 121–122.

challenge Deevy faced in expressing this idea in a social context where heroism was automatically associated with masculinity. Irish women's conventional roles were limited to being the supporters or helpmates of male heroes.⁴⁰

As Leeney mentions, the play depicts a young servant girl named Ellie Irwin as she and her mistress await word on the whereabouts of the recently escaped local serial-killer, "Jack the Scalp."

Ellie dreams of achieving a life that matches the splendor of her fantasies, many of which are fueled by a production of *Coriolanus* she attended years prior. Throughout much of the play's action Ellie laments her status, her home, and her generation; "Them were best of that were born long ago. Wirra - why weren't I born in a brave time."⁴¹ Both her socioeconomic status, as well as the "illegitimacy" of her birth, deny Ellie the possibility of escape via marriage. At the play's conclusion even Jack, a self-proclaimed serial killer, refuses her hand. Ellie's status as "an undesirable bride" positions her as a sacrificial offering to the newly established caste-system of the Free State. Here Deevy begins utilizing theatre as a sacrificial space, creating a ritual in which audiences were forced to not only listen to the unspoken injustice of everyday womanhood, but watch their suffering play out on stage in a manner akin to that of a provincial passion play. Deevy also begins to explore a life-long theme of her work, the contradiction of desire and the impossibility of fulfilment in the wake of gendered violence.

Deevy's next play *Temporal Powers* continues her thematic exploration of marriage, ineffable longing, and sacrifice among working-class women. The play

⁴⁰ Cathy Leeney. "Teresa Deevy (1894–1963): Exile and Silence." *Irish Women Playwrights, 1900-1939: Gender & Violence on Stage*, Peter Lang, New York, 2010, p. 173.

⁴¹ Teresa Deevy. 'In Search of Valour.' *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed: Volume II*, edited by Jonathan Bank et al., Mint Theater Company, New York, NY, 2017, p. 13.

chronicles the trials of Min and Michael Donovan, a young married couple navigating their first twenty-four hours of homelessness, post eviction. Upon discovering a sack of stolen money stashed in an abandoned ruin just outside of town, the couple finds themselves at the center of a spiritual debate regarding homelessness, ambition, and the “will of God.” After an unfortunate run-in with the local gardaí, Michael blames Min for the couple's various misfortunes, citing her ambition and sexuality as the reason for their collective downfall. He then resigns to immigrate to the United States by himself, leaving Min in the care of his sister. Refusing to be made the scapegoat for his wrongdoing, the play ends in an eruptive confrontation in which Min identifies her husband's violence as the true root of their problems; “It is Ned is to blame! And yourself Mick! When you first lifted your hand to me the wrong was done.”⁴²

Deevy's script won the Abbey's inaugural new author prize in 1932 and received a production in September of that same year. Hailed by *The Guardian* as “among the best (plays) the Abbey Theatre has ever staged,” critics were unanimous in their enthusiastic praise and confidently expected that the play would be seen regularly in the years to come. “There seems little doubt that *Temporal Powers* will figure often in the Abbey Repertory,” predicted *The Stage*. Instead, the play was revived only once in 1937 after a letter writing campaign from the public, and all but vanished for the remainder of the twentieth century.⁴³ The reception of *Temporal Powers* focused on the

⁴² Teresa Deevy, ‘Temporal Powers.’ *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed: Volume I*, edited by Jonathan Bank et al., Mint Theater Company, New York, NY, 2013, p. 49.

⁴³ *Temporal Powers* would receive its North American debut in 2011, produced by Mint Theater Company as part of Origin Theatre Company's 1st Irish Festival, “the first only festival of its kind devoted to producing and presenting the theatrical work of Irish diaspora playwrights.” The production received critical acclaim, and was nominated for four 1st Irish Awards (the most of any production that year) including Best Production, Best Director, Best Design, and Best Lead Actor.

strength of its antiheroine, whose ambitions defied convention by exceeding those of her husband. It is worth noting that “the play's emphasis on eviction, domestic violence, impoverishment, and emigration were social forces that originally went uncelebrated at the National Theatre.” Eibhear Walshe Notes that “twenty-first century audiences have been struck by the relevance of the play's debate over temporal, spiritual, and natural powers in the context of the underdeveloped and untested civic justice system of the early Irish Free State.”⁴⁴ What's more, Deevy's years of service as a mutual-aid worker with The Legion of Mary, caring for Dublin's vast population of unhoused and homeless women, further illuminates the authors personal connection to the spiritual and political dimensions of the play.⁴⁵

Shortly after the success of *Temporal Powers*, Deevy wrote to her friend Florence Hackett,

Something will have to be done about the theatre in Ireland. It's appalling. . . . Some sort of interchange between London-Irish players (who are very often "on the rocks") and the Abbey Company. The Abbey Co -- when it returns should be kept changing with another Co. of tip-top players. They are now familiar to Dublin audiences -- they have become "localized." I think so at least.

And then later in spring of 1935,

When in Dublin we called to the Abbey and saw Lennox Robinson. He says that because of the change of plans no Irish realistic plays are being done until after Xmas. He said he was delighted with the little play and that two of the other directors were also, and that W. B. Yeats said "he supposed it was all right." This was considered by the Robinsons (Mrs. was there too) rather a joke. They laughed over Yeats, and I learned that he does not care for my work. They did not tell me that, but on the following day we went out to the library where Frank O'Connor works, and had a very nice time with him. It was he who told me that Yeats does not care at all for my plays. Not very encouraging, but it is better to

⁴⁴ Eibhear Walshe. “Ineffable Longings - the Dramas of Teresa Deevy.” University College Cork, Ireland, Mellen Press, 2003, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁵ Martina Ann O'Doherty, “Teresa Deevy: Playwright (1894-1963),” *The Waterford Archeological and Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 60, pp. 109-115.

know. He said that is the reason my work was not brought on more at the Abbey.

At the time, Robinson and O'Connor were losing their own roles at the Abbey. The turmoil and shifting authorities at the National Theatre in the decline of Yeats are very well documented. The confusing turn from "Irish realistic plays" was to internationalize the repertory by promoting foreign playwrights, rather than domestic talent. Yeats launched an effort at reimagining the Abbey in late 1934, a year in which Deevy was not produced. "His intention was certainly to respond to widespread criticism of the recent Abbey production history, especially by Sean O'Faolain and Frank O'Connor." That had the effect, intentionally or not, to briefly exile from the leadership of Lennox Robinson, who had been Deevy's proponent. In March of 1935, "a new triumvirate of Directors was in place, including F. R. Higgins, Brinsley McNamara, and Hugh Hunt."⁴⁶

April of 1935 saw the debut of Deevy's fourth Abbey production, a one-act entitled *The King of Spain's Daughter*. The play tells the story of Annie Kinsella, a rebellious young peasant girl who attempts to stave off the inevitability of marriage while at odds with her abusive father. Irish theatre scholar Robert Welch would later dub Annie a "rural, Irish Miss Julie" – alluding to the character's insatiable appetite for life, and her dissatisfaction with the few roles open to her (wife or factory-worker). Annie flirts with any man she chooses, and although her abusive father Peter tries, he cannot subjugate her spirit. The elderly Mrs. Marks warns Annie's young suitor Jim

⁴⁶ John P. Harrington, "Teresa Deevy and Reoccurring Rediscovery of the Irish Playwright," in a lecture delivered at Mint Theater Company in 2017.

Harris to “have nothing to do with her” and advises him to “settle down with his sisters or get a sensible girl.” Love, romance, sex, these are illusions “better to be done without.” Here Deevy effortlessly encapsulates the ethos of rural Ireland in the 1930s, when it was often decided to avoid economic uncertainty by not marrying or having children.⁴⁷

Annie herself states that she “dreads” the prospect of children or resigning herself to a loveless marriage. Deevy’s conclusion remains open, the audience thinks that Annie will probably marry Jim after all; and she is drawn to him, not out of love or affection, but because of his determination to impress her. The play ends with her enthusiastically exclaiming “I think he’s a man that – supposin’ he was jealous – might cut your throat!”⁴⁸ This juxtaposition of emotional climax followed by poetic ambiguity would later become a staple of the “Deevy style.” *The King of Spain’s Daughter* received warm notices in the press and would be revived at the Abbey three times over the following three years. The Abbey brought the play to London in 1939, where it received a subsequent production with the Torch Theatre that same year. *The King of Spain’s Daughter* would go on to become Deevy’s most regularly published play; first in the June issue of *Theatre Arts Magazine* in 1935, in the March issue of *The Dublin Magazine* in 1936, in Macmillan’s *The One-Act Plays of Teresa Deevy* in 1939, in New Frontiers Press’s *The King of Spain’s Daughter and Other One-Act Plays* in 1947, in the Edwin Mellen Press’s *Selected Plays of Irish Playwright Teresa Deevy, 1894-1963* in 2003, in

⁴⁷ Robert Welch, “1926–1951: ‘The birth of a nation is no immaculate conception,’” Essay in *The Abbey Theatre, 1899-1999: Form and Pressure* (Oxford, 1999; online ed, Oxford Academic, 3 Oct. 2011)

⁴⁸ Teresa Deevy. “The King of Spain’s Daughter.” *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed: Volume II*, edited by Jonathan Bank et al., Mint Theater Company, New York, NY, 2017, p. 26.

Syracuse University Press's *Irish Women Dramatists 1908 -2001* in 2015, and in Mint Theatre Publishing's *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed Volume II* in 2017. The play has been treated as a time capsule for its unflinching depiction of the violence working-class women endured during the early years of Post-Independence Ireland. Deevy herself would refer to the play as a "comedy" rather than "tragedy," noting the absurd lack of options for young girls.⁴⁹

Marriage and scapegoating would become major themes of Deevy's work throughout the 1930s, reflecting the record low marriage rate in Ireland during the Free State period. This phenomenon was recorded in a groundbreaking three-part series by *Irish Times* columnist Mary Frances Keating entitled "Marriage is for Morons, Thinks Irishmen." Keating's work interrogated the "twisted fear of sex" that afflicted the young people of the Free State and early Republic. According to her, young people of the 1920s - 1950s were unable to "do so much as glance at each other without feeling they were doing something darkly wrong. Young women were more afraid of being named the kind of girl who would let a young man accompany her home after a dance than of the actual danger of walking alone at night." Men were called "fools for getting hooked into marriage, as youths are led to believe that girls are nothing less than manifestations of Satan," and that "women are there only to entice and destroy them" Keating wrote. Yet men were still getting unmarried women pregnant while all the while shunning marriage. "In Ireland, illegitimate births are frequently concealed, and

⁴⁹ McEvoy, pp. 1-18.

young unmarried mothers are usually hurried out of the country... with a ten-pound note and the parental injunction not to show their faces at home again.”⁵⁰

Leeney notes that from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, we can identify “numerous and complex reasons for the extraordinarily low marriage rate of the Free State period.” Chief amongst them was the system of inheritance known as primogeniture, or “the right of succession belonging to the firstborn child” in which legally, only firstborn sons could inherit family land and the financial security that came with it. “Younger sons often had to fend for themselves, resulting in migration to urban centers and mass waves of emigration abroad. The legacy of the Famine also played a major factor, as the trauma of starvation still lived at the forefront of collective consciousness, especially in rural communities which, according to the Census of 1926, made up 61% of the country’s population.”⁵¹ For these reasons there is a great irony in the emphasis on marriage by both the Catholic Church and the 1937 Constitution, as roughly half the adult population was unmarried. This irony was “sharper for women,” since for them “marriage usually meant loss of financial independence, and emotional and physical vulnerability to the will of their husbands.”⁵²

In his encyclical on Christian marriage, Pope Pius XI, quoting Saint Augustine, demanded “the ready subjection of the wife and her willing obedience.”⁵³ Thus “the

⁵⁰ Caelainn Hogan, *Republic of Shame: Stories from Ireland's Institutions for 'Fallen Women'*, Penguin Books, London, 2020, pp. 90-91.

⁵¹ Brendan M. Walsh, “Marriage in Ireland in the Twentieth Century” in *Marriage in Ireland*, ed. Art Cosgrove. Dublin: College Press, 1985, pp. 132-50.

⁵² Cathy Leeney, “Themes of Ritual and Myth in Three Plays by Teresa Deevy.” *Irish University Review*, Spring - Summer, 1995, Vol. 25, No. 1, *Silver Jubilee Issue: Teresa Deevy and Irish Women Playwrights*. Spring - Summer, 1995.

⁵³ Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*: Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Christian Marriage, Dec. 31, 1930 in *The Papal Encyclicals 1903-1939*, ed. Claudia Carlen (Raleigh: McGrath Publ. Co., 1981), pp. 391-414 (p. 395).

lives of single women differed radically from those of wives, far more than the lives of single men differed from those of husbands.”⁵⁴ With no effective birth control available the life of a married woman could be in danger as, according to Pius XI: “However much we may pity the mother whose health or even life is gravely imperiled in the performance of the duty allotted to her by nature, nevertheless what could ever be a sufficient reason for excusing in any way the direct murder of the innocent?”⁵⁵ The social and spiritual role of single women was, in contrast, ill defined. Pius XI warns of women without children (and one assumes he is excluding women with a religious vocation) “being considered outcasts, and slaves to the lust of men.”⁵⁶ Add to the very low marriage rates in post-treaty Ireland the restrictions on women within marriage (“debarred as they are by marriage for the Civil Service, from paid posts in local government, and from other influential occupations”), the powerful orthodoxies of the Catholic Church concerning contraceptives, and the fact that Deevy herself, nor her seven sisters ever married⁵⁷; it is not surprising that themes of marriage, “illegitimacy,” and courtship would recur throughout much of playwright’s work. These themes would eventually converge in arguably Deevy’s most celebrated psychological drama, *Katie Roche*.

Katie Roche premiered at the Abbey in 1936 to universal acclaim and would go on to become Deevy’s most enduring drama. The three-act play opens with the titular heroine working as a servant girl. We soon learn she is “the daughter of an unmarried

⁵⁴ Leeney, p. 3

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Sean Dunne, “Teresa Deevy”, *Journal of Irish Literature*, 14(2) (1985), pp. 3-17.

woman she never knew and bears the surname of a stranger who raised her out of charity. Her employer's brother Stanislas was once in love with her long-deceased mother and proposes at the end of Act I. The following two acts focus on their troubled, unhappy relationship."⁵⁸ There is a strong implication that the marriage is a sexual failure: "Three months now since we stood at the altar, and three times you drew from me."⁵⁹ As for social recognition of the marriage, it is non-existent except for Stan's married sister Margaret, who takes a poor view of Katie's behavior as a wife. She states disapprovingly: "I wouldn't leave my husband alone." Katie is not seen to behave as a wife should, and as for Stan, his frequent and prolonged absences are criticized by Frank, a neighbor, when, referring to Katie, he says, "Poor little thing. *Pause. Stan looks angrily at him. Then, very deliberate.* Not much of a life, supposed to be married."⁶⁰ In a very real sense Katie and Stan's marriage never took place.⁶¹ "The ritual has failed," because Stan never intended on marrying Katie as flesh and bone woman, but rather the phantasm of the lost love of his youth.

When Katie learns that her father was an aristocrat, and her mother was "a great beauty," she puts aside her saintly aspirations and decides she is "meant to be Grand." Her father, incognito as a traveling mystic, passes in and out of the play, arriving during moments of indecision to shame and even physically harm his unknowing daughter for her failures as a wife. Katie is often cited as the spiritual successor of Annie Kinsella, as

⁵⁸ Caoilfhionn Ní Bheacháin. "Sexuality, Marriage and Women's Life Narratives in Teresa Deevy's: A Disciple (1931), the King of Spain's Daughter (1935) and Katie Roche (1936)." *Estudios Irlandeses*, no. 7 (2012): 79–91.

⁵⁹ Teresa Deevy. 'Katie Roche.' *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed: Volume I*, edited by Jonathan Bank et al., Mint Theater Company, New York, NY, 2017, p. 50.

⁶⁰ Deevy, p. 88.

⁶¹ Cathy Leeney, p. 99

both women aspire to heroic ambitions beyond the suffocating constraints placed upon them by their fathers. Deevy places into question the very idea of a hero, for it is Annie and Katie who, through force of will, spin a kind of heroism out of themselves. For this reason, *Katie Roche* is arguably Deevy's most striking dramatic creation during her Abbey period. Described in 2017 by contemporary Irish stage actress Caoilfhionn Dunne as "a young woman who lives in a small town. She is a wild woman, but wild by other people's standards. She is creative and full of life, and it is that vitality that terrifies those around who are trying so desperately to maintain this sense of order that she defies."⁶² The play experienced success beyond the borders of Ireland. It was produced on Broadway in New York City the year after its debut, as part of the Abbey's 1937 North America tour. In 1938 the Abbey board restaged the original Dublin production in response to popular demand. It was then performed on London's West End and was even adapted for broadcast in both France and Sweden. Yet despite this success, *Katie Roche* would become Deevy's final play produced on the mainstage of Ireland's National Theatre during her lifetime.

Deevy's sixth Abbey production, *The Wild Goose* was staged in September of 1936. Set in 1692 during the height of the penal laws, the play explores "the contradictory pressures of country and of religion on the protagonist," Martin Shea, the "Wild Goose" of the title. Kirsty Lusk and Willy Maley note that "the title is a deliberate singularising of the familiar historical term 'wild geese' to suggest the dilemma of

⁶² C. Dunne & C. Byrne, 2017. "Katie Roche in Rehearsals." *Abbey Theatre*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_8IQSuRLoA

individual identity at this turbulent time.”⁶³ As a central character, Martin “evinces precisely the same attributes as Katie Roche, unable to choose definitively between a number of unsatisfactory options, struggling to be free in a narrowing universe. Unlike Katie, Martin is independent and propertied and therefore in control of his own destiny, but like Katie, that destiny is constricted by the state of his nation.” Martin finds himself at the crossroads of three paths, and must choose between joining the priesthood, enlisting with “the wild geese” in France, or marrying his sweetheart, Eileen Connolly.”⁶⁴

The dimensions of flight and emigration, previously explored in *Temporal Powers*, are also at play in *The Wild Goose*. It is interesting that the play explores Martin's limited options, not Eileen's, and concludes with his unhappy resignation to marry. *The Wild Goose* received mostly positive reviews from critics and received particularly effusive praise from Joseph Holloway. Holloway's diaries state that *The Wild Goose* proved, somewhat to his surprise, “a very tense dramatic work”: “The house was applauding heartily as I left the theatre after the final fall of the curtain. *The Wild Goose* interested me greatly.”⁶⁵ The play was subsequently broadcast in Australia by the BBC.

In 1938, Deevy's play *Holiday House* was accepted by the Abbey and a contract was signed, but ultimately lapsed. Previously thought to have been a one-act play, archived correspondence between Deevy and Mícheál Ó hAodha reveal that *Holiday*

⁶³ Kirsty Lusk and Willy Maley, “Drama out of a Crisis: James Connolly's *Under Which Flag* (1916) and Teresa Deevy's *The Wild Goose* (1936),” *Irish Studies Review* 30, no. 4 (2022): p. 458.

⁶⁴ Lusk and Maley, p. 455

⁶⁵ Joseph Holloway. *Joseph Holloway's Irish Theatre*, vol. I, ed. Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill (Dixon, CA: Proscenium Press, 1968) pp. 66 -67

House is in fact a three-act play.⁶⁶ The play's previous classification as a one-act is most likely a result of the existent script, which contains only the first act. Said script takes place in Co. Wexford during the month of August at Seafeld House, the holiday home of the Mackey family. Chris Morash notes that with *Holiday House*, "the distinctive sense of a world that is unnaturally still, almost stagnant, but is nonetheless animated by unarticulated passions becomes a feature of Deevy's dramaturgy."⁶⁷ In *Holiday House* Deevy explores the proverbial "cracks in the china" as the "seemingly innocuous arrival of two brothers and their wives at the same holiday home opens unspoken jealousies and fears, which barely break the surface between discussions of stowing luggage and making tea."⁶⁸ Said brothers, Neil and Derek Mackey have married each other's former sweetheart. The family matriarch "Mater," with the help of her anxious daughter Hetty, has arranged for the two couples to be reunited as neither could attend the others' wedding. The play reaches its climax with Neil and Jill going for a drive off stage, while Doris painfully confronts Derick for marrying another woman. However, the first act ends ambiguously with Mater setting lunch for the four former lovers.

Not long after Deevy's contract lapsed for *Holiday House*, a letter appeared in the *Irish Times* complaining about play selection at The Abbey and included Deevy in a list of authors who recently had work rejected. Deevy promptly offered a correction, stating; "I would like to point out that this play 'Holiday House' was accepted by the Abbey more than twelve months ago, and a contract for production was sent to me."

⁶⁶ Teresa Deevy to Micheál Ó hAodha, undated letter, "Letters from Teresa Deevy to Micheál Ó hAodha, 1947-1963," National Library of Ireland, MS 50,961.

⁶⁷ Morash, p. xiv

⁶⁸ Morash, p. xv

Her letter, which was published in the *Times*, also mentioned “evasive replies” from the management in response to her inquiries about scheduling, and finally notification that “the directors did not intend to keep their contract.”⁶⁹ No doubt, Deevy’s attempt to “publicly shame the Abbey management did little to endear her to them going forward.”⁷⁰ That same year *Temporal Powers* was announced for the Abbey’s UK and US tours, playing to both West End and Broadway houses, respectively. However, the play was later dropped from the lineup without explanation.

Later that year, Denis Johnston, a noted member of the Abbey’s rivaling Gate Theatre Company, tapped Deevy to adapt *In Search of Valour* for BBC Television. The film was first broadcast regionally to audiences in London and Northern Ireland on the 27th of May 1938, and again internationally on the flagship “BBC Television” on the 28th of June 1939.⁷¹ Deevy would later adapt her play *The King of Spain’s Daughter* for broadcast that following year. Both films received warm reception, resulting in multiple re-runs that same year. Close examination of the BBC’s Digital Archive illuminates that these titles made Deevy not only the first Irish citizen to write for television, but one of the first women of any nationality to write original narrative programming for the world’s oldest and largest English language broadcaster. An entry from the *Waterford Archeological and Historical Society Journal* reveals that these early successes resulted in the BBC commissioning a feature length film version of Deevy’s play *Katie Roche*, but the project was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II and ultimately abandoned.

⁶⁹ Teresa Deevy, “The White Seed,” *The Irish Times* (May 8, 1939), p. 8.

⁷⁰ Jonathan Bank, “Teresa Deevy, (1894-1963),” *The Suitcase Under the Bed*, July 21, 2017, <https://minttheater.org/production/the-suitcase-under-the-bed/?tab=authorbio>.

⁷¹ Willy Maley, “‘She Done Coriolanus at the Convent’: Empowerment and Entrapment in Teresa Deevy’s in *In Search of Valour*,” *Irish University Review*, 49(2) .Edinburgh University Press, November 1, 2019, p. 357.

⁷² However, her love for the medium never wavered, according to her friend Margaret Shanahan, Deevy regularly attended the cinema “especially if there happened to be an interesting subtitled foreign film showing. However, she was very alert and could follow most non-subtitled films also.” Her companion, Phyllis Doolan, remembers how she “used to explain difficult film dialogue to Deevy on scraps of paper which she would read by the light of a match, or else the couple would stop under streetlamps on their way home and Deevy would read Doolan's lips by lamplight.”⁷³ Deevy's success as a screenwriter was well documented, as famed actress Siobhán McKenna was once quoted in an *Irish Times* profile stating her long held desire to “act in the works of Miss (Teresa) Deevy in England and on Television.”⁷⁴

These successes aside, Deevy's next play, *Wife to James Whelan*, was turned down by the Abbey in 1942, thus ending her connection with the National Theatre. This rejection was personally traumatic for her, and her confidence never fully recovered. She labored for years over *Wife to James Whelan* before it was rejected by Ernest Blythe, the Abbey's new managing director. Below is an excerpt from an undated letter she wrote to her friend and fellow writer, Florence Hackett.

For ages now a play which will neither get finished or left alone has held me back. I don't know what length of time I've wasted on it (if it is waste) and I still love the thing and long to finish it...Last week it was (I thought) almost finished: and then I read it over and discovered it was hopeless, had gone flat. I decided to put the thing away and turn to something else. I felt desperate. No sooner do I

⁷² Martina Ann O'Doherty, “Teresa Deevy: Playwright (1894-1963),” *The Waterford Archeological and Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 60, pp. 109-115.

⁷³ Martina Ann O'Doherty, pp. 109-115.

⁷⁴ “Siobhán McKenna,” *The Irish Times Newspaper Online Archive*, June 15, 1956, <https://www.irishtimes.com/archive>.

try to concentrate on some new subject, then I fancy I can just work out the old one.⁷⁵

In March of 1942 an item appeared in the *Irish Times* reporting that

Miss Teresa Deevy, one of the most remarkable playwrights of Ireland, has completed a new play which, under the title 'Wife to James Whelan' will be produced by the Abbey Theater. Her plays are considered to be among the most excellent stage interpretations of the intricate working of the mind...⁷⁶

Deevy had indeed completed the play: "I felt the play was good and felt confident of it," she told Hackett. "But unfortunately, the Abbey has no intention of producing it." Ernest Blythe, the Abbey's managing director sent the play back, effectively ending the most important professional relationship of Deevy's life. Deevy confided to Hackett that,

Blythe's letter when returning it showed clearly that he had no use for my work—never asked to see any more. Said the characters are too like "Katie Roche". No one else could see this resemblance. Some of the actors, Cyril Cusack for one, protested to Blythe, and when he spoke of the likeness to "Katie Roche" they could not see that. The subject matter is quite different. I suppose every play by an author has a certain resemblance—the author's viewpoint, but that is all.⁷⁷

It is worth noting that Blythe's letter came on the heels of Deevy publishing a controversial "Letter to the Editor" in *The Irish Times* regarding the growing culture of literary censorship from the government. Deevy's letter was written in response to the banning Seán Ó Faoláin's novel *Bird Alone*, which was the sixth novel banned that year,

⁷⁵ Lionel Pilkington, "Historicizing is Not Enough: Recent Developments and Trends in Irish Theatre History," *Modern Drama* 47:4 (Winter 2004): 729.

⁷⁶ Matthew Hoehn and Teresa Deevy. "Teresa Deevy." *Catholic Authors: Biographical Sketches*, St. Mary's Abbey, Newark, NJ, 1952, pp. 121

⁷⁷ Lionel Pilkington, "Historicizing is Not Enough: Recent Developments and Trends in Irish Theatre History," *Modern Drama* 47:4 (Winter 2004): p. 729.

following Signe Toksvig's *Eve's Doctor*, Austin Clarke's *The Singing Men at Cashel*, Kate O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle*, Liam O'Flaherty's *Hollywood Cemetery*, and Norah Hoult's *Coming from the Fair*. Caoilfhionn Ní Bheacháin notes that "Deevy's words excoriate the culture of censorship that had taken hold, writing: 'If, in Ireland, we are not to be allowed to read of those whose faith differs from ours – if we are not to be allowed to read any criticism of priests or religious orders – let that be said. But let us have an end to insults – lowering to those who offer them and to the nation that tolerates such practices... Who are the censors? By what right do they hold office? And how, in case of proved incompetence, can they be removed?'"⁷⁸ At this time Blythe had also successfully established a new government funding scheme that made the Abbey the first federally subsidized theatre in Europe. Unfortunately, "as her reputation grew, Deevy was not without her detractors and when Blythe became artistic director of the Abbey in 1941, he made it clear that his vision was incompatible with hers."⁷⁹

The Abbey was rife with controversy in the early 1940's after Blythe came into power and instituted a number of conservative and unpopular policy changes. There was great discontent amongst the players, and complaints were aired publicly to the press. In 1944 two letters by Abbey players Gerard Healy and Liam Redmond included mention of the recent rejection of Deevy's play as evidence that "the Abbey Theatre is in real danger." Redmond wrote:

When you consider the number of plays, neither good nor popular, which have been put on in the past two years, it is exasperating to think that a play by Teresa

⁷⁸ Caoilfhionn Ní Bheacháin, "Teresa Deevy and the Secrets of the Green Suitcase," *The Irish Times*, April 3, 2021, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/teresa-deevy-and-the-secrets-of-the-green-suitcase-1.4522873>.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*

Deevy was rejected only a short time ago. It seems obvious that there is no leadership in the Abbey Theatre at the present moment.⁸⁰

In November 1944, Redmond and Healy, along with Ria Mooney, Cyril Cusack and others, broke ranks and formed their own company, "The Players Theater." *The New York Times* reported that "a secession movement has broken out in the ranks of Dublin's Abbey Theatre, the repercussions of which threaten to undermine the famous group." As it happens, Mooney and Cusack each had their own association with Deevy. Mooney appeared in *Temporal Powers* and *The Wild Goose* and both actors created roles in *The King of Spain's Daughter* and *Katie Roche*. Deevy held out hope that The Players might produce her work, she tells Hackett,

They are doing their own plays first, and why not? If we all started theatres we would all do our own plays—at least I would put mine on. Meantime I am sending my "rejected Abbey" one, hoping they may like it. I have been working hard, re-writing it.⁸¹

The Players Theater awarded the play a prize of £50 in the summer of 1945, under the title of "All on a Sunny Day," but the company never produced again from lack of funds, "Short-lived but brilliant" is how they were referred to in 1946.⁸² Without institutional support, *Wife to James Wheelan* remained unproduced for another decade.

Deevy's apparent censorship would not go unnoticed by her contemporaries. In an article for *The Dublin Magazine*, Lane attributed Deevy's "rapidly deteriorating stage popularity" to her unique portrayal of women who were "not all gentle," not to mention

⁸⁰ Teresa Deevy, Letter to Florence Hackett, (undated) TCD, Ms. 10722.

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Joseph Holloway, *Joseph Holloway's Irish Theatre*, vol. I, ed. Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill (Dixon, CA: Proscenium Press, 1968), p. 77.

her recurring depictions of domestic and intimate partner violence; "There are startling explosions of physical violence. Miss Deevy knows that it is in the nature of the stupid, as well as of the frustrated and puzzled, to hit out at something (or some woman)."⁸³

Lane then posits three possible explanations to Deevy's sudden exclusion from the National Theatre; her depictions of gendered violence, the prevailing literary censorship of the period, and the growing distaste for literature rooted in the realm of "dreams." She then notes the limited options available for playwrights excluded from the Abbey and the Gate, writing

Within the limits of the current censorship, our boundaries of taste outside the state-subsidized Abbey Theatre are as movable as matchboard screens. For the last decade, Irish literature has exemplified a distrust of the imaginative... This realist movement has been the virtual outlawry of "dreams" — except when they are pathological, or when Micheál Mac Liammóir with his own company has the courage to put on at his own fantasy and fill, a theatre to capacity night after night.⁸⁴

Ironically enough, Deevy sent the script of *Wife to James Whelan* to MacLiammoir's people, only to have it returned by Lady Longford expressing "high praise but regrets," citing "the lack of a suitable cast worthy of production."⁸⁵ At face value, Longford's response could be interpreted as a snub. However, archival records of Gate Theatre productions from this period reflect companies comprised of mostly amateur actors.⁸⁶

Lane concludes her essay with a warning, "Genius can grow regardless of public

⁸³ Lane, pp. 3-4

⁸⁴ Lane. p. 4

⁸⁶ This lack of "suitable actors" to embody Deevy's heroines would become a recurring factor to the playwright's ever fading notoriety in the following decades. In 1952 the Director of a West End theatre wrote to the Abbey, expressing his desire to produce "Katie Roche," and requesting aide in finding a "suitable actress to play Katie." The play was never staged.

appreciation, but to deprive it of such, is to cut off a plant from one vital element — light... There should be great Deevy plays still to come, and the stigma of guilt is more than regional if we willfully silence the writer. For this is something that may happen very easily, and if it happens the stigma will be national — also the loss.”⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Lane. p. 4

Chapter Two:

Later Life & “The Post Abbey Period” (1945 – 1963)

While Deevy would continue to achieve success across the disciplines of theatre, writing for new media, and literary criticism, she would never replicate the level of notoriety she achieved as an “Abbey dramatist.” Jordan’s categorization of the “Abbey period” (1930 – 1936) and the “post Abbey period” (1946 – 1963), while useful for archival purposes, ultimately omits the playwrights initial work in radio, which began as early as 1936, as well as her brief, albeit critically-acclaimed return to the Abbey via their Experimental Theatre Division in 1948. The Abbey continued to be rife with controversy in the late 1940s, as Blythe’s controversial policies elicited even greater criticism. In his book *Ria Mooney*, Theatre historian James P. McGlone recounts how on the 10th of November 1947, during an interval of Sean O’Casey *The Plough of the Stars*, Abbey repertory player Valentin Iremonger stood at his seat to make an announcement,

Ladies and Gentlemen, just before the show proceeds, I would like to say a few words. When the poet Yeats died, he left behind to the Irish nation as a legacy his beloved Abbey Theatre, then the first theatre in the world of its kind in acting, in production, and in the poetic impulse of its tradition. Today, eight years after, under the utter incompetence of the present directorates artistic policy, there is nothing left of that fine glory. Having seen what they did to O’Casey’s masterpiece tonight, in acting and production, I for one am leaving this theatre as an act of protest against the management policy.⁸⁸

Local newspapers aided in sensationalizing Iremonger’s protest by publishing letters from George Bernard Shaw and Paul Vincent Carroll, demanding the resignation of the theatre’s directorate. At the time, the Abbey’s board of directors included Lennox Robinson, Roilbeard O’Farachlain, Dick Hayes, and Ernest Blythe. Robinson, “the most

⁸⁸ James P. McGlone, “Chapter One: A Little Glowing Light,” essay, in *Ria Mooney: The Life and Times of the Artistic Director of the Abbey Theatre, 1948-1963* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2014), p. 5.

theatrically distinguished” board member, was a celebrated writer and director who had first joined the Abbey as a playwright in 1908 at just twenty-two years of age. Robinson remained a fixture at the National Theatre throughout the next four decades, joining the board of directors as resident producer in 1923. O’Farachlain, “who many considered to hold Yeats’ former mantle,” was a young poet and playwright who had gained recognition for co-founding the Irish Lyric Theatre in 1944 with Austin Clarke. Hayes meanwhile was a retired politician of considerable influence, widely believed to be a “silent partner.” According to McGlone, Iremonger’s diatribe “was widely believed to be aimed directly at Blythe.”⁸⁹

“Small, bald, taciturn, and importable,”⁹⁰ Blythe represents the same generation of “conformist rebels” that birthed Deevy; however, as Ireland’s first Minister of Finance he retained a considerable amount of influence during the patriarchal reimagining of the early Republic. Blythe joined the Abbey’s Board of Directors in the late 1930s and “became increasingly dominant over the next forty years,” eventually serving as both artistic and managing director.⁹¹ Eamon O’Flaherty notes that “Blythe brought a stifling paternalism and a narrow view of what an Irish National Theatre should be,” recalling Blythe’s statement that ‘the Abbey was not just a theatre but an instrument of national defense.’ The iron qualities that had won the civil war and guided the embattled state were not those required to foster the kind of creative engagement with modern theatre that had made the Abbey in the first place.”⁹² Shortly after the media frenzy following

⁸⁹ James P. McGlone, pp. 6-7.

⁹⁰ James P. McGlone, p. 7.

⁹¹ Eamon O’Flaherty, “The Abbey Theatre: The First Hundred Years,” *History Ireland*, Spring, 12, no. 1 (2004): pp. 1–7, <https://doi.org/https://www.historyireland.com/the-abbey-theatre-the-first-hundred-years/>.

⁹² Eamon O’Flaherty, pp. 1–7.

the Iremonger incident, Blythe announced Ria Mooney's appointment as the Abbey's new artistic director.

Mooney was a well-respected and much beloved figure in 20th century Irish Theatre, remembered by friend and frequent collaborator Micheál Mac Liammóir as "possessing a curious intensity like a steadily burning inner fire; her acting was poised, shapely, and full of intelligence."⁹³ Born in Rathmines on 30th of April, 1903 to middle-class Anglo-Irish parents, her father William Mooney owned operated a catering business off Baggot Street. She began her theatrical career in amateur productions at the age six, later joining the Rathmines and Rathgar Musical Society at sixteen, and eventually matriculating at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, where she trained formally as an actress. In 1924, at the age of twenty-one, Mooney was invited to join the Abbey Theatre having been scouted from the Dublin Arts Club production of Anton Chekhov's *The Proposal*. She joined a repertory company of famed players, and quickly earned the respect of her many esteemed colleagues, including Máire O'Neill, Cyril Cusack, and F. J. McCormick. Early on in her tenure she rose to prominence for creating the role of Rosie Redmond in Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*, performing during the infamous riots of 1926. She then featured in the Abbey's 1927 North American tour and felt inspired to move to New York City. There she became a member of Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Company, acting in plays on Broadway, and eventually serving as Le Gallienne's assistant director.⁹⁴

⁹³ Micheál Mac Liammóir, *All for Hecuba: An Irish National Theatrical Autobiography* (London, England: Methuen Press, 1947), p. 47.

⁹⁴ Linde Lunney and Noreen Giffney, "Ria Mooney," in *The Dictionary of Irish Biography*, October 2009, pp. 1–4, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3318/dib.005916.v1>.

Mooney returned to Dublin in the early 1930s and frustrated by the limited options presented to her by the National Theatre, briefly joined the company of the newly formed Gate Theatre. However, she would inevitably return to the Abbey in 1932, first encountering Deevy that same year while creating the role of Lizzie Brennan in *Temporal Powers*. She would go on to originate the characters of Annie Kinsella in *The King of Spain's Daughter*, Amelia Gregg in *Katie Roche*, and Eileen Connolly in *The Wild Goose*. Mooney would become resident producer of the Abbey's new Experimental Peacock Theatre in 1937, before ultimately joining the "mass exodus" of Abbey players in 1942 and co-founding The Players Theatre.⁹⁵ After The Players folded, Mooney would serve as Director the Gaiety School of Acting, until her appointment as Artistic Director of the Abbey in January of 1948. Among her earliest decisions was commissioning Deevy to adapt her one-act radio play *Light Falling*⁹⁶ for production in the Peacock Theatre.⁹⁷

Set in Ireland's northernmost county of Donegal, *Light Falling* functions as meditation on the sanctity of the quotidian. The play follows the domestic conflict between the childless Mary Scully, her disgruntled husband John, and John's invalid father Pat. Jordan would later refer to *Light Falling* as "very nearly a gem"⁹⁸ noting "the gradations of feeling between (the Scully's) are observed with almost excessive sensitivity. John's resentment of his wife's childlessness, which might have been

⁹⁵ Joseph Holloway, *Joseph Holloway's Irish Theatre, vol. I*, ed. Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill (Dixon, CA: Proscenium Press, 1968), p. 77.

⁹⁶ *Light Falling* was originally broadcast on Radio Éireann in July, 1947, and then subsequently over 1947 and 1948 on both Radio Éireann and the BBC.

⁹⁷ Linde Lunney and Noreen Giffney, pp. 1-4.

⁹⁸ Jordan, p. 21.

handled grossly and clumsily (by a different dramatist), is allowed to remain for the most part a mysterious *malaise*, which breaks out for what it is, only in the repressed viciousness of his taunt to Mary, ‘Grandpa is a queer word in your mouth.’”⁹⁹ The tender relationships between Mary and her sickly father-in-law grounds the play, as the infertile woman’s inclination to nurture is successfully reappropriated. The action begins with the arrival of a Scottish painter and his wife, Kenneth and Imsay Leslie, whom John has invited to visit the Scully farm. John’s resentment towards Mary manifests in his flirtation with Imsay, which Kenneth does not seem to mind, suggesting a non-monogamous, modern relationship. After the Leslies depart, John instigates a quarrel with Mary, in which he mocks her inability to have children and challenges her suitability as a wife. Pat meanwhile, enraged by his son’s cruelty, attempt to strike him, and in doing so falls. This episode “slackens the tension between husband and wife and gives John the necessary injection of feeling to inspire a reconciliation.”¹⁰⁰

Earlier in the play, Kenneth attempts to explain to the Scullys his desire to experience the Donegal sunset, “For me truth is embodied in light falling.”¹⁰¹ At the end of the play he returns, shortly after the conflict between Mary, John, and Pat is resolved, and offers the play’s final lines of dialogue,

PAT: I saw what you were saying, Mr. Leslie.

KENNETH: What was that!

⁹⁹ Jordan, p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ John Jordan, p. 23.

¹⁰¹ Teresa Deevy, “Light Falling,” in *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed: Volume II*, ed. Jonathan Bank, John P. Harrington, and Chris Morash (Mint Theater Publishing, 2017), p. 69.

PAT: What's this you called it, "light falling," and we don't often see it... When they were talking, usual-like about the turf and the potatoes... then I saw it... falling around them.¹⁰²

Deevy's letters to Florence Hackett reveal that the play was most likely authored during a holiday spent in Donegal during the summer of 1946. The two women were meant to have taken said trip together, with Hackett ultimately having to back out, leaving room for Deevy to encounter a "fascinating artist and his wife" during her stay.¹⁰³ In his introduction to the anthology, *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed, Volume II*, Chris Morash asserts

If Deevy's work is centrally about questions of subjectivity and perception, *Light Falling* emerges as one of her key works. Indeed, if *The King of Spain's Daughter* is Deevy's defining play of the 1930s, *Light Falling* is her defining play of the 1940s. By 1946, she had refined her technique of creating a stage world of almost complete stasis, where very little happens on the surface, but in which one of her characters has a moment of revelation, an intimation of the luminous in the quotidian. In *Light Falling*, the moment is simple; a character experiences a sense of wonder that he struggles to articulate in the fleeting quality of light at sunset – the "light falling" of the title.¹⁰⁴

The 1948 production of *Light Falling* was directed by Jack MacGowran, with a cast comprised of mostly green talent, leading the *Irish Independent* to note that "the acting was stamped with a certain amount of earnestness and understanding." Nine years later in 1957, when MacGowran was set to co-produce a West End production of Sean O'Casey's *The Shadow of a Gunman*, he chose *Light Falling* as the curtain-raiser.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Teresa Deevy, p. 75.

¹⁰³ Teresa Deevy, Letter to Florence Hackett, (undated) TCD, Ms. 10722.

¹⁰⁴ Chris Morash, "Teresa Deevy: Seeing the World," essay, in *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed: Volume II*, ed. Jonathan Bank, John P. Harrington, and Chris Morash (New York, NY: Mint Theater Publishing, 2017), pp. ix–xx.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

After the success of *Light Falling* Mooney staged a critically acclaimed and long-running revival of *Katie Roche* on the Abbey mainstage in 1949. Around this time, Mooney would also oversee the formation of the Radio Éireann Players, where Deevy would become a staple dramatist. Up until this point most of Deevy's work for radio had been produced by the BBC; however, at this juncture Radio Éireann would become a longtime creative home for the playwright, and director of production Micheál Ó hAodha would prove a fruitful collaborator.¹⁰⁶ What's fascinating is Ó hAodha would eventually succeed Mooney as artistic director of the Abbey, yet Deevy's work would never factor into his programming, nor would her work feature in any of his books on the history of the National Theatre, namely, *Plays and Places* (1960), *The Abbey - Then and Now* (1969), and *Theatre in Ireland* (1973).

Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, Deevy continued to author unperformed stage plays while simultaneously writing new works exclusively for radio. During this period, she also found success adapting radio versions of her previously rejected Abbey plays, *Holiday House* and *Wife to James Whelan*. Additionally, she adapted five of her six produced Abbey plays, and authored six original radio dramas. The first of these original creations, *Dignity*, was broadcast by the BBC in June of 1939. The play opens with a young writer, Wade, who appears initially to be living in a stimulating world of ideas, in contrast to his landlady, Mrs. Hally, who "goes on at length about jam, dust, draughts, and sleep, and appears to be able to see no further than the tedious rounds of her daily life."¹⁰⁷ When Wade finally concedes to allow Mrs. Hally "to share her life

¹⁰⁶ Teresa Deevy to Micheál Ó hAodha, undated letter, "Letters from Teresa Deevy to Micheál Ó hAodha, 1947-1963," National Library of Ireland, MS 50,961.

¹⁰⁷ R.M. Fox, "Cloth of Gold." *The Irish Times*, 20 March 1948, pp. 2

story in five minutes,” the play shifts in time, a device previously unexplored in Deevy’s dramaturgy. Deevy’s friend R.M. Fox, when reviewing the play, notes that “In the kind of dramatic reversal at which Deevy is so adept, the expectations set up in the opening are reversed, and we see that beneath Mrs. Hally’s dull exterior lies a complex emotional life; by contrast, Wade’s apparent depth now appears shallow.”¹⁰⁸ Radio is, of course, an ideal medium for a play with a flashback structure, and *Dignity* became enduring success, having subsequent broadcasts on Radio Éireann in 1947, 1953, 1969, 1977, 1988, and 1997.¹⁰⁹ The play also suggests that while Deevy’s exile from the Abbey may have been personally wounding, she could still generate new and innovative material for the new medium in which she was now working.

In her second play written exclusively for radio, *Polinka*, Deevy explores the dimensions of adaption, drawing inspiration from the short story of the same name by Anton Chekhov. A longtime acolyte of Chekhovian drama, *Polinka* developed out of Deevy’s collaboration with the prolific Russian translator Constance Clara Garnett.¹¹⁰ *Polinka* was first broadcast by the BBC on the 10th July, 1946 and described by Max Bollinger as “an evocative social commentary that explores the complexity of human relationships within a patriarchal society.”¹¹¹ Through the lens of a rural Russian family, Deevy adapts an “artful inquiry into the negotiation of power and gender roles within a homogeneous cultural context.”¹¹² The action follows the titular Polinka, who struggles

¹⁰⁸ R.M Fox, p. 3

¹⁰⁹ Teresa Deevy, “Dignity,” in *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed: Volume II*, ed. Jonathan Bank, John P. Harrington, and Chris Morash (Mint Theater Publishing, 2017), p. 40.

¹¹⁰ Teresa Deevy, Letter to Florence Hackett, (undated) TCD, Ms. 10722

¹¹¹ Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, Constance Garnett, and Max Bollinger, “Polinka: Introduction,” essay, in *Short Stories: About Truth, Freedom, Happiness, and Love* (London England: Sovereign, 2011). p. 1

¹¹² Ibid

to find her voice amidst oppressive social constraints. In this way, Deevy successfully challenges her audience to question their preconceived assumptions surrounding traditional gender roles.

Later that same year Deevy would author a one-act entitled *Strange Birth*, in what appears to be her first new stage play post her estrangement from the National Theatre. Its central figure Sara Meade is a domestic servant in the boarding house of a loving landlady Mrs. Taylor. At the age of thirty-one, Sara has abandoned hope of finding love or romance, despite an ongoing flirtation with the local postman, Bill Kirwan. Throughout the play we learn that Sara spends as much time listening to the troubles of the various boarders as she does cleaning. While she is a major source of strength for others, she appears cold and unfeeling when considering her own romantic options. In the play's conclusion Deevy chronicles a tender emotional awakening, and the subsequent promise of romantic love. J.D. Riley in a 1955 review of the play for *Irish Writing* compares *Strange Birth* to the work of prominent modernist Katherine Mansfield;

"One of Miss Deevy's accomplishments is to have expressed in drama the feminine vision fixed so admirably in the well-wrought fragments of Katherine Mansfield. Miss Mansfield was something of an innovator (or importer), and the modern short story, following her, is often all Aristotelian Middle. In *Strange Birth*, Miss Deevy brings this technique to the theatre by dispensing with the first and third acts and making this dramatized Middle. This single act is in a present time which, by the intensity and vividness of its presentation, draws to itself and comprehends the past and future of its people. None of the characters of the play have any very clear past or foreseeable future, they pass in and out telling us just enough of themselves to become distinct and to create in us the obscurely exhaled mood in which Sara makes her decision. There is no plot, no machinery of any sort, only a mounting atmosphere which makes the single action sufficient.¹¹³

¹¹³ J.D. Riley, "On Teresa Deevy's Plays." *Irish Writing*, No. 32, Autumn 1955. Dublin, Ireland. pp. 30-36

Strange Birth was published in the first edition of *Irish Writing* in 1946, and later reprinted in both MacMillan's *The King of Spain's Daughter and Other One-Act Plays* in 1947, and Mint Theater Publishing's *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed, Volume II* in 2017. Written initially for the stage, the play was broadcast by Radio Éireann in June of 1948, and subsequently staged nearly seventy year later by the Mint Theater Company in New York City.¹¹⁴

Deevy's next radio drama *Within a Marble City*, first broadcast by Radio Éireann on 15th of January, 1949 explores similar themes of burgeoning love, depicting a tender romance between Mary Tobin, a young upper-middle class Catholic girl, and her fiancé Christopher Murray, whom she has met via a newspaper advert. This short play chronicles their engagement, and Mary's fear of earning her father's disapproval. She eventually succeeds in securing her father's consent, and since Christopher loves her, she "should" be happy. However, Deevy's heroine appears entirely unconcerned with her approaching nuptials, and instead focuses on "finding suitable husbands" for her younger sisters. Mary's seemingly cold and practical facade is illuminated in the play's titular line, with Christopher noting, "Mary, you are like a walled-up city... a little city of marble... not so cold... but like marble."¹¹⁵ *Within a Marble City* would prove to be Deevy's most critically acclaimed radio drama, with Philip Rooney of *The Irish Press* writing,

¹¹⁴ Andy Webster, "Review: Ireland in Four Dimensions, by a Pioneering Playwright," *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*, August 25, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/25/theater/the-suitcase-under-the-bed-review.html>.

¹¹⁵ Teresa Deevy, "Within a Marble City," in *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed: Volume II*, ed. Jonathan Bank, John P. Harrington, and Chris Morash (Mint Theater Publishing, 2017), p. 90.

In her new play, Miss Deevy brought to life a small group of people from an Irish provincial town. "Brought to life" is not in this instance a carelessly used complimentary phrase, for that is precisely what the writer has done. ... The story of these people is, on the surface, so slight as to be little more than a sketch, a study of characters at a moment of minor crisis. But Miss Deevy is a playwright who does not work on the surface. Her interest is in the complex quality of character, in the stresses and strains which underlie all human relationships, and which determine, often so strangely, the interweaving of life patterns.¹¹⁶

Later that year *Within a Marble City* would garner Deevy first prize in RTÉ's 1948 writing competition, solidifying the play's inclusion within the canon of early Irish radio.¹¹⁷

Deevy's next original radio drama, *Going Beyond Alma's Glory* was first broadcast by Radio Éireann on 14th of October 1951. The entirety of the play's action takes place in a café, "where life ebbs and flows just outside." The titular "Alma's Glory" is a racehorse on which Edmund Spillane, a "seedy journalist," gambles a great deal of "borrowed" money, in the hopes of winning back his estranged wife Mona Pewitt, a successful "comedy actress." The couple inevitably reconciles, and while they are tentatively establishing a new relationship the police arrive and Spillane is arrested. In a twist of dramatic irony, Deevy reveals that Mona has earned a great deal of money while away, and Spillane's crime was entirely unnecessary. In the café where they have met, Mona tells the waitress, Alice, 'I think we've got something this time ... I don't mean money ... but something that goes beyond.'¹¹⁸ A 1951 review from the *Tuam Herald* praised the play, writing "(Deevy) draws a delicately written character study of an inveterate and

¹¹⁶ Philip Rooney, "Teresa Deevy's Plays," *Irish Press* (January 24, 1949) p. 4.

¹¹⁷ Teresa Deevy, et al. p. 78.

¹¹⁸ Teresa Deevy, "Going Beyond Alma's Glory." In *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed: Volume II*, edited by Jonathan Bank, John P. Harrington, and Chris Morash. Mint Theater Publishing, 2017. p. 106

impecunious backer of horses who attempts to reform and adjust himself to a more regular way of life.”¹¹⁹ However, Jordan was considerably less effusive in his critical analysis, stating “*Going Beyond Alma's Glory* has an unfortunate title... Miss Deevy is being a little more obvious in this play, than in earlier work, and I do not feel that *Alma's Glory* may be taken as more than an atypical exercise from a distinguished artist. With this radio play, there are indications that facility had at last caught up with Teresa Deevy. It is ironic that this playlet, with the exception of *Strange Birth*, is her only dramatic work since *The Wild Goose* to have been published.”¹²⁰

In addition to her work across new media, Deevy published book reviews from 1946 through 1954, writing for various publications including *The Dublin Magazine*, *Irish Writing*, *The Irish Book Lover*, and *The Bell*. During this period, she reviewed work from many of her friends and peers, including titles by A.E. Coppard, Kate Roberts, William R. Wilde, Mary Lavin, Kate O’Brien, Bryan Guinness, Constantine Fitzgibbon, and Winefride Nolan, among others. Beyond just her writing, the 1940s proved to be an eventful period in Deevy’s personal life. She spent the first half of the decade volunteering as a nurse for the Irish branch of the Red Cross during World War II, treating Irish combatants who had served abroad in foreign armies. She would write to Hackett about the experience in 1944 stating, “I’m still with the Red Cross, I go weekly to roll bandages, etc. etc.”¹²¹

A prolific letter writer, archived correspondence between Deevy and various artistic and literary figures of the 1940s and 1950s offer evidence of a thriving social

¹¹⁹ *Tuam Herald* (October 15th 1951)

¹²⁰ ¹²⁰ John Jordan. p. 24.

¹²¹ Teresa Deevy, Letter to Florence Hackett, (undated) TCD, Ms. 10722.

life outside her professional work. Noteworthy among these relationships was a close friendship with the prolific children's author Patricia Lynch, with whom Deevy would co-author a collection of short stories entitled *Lisheen at the Valley Farm and other Stories* in 1945. She would later publish a lengthy critical study of Lynch's work and cultural significance in a 1948 edition of *Irish Writing* entitled "Patricia Lynch: A Study." That same year, Lynch's husband, the famed journalist R.M. Fox, published a review of Deevy's collected plays in *The Irish Times* entitled "Cloth of Gold: Three Plays by Teresa Deevy." Fox praises Deevy's dialogue, humor, and "spirit of fantasy." He then questions the sudden absence of her work at the National Theatre, chastising the predominantly male "strange little coteries that award distinction to one another"¹²² who seemingly refuse to acknowledge Deevy's gifts. He ends with a subsection entitled "Why Not?" writing,

For those, who want to know the work of a leading, living Irish dramatist, these three one-act plays are valuable. Ibsen's women wanted to break chains, but Teresa Deevy's women demand high adventure and emancipation of the spirit. She presents a blending of romance, reality and fantasy that has its roots in life. In over industrialized countries people seem to lose the capacity for imagination. They seem afraid to look closely into human nature. Can that be happening in Ireland? Or why is it that the work of this fine dramatist is not seen more often on the stage. It is a mystery to me.¹²³

Correspondence between Deevy, Fox, and Lynch documents a tradition of weekly meals spent together on Thursday evenings, with late night chats concerning "literature,

¹²² R.M. Fox, "Cloth of Gold." *The Irish Times*, 20 March 1948, <https://www.irishtimes.com/archive>.

¹²³ Ibid

Dublin, and the ephemeral.”¹²⁴ The couple would later serve as pillars of support for Deevy in 1954 while navigating the loss of her dear sister Nell.

Ellen “Nell” Deevy, spent much of her adult life as a companion, aide, and interpreter for her younger sister. According to family friend Margaret Shanahan, “Tessa could lip-read, especially Nell, and all else failing we had to resort to writing. She did not like this but her impatience with her limitations was little in evidence. Nell was indispensable as an interpreter and endeavored to clarify any misunderstandings that arose. She repeated what had been said - her head turned slightly sideways, mouthing the words slowly and exaggerated. Together they were one person - Nell the ears and Tessa the voice.”¹²⁵ During their years in Dublin Nell and Deevy were regular theatre goers, attending performances of works by various playwrights, including Sean O'Casey, Lennox Robinson, Eugene O'Neill, as well as Deevy's own compositions. “Of the two sisters Deevy commanded the most attention, being a playwright and totally deaf. Her warm, friendly personality and genuine interest in even the smallest details of people's lives attracted a large circle of friends and acquaintances drawn from the theatrical, literary, artistic, and musical sections of Dublin society.”¹²⁶ O'Doherty notes that amongst her closest friends were “Lennox Robinson and his wife, Dolly; the playwrights, Denis Johnston and M.J. Molloy; some cast members of her Abbey plays, Cyril Cusack, Shelagh Richards, May Craig, and Ria Mooney; the writers R.M. Fox and his wife, Patricia Lynch, Kate O'Brien, Sean O'Faolain, and David Marcus; the artists, Patrick

¹²⁴ Teresa Deevy to Patricia Lynch, undated letter, Papers of Patricia Lynch and R.M. Fox, National Library of Ireland, MSS 34, 923-34,931.

¹²⁵ Martina Ann O'Doherty, “Teresa Deevy: Playwright (1894-1963),” *The Waterford Archeological and Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 60, pp. 109-115.

¹²⁶ Ibid

Hennessy and Jack B. Yeats, and finally, the RTÉ violinist, William Shanahan and his Waterford-born wife, Margaret. Many of these friends were regular visitors to the flat and Deevy derived tremendous enjoyment from their friendship.”¹²⁷

Despite a progressive decline in health, Nell’s death apparently came as a shock to friends and family. Deevy wrote to Lynch the following week,

Patricia, you were fond of her — your visits were a real joy — you helped her... That last visit in the flat — well that was on Tuesday and we were still full of hope. I knew that you had not thought of how serious her operation might be. It was the following Monday she went into Hospital, very eager “to get this one over with. To get strong and really enjoy life again.” What a love for life she had. She was great. Never a quiver — never bore me — when they said the night before the operation it was time for me to go — “You go off and have a skate for yourself,” she said, and when I delayed “better go on, if you delay it might only pout the night against us!” That was the last thing she said to me... Yes Patricia, I am trying now to work... That is what I am here for. I will want oh so very, much to see you when I get back. You and R.M. are dearer to me more than ever. I need you. Nell knew I could count on you both.

She would share similar sentiments that following month with Hackett, writing;

It is extraordinary Florence, how many things Nell used to wish for have come about. I feel constantly “she had a hand in this.” She is with me. But I have never once seen her in a dream, as I did with mother and Nance after they died. I would love it. They were so vivid. One thing I know, Nell wanted people to throw themselves into life and enjoy it.¹²⁸

In this same letter Deevy notes a rekindling of time spent with Lennox Robinson, a once close friendship that seemed to wain from 1940 through 1954, perhaps explaining Deevy’s omission from both his memoir, *Curtain Up* (1942) and his oral history of the

¹²⁷ Martina Ann O'Doherty, “pp. 109-115.

¹²⁸ Teresa Deevy, Letter to Florence Hackett, (undated) TCD, Ms. 10722.

National Theatre, *Ireland's Abbey Theatre - A History 1899-1951* (1952). Without Nell she moved out of their three-bedroom flat on Waterloo Road and into a one-bedroom round the corner. She continued to spend most of her time in Dublin for the next few years, where she nourished lively friendships with Yeats, O'Brien, and O'Connor. "She held open house most Sunday afternoons", the influential editor David Marcus later wrote in his memoirs, "and there was no knowing what famous people might casually drop in on such occasions."¹²⁹ Well liked among her literary peers, the Irish Women's Writers Club named Deevy "Woman of the Year" in 1949, and in 1954 she was awarded PEN Ireland's highest honor for "lifetime achievement." Later that same year, shortly after the death of her beloved Nell, Deevy was elected to the Irish Academy of Letters.¹³⁰

Arguably Deevy's great accomplishment of later life came in 1956, with the much-anticipated world premiere of *Wife to James Whelan* at Madame Bannard Cogley's Studio Theatre Club in Dublin, almost fifteen years after its initial rejection from the National Theatre. Caoilfhionn Ní Bheacháin identifies *Wife to James Whelan* as "a drama concerned with class, gender and power relationships in a small rural community in Munster."¹³¹ The play follows the fortunes of a group of friends over an eight-year period, and in a misnomer reminiscent of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, the titular character does not exist, but rather suggests a path not taken by the play's heroine. In Act I of the play Deevy introduces a group of friends in their late teens and early twenties. Her two

¹²⁹ David Marcus, *Autobiography: Leaves from the Diary of a Hyphenated Jew*. Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 2001. P. 40

¹³⁰ Various, "Irish Academy of Letter," *The Irish Times*, (October 29, 1954)

¹³¹ Caoilfhionn Ní Bheacháin, "'He Seeds beneath the Snow': Resignation and Resistance in Teresa Deevy's *Wife to James Whelan*," essay, in *Irish Women Writers: New Critical Perspectives*, ed. Elke D'hoker (Oxford, England: Lang, 2011), 90–108.

protagonists, Nan Bowers and James Whelan, are “willful and independently minded individuals. As the play unfolds, it becomes evident that gender is the pivotal determinant in the fate of these characters.” Act II is set seven years later. “By this time, Nan is a widow with a small child, and resented by the local community for her life choices. She had refused to wait ‘without a promise’ for Whelan, “an individual characterized by a modernizing zeal and ruthlessness,” preferring instead to marry a man who had ‘the strength of gentle people.’ Nan’s husband, a unseen character called Jack McClinsey, died just two years after they married. She was then left to care for her sick father-in-law for a subsequent four years. Thus, some seven years later, Nan returns to her hometown with a young son, no husband and no income. Left in a vulnerable position she seeks employment from her former suitor. Whelan offers Nan a job as a secretary, and because she is impoverished, attempts to steal from him.” When he catches her, Whelan insists that she is prosecuted with the harshest punishment possible.”¹³² Act III opens with Nan having just completed her prison sentence. Whelan has spent the period of Nan’s incarceration decrying her actions to local community members. Unable to find work with another employer, a desperate Nan returns to Whelan to begin job as a maid. Proud and unflinching, by the play’s end Nan refuses to allow her circumstances to break her spirit.¹³³

Ní Bheacháin asserts that *Wife to James Whelan* “challenges the broader political, social and cultural consensus that was being promoted by the Catholic Church and by

¹³² Caoilfhionn Ní Bheacháin, “‘He Seeds beneath the Snow’: Resignation and Resistance in Teresa Deevy’s *Wife to James Whelan*,” essay, in *Irish Women Writers: New Critical Perspectives*, ed. Elke D’hoker (Oxford, England: Lang, 2011), pp. 90–108.

¹³³ Ibid

successive Free-State governments. Many of Deevy's plays concern the plight of women whose social and political hopes are curtailed and atrophied by the societies they inhabit."¹³⁴ In many respects *Wife to James Whelan* closes the cycle of Deevy's Abbey plays, and her dramaturgical impulse towards domestic disillusionment in the wake of gendered violence. The 1956 production received critical acclaim with *The Irish Times* writing

Madame Bannard Cogley has produced the play with great precision and obvious conviction. "Wife to James Whelan" which runs till next Sunday evening, is an encouraging example of an adult play written by a contemporary dramatist.¹³⁵

Following the success of *Wife to James Whelan*, Deevy's antepenultimate play, *Supreme Dominion* was staged at the Franciscan Hall of Merchant's Quay, during the Dublin Centenary Celebration of Fr. Luke Wadding in 1957.¹³⁶ Deemed a "tremendous success," the drama was subsequently adapted by Philip Rooney for broadcast on Radio Éireann.¹³⁷ Later that same year Madame Cogley produced the world premiere of Deevy's penultimate play, *In the Cellar of My Friend*. However, arguably Deevy's greatest work would come in the form of her final play, *One Look and What it Led To*.

Deevy's nephew Kyle Deevy maintained a close relationship with the playwright during her final years in Dublin. His account, alongside Deevy's additional correspondence from the period, reflects frequent travels, with the playwright rarely

¹³⁴ Ibid

¹³⁵ Various, "A New Play by Teresa Deevy," *The Irish Times*, (October 17, 1956)

¹³⁶ Martina Ann O'Doherty, "Deevy: A Bibliography," essay, in *Jubilee Issue: Teresa Deevy and Irish Women Playwrights*, No. 1, vol. 25 (Dublin: Irish University Review, 1995), 166.

¹³⁷ Teresa Deevy. Letter to Micheál Ó hAodha. "Letter from Teresa Deevy to Micheál Ó hAodha about Her Radio Play 'Supreme Dominion.'" Dublin, Ireland: The National Library of Ireland, July 16, 1957.

staying in one place for more than a couple of months at a time, fluctuating between her family home in Waterford and her flat in South Dublin. Throughout these later years Deevy was a daily communicant and embarked on multiple missions to Lourdes, where she volunteered with the sick and infirmed. She also made frequent pilgrimages to Lisieux, Fatima, Assisi, San Giovanni, and Rome, where she reportedly had an audience with Pope Pius XII. She undertook these trips singlehandedly and “relied only on her fluency in written French and Italian while navigating the continent.”¹³⁸ Additionally, her short story “Adventure” written under the aforementioned pseudonym “Will O’ the Wisp,” documents Deevy’s sojourn to Foggia, where she met St. Padre Pio and witnessed him give mass. Deevy seems to have submitted the story to *The Irish Times*, and while seemingly rejected, her unpublished manuscript contains a page of mostly positive feedback from the periodicals editorial staff.

By the late 1950s Deevy had returned to Waterford full time, living alongside her elder sister Frances “Fan” Deevy, who was also completely deaf. Dunne conjures a warm image of Deevy from this period, writing

In the fifties, she was a thin woman on a bicycle, her grey hair tucked under an assortment of strange hats. She rode through the streets of Waterford, and those who knew her tensed as she passed, in case a car might hit her. She was completely deaf and somehow avoided being hit by Morris Minors and Anglia’s that blared their horns behind her. She heard nothing, and just cycled on with the nonchalance of a girl riding along the country lane. Her clothes never seemed to match. She was seen wearing sandals or runners even in the middle of winter. Some people thought she had once written plays. Others knew it, but it was a long time ago. Her name was Teresa Deevy.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Martina Ann O’Doherty, pp. 109 - 115.

¹³⁹ Sean Dunne, “The Journal of Irish Literature: A Teresa Deevy Number”, Proscenium Press, Volume XIV, No. 2 (May, 1985), p. 1.

O'Doherty meanwhile invokes of different image of this time, noting that Deevy “never succeeded in recapturing the happiness which characterized much of her Dublin hey-day,” as she was “removed from her theatrical friends, and Frances did not share her interest in the arts.”¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Deevy became involved with a local amateur writers' group, and provided invaluable assistance and moral support to the then budding Waterford playwright, James Cheasty. Deevy's correspondence with the young writer suggests that they first met upon Cheasty inviting her to attend the debut of his play, *A Stranger Came*. A letter from Deevy dated the 19th of December, 1952 suggests that this friendship with Cheasty, as well as her mentorship of him, began tentatively:

You have had stories and poems published – yet a play is exciting! – isn't it? I look forward very much to seeing this – Perhaps before it comes on – if you had a spare script, you'll let me see it – I would like to read the play before seeing it.¹⁴¹

Further correspondence between the pair suggests that within the next four months Cheasty sent Deevy the script of *A Stranger Came*, along with a slew of other plays. Deevy expresses enthusiasm for his efforts in letter dated the 24th of April of 1953, complimenting Cheasty on the “impelling force” of his writing. She goes on in praise stating, “in all these plays you have shown life from a very grim angle – but in this one there is a very distinct lightning of tone.” In a letter dated the 28th of August 1953, Deevy suggests that a new play of Cheasty's requires a further lift in tone as “the

¹⁴⁰ Martina Ann O'Doherty, “Teresa Deevy: Playwright (1894-1963),” *The Waterford Archeological and Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 60, pp. 109 - 115.

¹⁴¹ Kate McCarthy and Úna Kealy, “Writing from the Margins: Re-Framing Teresa Deevy's Archive and Her Correspondence with James Cheasty c.1952 – 1962,” *Irish University Review* 52, no. 2 (2022): pp. 322-40.

audience will need amusement in the midst of so much sadness.” Although direct, her feedback is offered by way of “suggestions” and she is careful not to over-step her role:

How I do hope you will not mind my having made these suggestions [...] (We get used to suggestions and counter-suggestions in the theatre – and to being ignored!) I’ll see what way it is worked out on the stage.¹⁴²

The production of said play was a success, much to Deevy’s delight, “It is splendid that all recognise you have dramatic quality.” Writing the foreword to *A Stranger Came*, published in 1956, Deevy acknowledges that Cheasty “impressed” her by his ability to absorb and respond to feedback: Not often is a beginner so eager to hear of his own faults – and of every possible fault that might, at a future date, blur his work: things to avoid – that was it; he was out to track them down.”¹⁴³ Their friendship would continue throughout the remainder of Deevy’s life, with Cheasty authoring a glowing tribute in a 1963 edition of *The Irish Independent* entitled “An Appreciation: The Late Teresa Deevy.”

Shanahan notes that the Deevy spent a great deal of time reading fiction during her final years in Waterford, often lending out copies of books by her favorite author, Betty Smith.¹⁴⁴ Celebrated in *The New York Times* as “one of the most cherished American novels of all time,” Smith’s *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* “endures through generations as one of the biggest bestsellers of the twentieth century.”¹⁴⁵ The novel chronicles the life of Francie Nolan, a working-class Irish immigrant teenager who

¹⁴² Ibid

¹⁴³ James Cheasty, *A Stranger Came* (Dublin, Ireland: Progress House, 1956), p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ Martina Ann O'Doherty, pp. 109-115.

¹⁴⁵ Judith E. Smith, essay, in *Visions of Belonging: Family Stories, Popular Culture, and Postwar Democracy, 1940-1960* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 41-74.

comes of age “in the slums of Williamsburg” during the 1930s. Most likely unbeknownst to Deevy, Smith was also a playwright, who authored more than seventy unproduced and unpublished dramas, commenting in 1937: “I write plays because I’d rather do that than anything else in the world.” Smith’s play shares her novels’ focus of “working-class women persevering through poverty to craft their own narratives of escapism and self-determination.”¹⁴⁶ In 1931 her play *Becomes a Woman*, was awarded the prestigious Avery Hopwood Drama Award by the University of Michigan’s faculty of English, which, at the time included Lennox Robinson, who served a visiting lecturer.¹⁴⁷

Unable to find a theatrical home for *Becomes a Woman*, Smith would later adapt the play into her much beloved novel. What’s more, in January of 2023 the Mint Theater Company, home of the internationally lauded Teresa Deevy Project, would produce the world premiere of *Becomes a Woman* at New York City Centre. The production was a critical success, with Ken Marks of *The New Yorker* writing,

It’s a rare play that can inspire applause from a line of dialogue and cheers as the lights go down on the final act, odder still for one getting its world première nearly a century after it was written. But that’s what’s happening at the Mint’s production of this remarkable 1931 drama by Betty Smith, the author of the novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, directed by Britt Berke.¹⁴⁸

Becomes a Woman would ultimately receive a Theatre World Award, as well as nominations for Outstanding New Off-Broadway Play and Outstanding Lead Actress in a Play at the 2023 Outer Critics Circle Awards. In the wake of this success, the plays of

¹⁴⁶ Maya Cantu, “Betty Smith: Author Bio,” *Becomes a Woman*, Mint Theater Company (February 7, 2023), <https://minttheater.org/production/becomes-a-woman/?tab=authorbio>.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

¹⁴⁸ Ken Marks, “Review: *Becomes a Woman*,” *The New Yorker*, (March 13, 2023). <https://www.newyorker.com/goings-on-about-town/theatre/becomes-a-woman-03-13-23>.

Smith now exist in the same archive as the Mint's "Teresa Deevy Papers" in New York City.

Towards the end of her life Deevy experienced loss of eyesight and spent her final days at the Maypark Nursing Home in Waterford, eventually succumbing to ongoing health issues on January 19th, 1963, just two days shy of her seventieth birthday. Notices of her death in *The Stage*, *The Irish Times*, and *The Irish Examiner*, mourned Deevy as "Ireland's leading female dramatist,"¹⁴⁹ "a brilliant playwright,"¹⁵⁰ and "a genius of mystery."¹⁵¹ The full dimensions of said genius are perhaps best exemplified in her final three plays, *Supreme Dominion*, *In the Cellar of My Friend*, and *One Look and What it Led To*. In these plays Deevy explores what Chris Morash deems "a sense of the marvelous in the ordinary, not as delusion or fantasy, but as aesthetic or even spiritual revelation."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ R.M. Fox, "Teresa Deevy," *Irish Press*, (January 21, 1963)

¹⁵⁰ James Cheasty, "An Appreciation: The Late Teresa Deevy," *Irish Independent* (January 23, 1963) p. 11

¹⁵¹ Various, "Teresa Deevy," *The Irish Times*, (January 22, 1963)

¹⁵² Morash, p. xvii

Chapter Three:
Supreme Dominion,
Liberation Hagiography as Historical Revision

Teresa Deevy's antepenultimate play, *Supreme Dominion*, was first staged in 1957 at the Franciscan Hall of Merchant's Quay, during the Dublin Centenary Celebration of Fr. Luke Wadding.¹⁵³ Deemed a "tremendous success," the drama was subsequently adapted by Philip Rooney for broadcast on Radio Éireann that same year.¹⁵⁴ *Supreme Dominion* dramatizes the life of Wadding, a sixteenth-century Irish priest positioned herein as progenitor of Irish liberation theology. The entirety of the play is set in Rome, spanning the duration of the Irish Confederate Wars, as Wadding labors to rally support from Europe's Catholic elite. To this end Deevy positions Wadding, a figure posthumously remembered as "the greatest Irishman of his century,"¹⁵⁵ as a patron saint for Irish Nationalism. Deevy scholar Una Kealy notes that Wadding is "an ideal figure for Deevy, functioning as the perfect synthesis of nationalist and devout Catholic. Her idealisation of the priest is connected with her frustration at the narrowing of contemporary horizons in Ireland. Deevy's priest is a simple, heroic figure, uncompromising and uncomplicated in his devotion to church and country."¹⁵⁶ Celebrated by John P. Harrington as "arguably (Deevy's) most famous radio play,"¹⁵⁷ *Supreme Dominion* proves a major departure from the playwright's earlier work, marking a progressive journey in her dramaturgy. Noteworthy as Deevy's first confirmed drama set beyond the shores of Ireland, the play illuminates the forgotten

¹⁵³ Martina Ann O'Doherty, "Deevy: A Bibliography," essay, in *Jubilee Issue: Teresa Deevy and Irish Women Playwrights*, No. 1, vol. 25 (Dublin: Irish University Review, 1995), p. 166.

¹⁵⁴ It should be noted that the only extant text of *Supreme Dominion* is Rooney's adaptation for Radio Éireann. This version of the text is the one utilized throughout this chapter.

¹⁵⁵ Urban Flanagan, *Luke Wadding* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1957), p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ Kate McCarthy and Úna Kealy, "Writing from the Margins: Re-Framing Teresa Deevy's Archive and Her Correspondence with James Cheasty c.1952 – 1962," *Irish University Review* 52, no. 2 (2022): 322 – 40.

¹⁵⁷ John P. Harrington, "Teresa Deevy and Reoccurring Rediscovery of the Irish Playwright." EnrichMint Series Lecture, 2017. pp. 2-3

dimensions of the “Pre-Independence Irish exile.”¹⁵⁸ In this vein, *Supreme Dominion* is emblematic of a widespread practice held throughout mid-twentieth century Ireland that “successfully conflated Catholicism with National Identity.”¹⁵⁹ What’s more, a critical application of Liberation theology, or more explicitly revisionist myth as “liberation hagiography,” further illuminates the previously unexplored scope of Deevy’s work as a theologian.

In *Supreme Dominion*, Deevy embraces a temporal imagination, as she weaves the threads of history, myth, and drama into a tapestry of cultural revision. Romanian-American theologian Mircea Eliade asserts that “myths foster a culturally specific perception of history and time. By experiencing myths as true stories through ritual reenactment on stage, people escape linear, historic time via narratives of sacred time.”¹⁶⁰ In this way, theatre can function as a vehicle for both religious myth-making and historical revisionism, specifically through the genre of hagiography. A hagiography is either a “biography of a saint” or “an idealized biography of a preacher, priest, founder, folk-saint, monk, nun, or icon within any world religion.”¹⁶¹ The term is derived from the ancient Greek words “hagios,” meaning holy, and “graphia,” meaning writing.¹⁶² Throughout the centuries, hagiography has “honored the holy, remembered

¹⁵⁸ Harald Sack, “Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim: The Most Remarkable Woman of Her Time,” (SciHi Blog, February 6, 2019), p. 1

¹⁵⁹ Eibhear Walshe, “Lost Dominions: European Catholicism and Irish Nationalism in the Plays of Teresa Deevy,” essay, in *Jubilee Issue: Teresa Deevy and Irish Women Playwrights*, No. 1, vol. 25 (Dublin: Irish University Review, 1995), p. 135.

¹⁶⁰ Diana G. Tumminia, ed., “The Process of Mythmaking: General Theories of Myth,” essay, in *When Prophecy Never Fails: Myth and Reality* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 61.

¹⁶¹ Claudia Rapp, “Hagiography and the Cult of Saints in the Light of Epigraphy and Acclamations”. (Byzantine Religious Culture. Brill Academic2012), pp. 289-311.

¹⁶² Rico G. Monge. Rico G. Monge, Kerry P. C. San Chirico and Rachel J. Smith (ed.), *Hagiography and Religious Truth: Case Studies in the Abrahamic and Dharmic Traditions*. (Bloomsbury Publishing: London, 2016), p. 7.

their lives, and asked for their intercession in various ways, from pilgrimages and altars in the streets, to public performances on the stage.”¹⁶³

In the context of theatrical history, hagiographic drama marked the return of Western Theatre after its conspicuous absence throughout the Early Middle Ages. The genre functions as a vital dramaturgical bridge between the ancient drama of Antiquity and the various subgenres of Medieval theatre; namely, morality, mystery, and miracle plays. Within the scope of these three genres “morality plays” were arguably the most formulaic, featuring “personified concepts, often vices or virtues, alongside angels and demons engaged in a struggle to persuade a human protagonist toward either good or evil.” The common arc of these plays follows a basic formula, “the temptation, the fall, and the ultimate redemption” of man.¹⁶⁴ “Mystery plays,” meanwhile, focus on “the representation of Biblical stories, often accompanied by antiphonal song. These plays explore subjects ranging from the Creation story to the Last Judgment.”¹⁶⁵ The precursor to both of these subgenres were “miracle plays,” which evolved directly from hagiography, and explore non-scriptural legends of saints and other holy people.¹⁶⁶ Looking ahead, contemporary women dramatists like Teresa Deevy inherit the legacy of hagiography from Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim, a tenth century canoness widely identified as Europe’s first known playwright after the collapse of Antiquity.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Daniela Cavallaro, “Saints on Stage: Popular Hagiography in Post-WWII Italy,” MDPI, March 21, 2021, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/3/216>.

¹⁶⁴ Pamela M. King, “Morality Plays.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, edited by Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher. 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008)235

¹⁶⁵ John Gassner & Edward Quinn, (1969). “England: middle ages”. *The Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama*. London: Methuen. pp. 203-204.

¹⁶⁶ Lawrence M. Clopper, (2001). *Drama, play, and game: English festive culture in the medieval and early modern period*. University of Chicago Press. p. 69

¹⁶⁷ Harald Sack, “Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim: The Most Remarkable Woman of Her Time,” (SciHi Blog, February 6, 2019), p. 1

Hrotsvitha was born in 935 AD to a wealthy and educated noble Saxon family. As a young woman she would enter the Gandersheim Abbey, where she studied under Abbess Gerberga II, a niece of the Holy Roman Emperor, Otto I. Under Gerberga's tutelage, the playwright was exposed to the writing of Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and Euripides. However she did not feel inspired to write plays until she encountered the work of the popular African-Roman playwright Terence, as she vehemently disagreed with his depictions of women.¹⁶⁸ She once wrote, "Wherefore I, the strong voice of Gandersheim, have not hesitated to imitate the poet Terence, whose works are so widely read, my object being to glorify, within the limits of my poor talent, the laudable chastity of Christian women."¹⁶⁹ Over the course of her lifetime Hrotsvitha would publish three major works: *Liber Primus*, which contains her eight legends; *Liber Taertius*, which contains *Gesta Oddonis*, her history on the Ottonian family; and *Liber Secundus*, which contains her six plays. Her six poems, which took the form of verse dedications and introductions to her other works, are distributed evenly among these three books.¹⁷⁰ Across genres, Hrotsvitha's work depicts harrowing tales of righteous women in ninth century Germany. Her plays, *Gallicanus*, *Dulcitius*, *Calimachus*, *Abraham*, *Pafnutius*, and *Sapientia*, are all hagiographies that function more as religious polemic than spiritual adoration.¹⁷¹ Hrotsvitha's unique dramaturgy spanned themes of

¹⁶⁸ Susan Jonas, "Playwrights: Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim," History Matters Foundation, accessed May 16, 2023, pp. 1-3.

¹⁶⁹ Anna Rudolph. "Ego Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis, Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim: Her Sources, Motives, and Historical Context." Published in *Magistra*, Vol. 20 Issue 2. (Winter 2014): p. 58.

¹⁷⁰ Susan Jonas, pp. 1-3.

¹⁷¹ Recent scholarship confirms that Hrotsvitha was associated with the theatrical exploits of the Ottonian court, and it's suggested that these plays were both performed and read aloud during her lifetime!

repentance, martyrdom, and biblical numerology, or the “use of sacred numbers in Catholic writing to convey a meaning beyond numeric value.”¹⁷²

Medievalist Alessandra Cusimano notes how “during the medieval period numbers held great significance for all aspects of life. With the Bible being the most widely read work, it can only follow that numbers came to play an important role in scriptural analysis and general understanding of the text.”¹⁷³ Working with even just a perfunctory knowledge of biblical literature one can identify a multitude of numerical patterns and the importance of numbers in general, “such as, the Trinity, the six days of creation, the presumed age of Christ at crucifixion (thirty-three), the twelve apostles, the ten commandments, the eight beatitudes, the seven deadly sins, and the number of the beast.”¹⁷⁴ Conversely, Faith Wallis asserts that “Numbers were the blueprint for a divinely designed creation (not an eternal, divine cosmos), and were therefore the key to understanding the written word.”¹⁷⁵ Deevy herself employs an understanding of “biblical numerology” as a hagiographic device in *Supreme Dominion*, as her stage directions suggest a division of seven scenes, with “seven” representing the sacred value for “charity, grace, and the spirit.” Additionally, her character list can be broken down into thirteen named and fourteen unnamed characters, representing the values

¹⁷² Adela Yarbro Collins, “Chapter Three: Numerical Symbolism in Jewish and Early Christian Apocalyptic Literature,” essay, in *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2000), pp. 55-56.

¹⁷³ Alessandra Cusimano, “Importance of Medieval Numerology and the Effects Upon Meaning in the Works of the Gawain-Poet ” (thesis, University of New Orleans Scholars Work, 2010), p. 1.

¹⁷⁴ Cusimano, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁵ Faith Wallis. “‘Number Mystique’ in Early Medieval Computus Texts.” *Mathematics and the Divine: A Historical Study*. Ed T. Koetsier and L. Bergmans. Elsevier B.V. 2005, p. 181-199.

for “teacher” and “writing,” respectively.¹⁷⁶ What’s more, the play spans exactly thirty-three years, representing the value for “covenant.”¹⁷⁷

Deevy’s medieval religious influences are further illuminated within the context of twentieth century “Liberation theology.” Liberation theology is “a Christian theological approach emphasizing the liberation of the oppressed. It engages in socio-economic analyses, with social concern for the poor, and political liberation for marginalized peoples, whilst addressing other forms of inequality, such as race or caste.”¹⁷⁸ While the discipline gained notable popularity in the mid-twentieth century throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, the “modern” emergence of liberation theology can trace its roots back to late nineteenth century papal considerations for Irish Catholics.¹⁷⁹ In 1891 Pope Leo XIII issued a Catholic social doctrine called *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of Workers), that laid the foundation for future social teachings of “liberation” in the Catholic Church.¹⁸⁰ Pope Leo XIII was reportedly “troubled with the horrible living and working conditions of Ireland’s urban poor.” Accordingly, he took “a clear position against exploitation in trying to resolve the misery of the poor, stating ‘since the great majority of them live undeservedly in

¹⁷⁶ Donald Senior et al., *The Catholic Study Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 398-399.

¹⁷⁷ In biblical numerology the number “33” represents the value “covenant,” in relation to the five covenants between God and man. The first or “Noahic” Covenant occurs the thirty-third time Noah’s name is used in Scripture, when Yahweh promises to never again flood the earth. The second or “Abrahamic” Covenant occurs the thirty-third time Abraham’s name is used in Scripture, when God blesses Abraham with Isaac, “the child of promise.” The third, or “Mosaic” Covenant occurs in the thirty-third line of Exodus, when God promises Moses the liberation of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. The fourth or “Davidic” Covenant, is the promise of Kingship, when David rules for thirty-three years. The fifth and final Covenant also known as “The New Covenant” is the promise of salvation when Christ dies on the cross at Thirty-Three years of age.

¹⁷⁸ Chris Cook, “Liberation Theology,” in *A Dictionary of Historical Terms*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1998), p. 203.

¹⁷⁹ James D. Kirylo, “Chapter Seven: Liberation Theology and Paulo Freire,” essay, in *Paulo Freire: The Man from Recife* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2011), p. 174.

¹⁸⁰ Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005).

miserable and wretched conditions.”¹⁸¹ Forty years later in 1931, observing the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Pius XI released *Quadragesimo Anno* (On the Fortieth Year), which “spoke out against economic exploitation and argued the shortcomings of liberal capitalism.” Then finally, in 1961, Pope John XXIII issued *Mater et Magistra* (Christianity and Social Progress), which “forbade new means of colonialism and exploitation in the form of economic, cultural, and political rule.”¹⁸² This emphasis on post-colonial considerations would subsequently become the foundation for decades of interpretation within the wider discipline of Liberation theology.

In his study *The Saint and Siren*, Religious Anthropologist Terry Rey argues that within the context of formerly colonized peoples, narrative postcolonial reconsiderations of Catholic figures can be recategorized in a new genre, deemed “Liberation Hagiography.” Rey asserts that “just as Liberation theology was motivated by the conviction that Christianity entails exercise of a ‘preferential option for the poor and oppressed,’ Liberation hagiography is motivated by the conviction that Catholic saints exercise just such a preferential option.”¹⁸³ Within the dimensions of Liberation hagiography, Rey argues that folk-saints, via revisionist myth-making, can “bypass the traditional religious model by drawing from indigenous history to emphasize survival over sacrifice, resistance over obedience, and self-determination over submission.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Leo XIII. *On the Condition of the Working Classes (Rerum Novarum)*. (Boston, MA: St. Paul Books & Media, 1942).

¹⁸² Joseph Gremillion. *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching Since Pope John*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 1976).

¹⁸³ Terry Rey and Deborah O’Neil. “The Saint and Siren: Liberation Hagiography in a Haitian Village.” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 41.2 (2012): pp. 166-186.

¹⁸⁴ Terry Rey and Deborah O’Neil. “The Saint and Siren: Liberation Hagiography in a Haitian Village.” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 41.2 (2012): pp. 166-186.

Ultimately, elements of both traditional “Medieval hagiography” and postmodern “Liberation hagiography” provide an argument for a dramaturgy of post-colonial temporality at play throughout *Supreme Dominion*. What’s more, one can argue that Deevy has structured her drama within the hagiographic theatrical tradition of her subject’s lifetime as a means of positioning herself as both playwright and historian. However, she was not alone in this effort, as multiple Irish writers authored revisionist hagiographies of Wadding, in lieu the folk-saint’s 1957 centenary celebration.

Numerous celebrations popped up across the country, with public lectures from noteworthy Irish historians in Galway, Cork, and Kilkenny, delivered by Síle Ní Chinnéide, Urban Flanagan, and Thomas Moore, respectively. The Waterford centennial saw the unveiling of a new Wadding statue by Gabriel Hayes, “erected in the heart of town and adjacent to Reginald's Tower, in one of the city's most prominent locations.”¹⁸⁵ From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, this renewed sense of interest in Wadding was arguably a byproduct of a popular tradition of “folk-Catholicism,” geared with the intention of revising collective cultural memory. During the aforementioned centenary lecture at the University of Galway, Irish historian Síle Ní Chinnéide notes that

The names of many important historical figures survive in the people's memory in Ireland long after their activities have been forgotten. For instance, ask any Irishman if he knows who Napper Tandy was, and he is almost certain to reply: 'Of course, I do'; but press him further, and you will find that all he knows of the brave Tandy is that 'he took me by the hand'; and the shadows have gathered around many other once honoured personages more worthy to be remembered. So, though the name of Luke Wadding is on all our lips, for most Irish people he remains little more than a name. I hope here to give some substance to that

¹⁸⁵ Andrew Carpenter and Paula Murphy, “HAYES, GABRIEL (1909–78),” essay, in *Art and Architecture of Ireland Volume III: Sculpture 1600-2000* (Dublin, Ireland: Royal Irish Academy, 2015).

shadow, by recalling across the centuries a few memories about the priest, the scholar, and the patriot that was Luke Wadding.¹⁸⁶

Wadding was born on the 16th of October 1588 in County Waterford and subsequently baptized on the feast day of St. Luke, for whom he was named. Wadding was the eleventh out of a total fourteen children born to his father Walter, a wealthy “merchant prince,” and influential member of the powerful Wadding family. Comprised of devout and steadfast Old Norman-Irish Catholics, the Waddings produced multiple Mayors of Waterford city, as well as numerous high-ranking members of clergy who served throughout continental Europe and South America. Conversely, Wadding’s mother Anastasia Lombard was “a blood relation to a number of famous Irish bishops of the period,” including her brother Peter Lombard, Primate of Ireland, and her cousins David Rothe, Bishop of Ossary, and Patrick Comerford, Bishop of Waterford. Wadding’s childhood in Ireland has been recorded as “exceedingly happy,” resulting in a lifelong affinity for his homeland. As a boy he was privately educated at the School of Mrs. Jane Barden in Waterford and of the School of Peter White in Kilkenny, during which time he became fluent in both Irish and Latin, later authoring poems in both languages.¹⁸⁷

Much of Wadding’s childhood was colored by the events of the Nine Years’ War, “one of the most traumatic and bloody conflicts in Irish history.”¹⁸⁸ Said war resulted in the death of approximately 30,000 Irish citizens, mostly from plague brought over by

¹⁸⁶ Síle Ní Chinnéide, “Luke Wadding, 1588-1657: Tercentenary Lecture,” *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* 26, no. 3/4 (1957): p. 81.

¹⁸⁷ Clare Carroll, “The Exile as Historian: Luke Wadding’s Chapter 2: *Annales Minorum* (1625–54) between Global and Local Affiliations,” essay, in *Exiles in a Global City: The Irish and Early Modern Rome, 1609-1783* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), p. 50.

¹⁸⁸ James O’Neill, introduction, in *The Nine Years War, 1593-1603 O’Neill, Mountjoy and the Military Revolution* (Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 2018), p. 1.

English soldiers, with British historian John McGurk noting that “ultimately disease was a far greater killer than battle wounds.”¹⁸⁹ By the war’s end in 1603, both of Wadding’s parents had died from plague, resulting in his elder brother Matthew sending him abroad to study at the Jesuit College in Lisbon, Portugal. Two years into his studies he would leave the Jesuits to join the Franciscan monastery in Matozinhos, eventually matriculating at the University of Coimbra, where he studied philosophy under Francisco Suarez, “one of the greatest natural law philosophers of the age.”¹⁹⁰ During this time he became fluent in Hebrew, Ancient Greek, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. Shortly after being ordained in 1613 Wadding was asked to speak at the General Meeting of the Franciscans in Leiria, where he caught the attention of Antonio de Trejo, Vicar General of the order. Impressed by his work, de Trejo sent Wadding to the Franciscan College at Salamanca to pursue further academic studies. During a subsequent GM of the Franciscan Order in 1618, Wadding was reunited with his former patron de Trejo, who introduced him to the new Minister General of the Franciscan order, Fr. Benigus of Genoa. Said meeting marked Wadding’s indoctrination into the high-ranking circles of the Spanish aristocracy.¹⁹¹ Shortly thereafter, Wadding’s fellow Irishman Florence Conry would introduce him to the complex patron network of the Spanish Court. Conry and his many connections would prove invaluable for a young Wadding, resulting in his high-profile placement in Rome. Historian Clare Carroll notes

¹⁸⁹ John McGurk, “The Dead, Sick and Wounded of the Nine Years War (1594-1603),” *History Ireland: Early Modern History (1500–1700), Social Perspectives* (Features) Volume 3, Issue 4 (Winter 1995): 2–3.

¹⁹⁰ Nick Maxwell, “Luke Wadding (1588–1657): The Only Irishman to Receive Votes in a Papal Conclave,” *History Ireland*, March 3, 2013, <https://www.historyireland.com/luke-wadding-1588-1657-the-only-irishman-to-receive-votes-in-a-papal-conclave/>.

¹⁹¹ Clare Carroll, “The Exile as Historian: Luke Wadding’s Chapter 2: *Annales Minorum* (1625–54) between Global and Local Affiliations,” essay, in *Exiles in a Global City: The Irish and Early Modern Rome, 1609-1783* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), p. 52.

that “Conry represents a strong link with the generation that fought in the Nine Year’s War, while Wadding represents a new phenomenon, an Irish exile more fully integrated into Spanish and Roman institutions.”¹⁹²

In 1618 King Phillip III sent Wadding to Rome as part of “the Spanish Delegation in Defense of the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.” His former patron de Trejo was appointed leader of the delegation, with Wadding serving as his primary assistant. Over the next few years Wadding would outlast the tenure of both de Trejo and his successor, the Count of Albuquerque, and remain in Rome indefinitely as Secretary for the Spanish Legation. He would then live with his mentor’s brother, the Cardinal Gabriele de Trejo, at the palace of Prince Colonna. During this time, Wadding became acquainted with Pope Urban VIII, who would later prove a life-long friend and mentor. As Wadding’s focus shifted towards academia, he requested a transfer from the palace to the Convent of San Pietro, desiring to live among his fellow Franciscans. During these early years in Rome, Wadding quickly won the admiration of his peers and began to establish a strong network of influential theologians and wealthy European aristocrats.¹⁹³ It is at this juncture, in approximately 1622, that Deevy begins her drama.

Deevy’s first three scenes take place over the course of a single day in Rome; and depict the backroom dealings that resulted in the founding of St. Isidore’s, the first Irish College in Rome. The action of the play begins with the arrival Signora Gracia Valjon, a fictional sister of Cardinal de Trejo, who has come to the palace of Prince Colonna to

¹⁹² Clare Carroll, “The Exile as Historian: Luke Wadding’s Chapter 2: *Annales Minorum* (1625–54) between Global and Local Affiliations,” essay, in *Exiles in a Global City: The Irish and Early Modern Rome, 1609-1783* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), p. 53.

¹⁹³ Síle Ní Chinnéide, p. 83.

discuss her son Bernard's position, or lack thereof, within the ecclesial hierarchy. Valjon laments to her dutiful daughter Isabelle, "(Bernard) should by now be a person of importance within the Franciscan Order... but he's passed over." Her bitterness is intensified by the arrival of her brother's secretary, Wadding, with whom she has fallen out. The pair proceed to spar over questions of loyalty, politics, and patronage, at which point Wadding reveals his ambition to open an Irish College in Rome. The noblewoman fears said course might antagonize the British crown, recounting how her own people "lost all of their money long ago through the Armada — Spain's greatest blunder" accompanied by the ominous warning "It is foolish to go warring on England.... The English are a lucky people."¹⁹⁴ Wadding responds by appealing to her conscience, detailing the oppression of his people, and positioning education as an avenue "to see Ireland free from the injustice and persecutions that are crushing her."¹⁹⁵ Ultimately, Valjon relents and pledges to serve as patron for Wadding's college. When examining this exchange in his essay "Lost Dominions: European Catholicism and Irish Nationalism in the Plays of Teresa Deevy" Walshe notes that,

In the beginning the familiar division between idealistic men and skeptical women is used as a dramatic device to introduce Wadding, with those around him questioning and debating his motivations and his ambitions in Rome. His access to the Pope is envied and his interest in the freedom and faith of his own small country is distrusted. His admirers defend him, "He has great power", and his detractor Signora Valjon asks 'Why didn't he stay at home?' and complains that 'People say Father Wadding loves Ireland. Perhaps he loves her enough to renounce his ambitions here and go back to his own people.'¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Teresa Deevy. *Supreme Dominion*, adapted by Philip Rooney. The Teresa Deevy Archive, Maynooth University County Kildare, Ireland. Acquired 2017, p. 128.

¹⁹⁵ Teresa Deevy. *Supreme Dominion*, adapted by Philip Rooney. The Teresa Deevy Archive, Maynooth University County Kildare, Ireland. Acquired 2017, p. 5.

¹⁹⁶ Walshe, p. 135.

In reducing Senora Valjon to the “skeptical woman trope,” Walshe overlooks the character’s historical parallel, and by extension, the immense scope of Deevy’s work as historian.

While there is no record of Cardinal de Trejo having a sister, let alone a noblewoman of papal influence, Senora Valjon is most likely inspired by the infamous Signora Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphili, sister to Pope Innocent X. Pamphili was born in Viterbo, the eldest of three daughters to Sforza Maidalchini, a condottiere, and Vittoria Gualterio, patrician of Orvieto and Rome. In order to conserve the family property for his only son, Sforza decided that his daughters would join religious life, “as the dowry to enter a convent was less than that required for a suitable marriage.” Olimpia refused, and in 1608 married Paolo Nini, one of the wealthiest noblemen in Italy. Their two children both died in infancy, while Nini himself died in 1611, thus making Pamphili the sole heiress of a vast fortune.¹⁹⁷ She would go on to marry Pamphilio Pamphili, elder brother of Giambattista Pamphili, the future Pope Innocent. The brothers shared their ancestral family palace between Piazza Navona and Piazza Pasquino. The separate wings of which accommodated both the Nobleman’s and the Cardinal’s respective courts. During this period Pamphili developed a close relationship with her brother-in-law, eventually becoming his chief advisor.¹⁹⁸ For many years, the future Pope would not make a decision of consequence without first consulting his sister-in-law, resulting

¹⁹⁷ M. Rodén. “Mistress of the Vatican: The True Story of Olimpia Maidalchini, the Secret Female Pope (review).” *The Catholic Historical Review* 95.4 (2009), p. 825.

¹⁹⁸ Philippe Boutry (2002). “Innocent X”. *The Papacy: an encyclopedia*. Routledge, p. 801

in her posthumous identification as “the papal powerbroker of the sixteenth century.”¹⁹⁹

Pamphili’s political maneuvering would eventually win Innocent the 1644 papal conclave. Furious at the power the new Pope’s election gave to his already-powerful sister, Cardinal Alessandro Bichi reportedly exclaimed, “We have just elected a woman pope.” Supporters of Bichi and the French delegation would later hang banners throughout churches in Rome that read “Pope Olimpia I.”²⁰⁰ As Monarch of the Papal States, Pope Innocent X bestowed royal titles onto his closest friends and family, and on the 7th of October 1645, Pamphili received the title, “Princess of San Martino,” effectively turning the small enclave of San Martino al Cimino into her personal principality. It is not surprising that after this honorific elevation, the noblewoman acquired even greater influence.²⁰¹ “Olimpia’s influence” a Florentine envoy wrote on February 11th, 1645, “grows daily; she visits the Pope every other day and the whole world turns to her. The nobility ambassadors, Bishops, and Cardinals show the utmost regard for Olimpia and strive to secure her goodwill by means of flattery and rich presents. Even some of their eminences have adorned their homes with her portrait.”²⁰² Pamphili proceeded to make frequent visits to the Vatican, as Innocent often called on her to appear at public events.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Ludwig Pastor, Frederick Ignatius Antrobus, Ralph Francis Kerr, and Ernest Graf. “Pope Innocent X.” Essay. In *The History of the Popes*, 502. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1938.

²⁰⁰ M. Rodén, p. 826.

²⁰¹ Philippe Boutry, pp. 801–802.

²⁰² Owen Chadwick, *The Popes and European Revolution*. Oxford University Press, (1981), p. 303

²⁰³ Ibid

Much like Deevy's character, Pamphili concentrated much of her attention on the success of her son, the Cardinal Camillo Francesco Pamphili who, much like Bernard, was a noted admirer and protégé of Wadding's. "As new popes navigated the bureaucracy of their predecessors' appointees, it was a common practice to appoint their own trusted relatives to senior administrative positions. Soon after his election, Innocent elevated his late brother's son, Camillo to the office of Cardinal-nephew."²⁰⁴ At the same time he redistributed some of the responsibilities of the office to the Cardinal Secretary of State, Giovanni Giacomo Panciroli, with the military duties assigned to Andrea Giustiniani and Niccolò Ludovisi who had married his nieces, Maria Flaminia and Costanza.²⁰⁵ Despite their best efforts, Innocent's familial appointees were widely considered "dismal failures." While documenting this toxic culture of nepotism in his book *The History of the Popes*, German historian Ludwig von Pastor notes that "the only familial relation to Pope Innocent qualified to fulfill leadership duties was unfortunately a woman."²⁰⁶ During her high-profile life in Rome, Pamphili became a noted ally of Wadding's, aiding in fulfilling the priest's dream of an Irish College in Rome, and allegedly offering financial support to the efforts of the Irish Confederate Army.²⁰⁷ Deevy's drama carefully navigates Wadding's complex relationship with Pamphili's stand-in, Senora Valjon.

Said relationship proves fruitful, and the College of St. Isidore's opened its doors on the 24th of June 1625. Wadding hand-picked a faculty of Irish lecturers, including

²⁰⁴ Philippe Boutry and Philippe Levillain, p. 802.

²⁰⁵ Ludwig Pastor, Frederick Ignatius Antrobus, Ralph Francis Kerr, and Ernest Graf. (1938) "Pope Innocent X." Essay. In *The History of the Popes*, London, England. p. 502.

²⁰⁶ Ludwig Pastor, p. 503.

²⁰⁷ Ludwig Pastor, p. 506.

“Anthony O’Hicidh of a famous literary family in Thomond, Martin Breathnach from Donegal, Patrick Fleming from Louth, and John Punch from Cork.”²⁰⁸ The College’s patrons collectively donated a library of 5,000 printed books and 800 manuscripts, along with enough money to house an initial thirty resident students.²⁰⁹ Wadding would serve as rector of the college throughout its first fifteen years. During this time, he would publish the book on his work with “The Embassy on Behalf of the Immaculate Conception” (1625) as well as an eight-volume history of the Franciscan order (1639). Carroll notes that Wadding’s written works were “some of the best known and most widely disseminated of the Franciscan order; not just in Roman libraries but throughout Europe, from the German-speaking territories to the Low Countries and France.”²¹⁰ Returning to Deevy’s drama, the fourth scene of *Supreme Dominion* proceeds to dramatize Wadding’s conflicting commitments between his scholarship and political efforts.

Deevy’s fourth scene begins at the end of Wadding’s tenure as Rector of St. Isidore’s in 1641, almost “two decades” after the events of the first three-scene sequence. The action resumes with a conversation between two Franciscan brothers; Fr. Francis, a militant Irish nationalist, and Fr. Ambrose, a royalist. The two priests provide much needed exposition, as they reflect on the success of St. Isidore’s, and the ascent of its founder into the upper echelons of Vatican politics. The pair then engage in

²⁰⁸ “History of St. Isidore’s, Rome,” Saint Isidore’s College, Rome, December 23, 2020, <https://stisidoresrome.org/history/>.

²⁰⁹ “History of St. Isidore’s, Rome,” Saint Isidore’s College, Rome, December 23, 2020, <https://stisidoresrome.org/history/>.

²¹⁰ Carroll, Clare. “Introduction: The Irish as Exile” essay, in *Exiles in a Global City: The Irish and Early Modern Rome, 1609-1783* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

a political debate over the current situation in Ireland. Fr. Francis hopes that Wadding's newfound notoriety will aid in the fight for Irish liberation, while Fr. Ambrose hopes Wadding will "abandon his old cause" and focus on his academic work, "I deplore his excessive interest in Ireland — that will yet be the downfall of him..." The priests are interrupted by the arrival of two envoys from the newly formed Irish Confederate Army, Turlough O'Connor and Fergus Ryan, who bring with them the news of a revolution in Ireland. They request an audience with Wadding, to report the 1641 Rebellion, and a planned siege of Dublin Castle by Phelim O'Neill. Senora Valjon arrives with the news that the siege has failed, expressing her distaste for bloodshed. Wadding appears shortly thereafter with packages containing money and ammunition for the Irish Confederate army. Shocked by his participation, the noblewoman presses Wadding on the sanctity of human life, and the inevitable violence of war, "There will be bloodshed! Lives will be lost... Isn't even just one life more precious than gaining possession of a Castle?" Wadding counters that "While the Castle remains unconquered lives are lost in great numbers... Lost through starvation... through ill treatment... in ways you hear nothing of... This is a fight against oppression — lives are 'given,' not lost — they are offered... How different from the millions of lives lost to oppression... dying from lethargy... disheartened." Valjon remains unmoved and Wadding doubles down, advising the noble woman to take up her concerns with the Pope himself, as Urban has supplied the ammunition in question. Throughout this scene Deevy dramatizes a key moment in Irish history, when the Confederate Wars broke out in Ireland in 1641. At

this time the Supreme Council of the Irish Catholic Confederates appointed Wadding their official agent in Rome.²¹¹

The Irish Confederate Wars, also known as “the Eleven Years' War,” waged in Ireland from 1641 to 1653. Remembered globally as the “Irish theatre of the War of the Three Kingdoms,” the wars were a prolonged conflict between England, Ireland, and Scotland during the reign of Charles I. Said conflict was rooted in “political, religious, and ethnic disparities concerning governance, land ownership, and religious freedom” in Ireland. These points of contention “exacerbated preexisting conflict between Irish Catholics and Anglo-Irish Protestants over question of land ownership and whether Ireland could function as a self-governing kingdom under Charles I or a subordinate to the parliament in England.”²¹² The Confederate Wars were the most destructive conflict in Irish history, resulting in an estimated 200,000 to 600,000 deaths from both fighting and war-related famine. The war began with the Rebellion of 1641, at which time Irish Catholics sought to “end anti-Catholic discrimination, increase self-governance, and roll back the Plantations of Ireland.” Additionally, the Irish feared an inevitable invasion from anti-Catholic English Parliamentarians and Scottish Covenanters who at the time, were systematically defying the Stuart king. The initial rebellion developed into a violent ethnic conflict with Irish Catholics on one side, and English and Scottish Protestants on the other.²¹³

²¹¹ Clare Carroll, “Introduction: The Irish as Exile” essay, in *Exiles in a Global City: The Irish and Early Modern Rome, 1609-1783* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), p. 11.

²¹² Philip McKeiver; *A New History of Cromwell's Irish Campaign*, (Advance Press, 2007): p. 3

²¹³ Ibid.

The early months of the war were “marked by ethnic cleansing and massacres in Ulster,” after which Catholic leaders formed “the Irish Catholic Confederation in May 1642, which controlled and governed most of Ireland, comprised of both Irish and old Norman Catholics.” Throughout the following years the Confederates fought against Royalists, Parliamentarians, and an army sent by Scottish Covenanters, with all sides using “scorched earth tactics,” desecrating the land they sought to control. The unexpected nature of the rising, combined with political unrest in Britain, proved critical to Ireland’s initial success. King Charles I, already exhausted by “the Bishops’ Wars of 1638,” and the “1639 War of the Scottish Covenanters,” became “embroiled in a struggle with the Westminster Parliament, and failed to act decisively against the Irish insurgents.”²¹⁴ Irish Historian Jane Ohlmeyer notes that “had the English king accepted the Grand Remonstrance (December 1641) and somehow reconciled his differences with Parliament, there can be little doubt that the revolt in Ireland could have been quashed with relative ease; but any hope of dealing quickly with the Irish problem was thwarted by the outbreak of the First English Civil War in August 1642 which dramatically reduced the amount of English money and the quantity of supplies and soldiers available for Ireland and allowed the Catholic insurgents, now bonded by an oath of association, to organise themselves into a formal confederation, modeled on the English Parliament, with its capital at Kilkenny.”²¹⁵ Charles later authorized secret

²¹⁴Jane Ohlmeyer. “A Failed Revolution? The Irish Confederate War in its European Context.” *History Ireland, Early Modern History (1500–1700), Early Modern History Social Perspectives*, Features, 1, no. 3 (Spring 1995). 1-2.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

negotiations with the new “Confederation of Kilkenny”, resulting in a Confederate–Royalist cessation in September 1643 and further negotiations.

Deevy’s fifth scene is set amidst the news of this temporary cessation reaching Wadding and his followers. Wadding appears devastated, as he fears a peace agreement could result in partition; “After all those years of persecution... years during which no Catholic could hold any position... years of Mass being celebrated in lanes and alleyways...there was a moment of hope... And now cognitions worsen daily. Now comes this delayed threat of... a split country. That is the danger of this ‘cessation’ — a divided land... people turning against another in bitterness and disappointment.” At this juncture it is worth noting that Deevy authored this play in 1957, shortly after the onset of the IRA Border Campaigns in the North of Ireland, a major precursor to the Troubles. Not to mention the fact that Deevy took a great many trips to Belfast in her later life, experiencing a career revival in the North of Ireland after being shut out by the National Theatre. One could argue that throughout the scene, Deevy speaks directly to her contemporary audience, as Wadding articulates the inevitability of violence as a byproduct of a partition.

When addressing “post-partition anxieties and the matter of authenticity” in twentieth century Irish literature, the critic Louise Harrington notes that “the separation of identity politics and cultural pursuits at this time was next to impossible. Even if something was originally intended to be apolitical, it inevitably became a medium through which Irish nationalism could flourish and counter British culture.”²¹⁶

²¹⁶ Louise Harrington, “Postpartition Anxieties and the Matter of Authenticity in Ireland,” essay, in *Partitions and Their Afterlives: Violence, Memory, Living*, ed. Radhika Mohanram and Anindya Raychaudhuri (London, England: Rowman & Littlefield international, 2019), p. 159.

Harrington positions partition as an act of violent cartographic dominion over the land, stipulating that “no amount of perceived post-partition, post-conflict stability can undo the formation and cementation of insider-outsider divisions, nor eliminate the collective anxieties around territory and belonging, nor stem the desire to maintain a carefully bordered authenticity that binds the people to the land.”²¹⁷ Conversely Irish psychologist Geraldine Moane asserts that,

Repeated occurrence of trauma, dispossession, loss and defeat’, whether through natural disasters such as famine, the domination of colonial forces, the partition of the island or the powerful influence of the Catholic Church, have fundamentally shaped Ireland’s present state. The enduring influence is not easily shaken and, even recent periods of prosperity and radical development cannot undo historical legacies.²¹⁸

However, the application of liberation theology as revisionist myth-making, combats the very historical legacies that Moane deems “not easily shaken.” By invoking a legacy of failed partition within the theatrical medium, Deevy manufactures a ritualized, meditative space, within which her audience can collectively contend with the cyclical, temporal realities of a divided island.

The cessation of the Confederation ended in 1644 when the Confederate military expedition landed in Scotland to aid the Royalist army. The Confederates continued to fight the Parliamentarians in Ireland, winning a decisive victory at the Battle of Benburb.²¹⁹ In recalling these early, formative victories for the Irish Confederate army, Ní Chinnéide notes that “little importance can be attached to the initial success of

²¹⁷ Harrington, p. 174.

²¹⁸ Geraldine Moane, ‘Colonialism and the Celtic Tiger: Legacies of History and the Quest for Vision’, in Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin, eds., *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), pp. 113-114.

²¹⁹ Philip McKeiver; *A New History of Cromwell's Irish Campaign*, (Advance Press, 2007): p. 7.

popular risings, unless help can be obtained from the outside world to sustain and consolidate the victory.”²²⁰ To obtain that help “Catholic Ireland turned to Luke Wadding, the only man who could gain the ear of the pope, and through the pope, the ears of those Catholic powers without whose permission neither men nor supplies could be shipped to Ireland.”²²¹ That appeal met with a prompt response; and so it came about that “during the whole length of the first five successful years' of fighting Ireland's war effort was conducted abroad,”²²² positioning Wadding as Ireland's *eminence grise*.

Deevy explores the dimension of Wadding's influence in the sixth scene of her play, set three months after the Battle of Benburb. The scene opens with a pair of unnamed Italian men gossiping about the growing possibility of Irish independence, “I myself have no feeling for or against the Irish cause... but I could not help but be moved this morning when I saw Father Wadding unveil the banners that your Irish Army took from the English at Benburb.”²²³ Similar sentiments of celebration are expressed by Wadding and his fellow Irish priests. Wishing to capitalize on their growing momentum, Wadding spends much of the scene maneuvering to get the new Pope Innocent X to send Cardinal Giovanni Battista Rinuccini as a “nuncio,” or “ecclesiastical diplomat” to Kilkenny. Historically, Wadding had in fact lobbied for Rinuccini's appointment, a decision that would eventually prove fatal to the Confederate war effort. In the

²²⁰ Ní Chinnéide, p. 85.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Clare Carroll, p.2

²²³ Deevy, p. 36.

beginning Rinuccini “appeared to be the savior the Confederates had prayed for.”²²⁴ He sent ahead of his arrival one-thousand braces of pistols, four-thousand cartridge belts, two-thousand swords, five-hundred muskets and twenty-thousand pounds of gunpowder before embarking on Kilkenny. He then arrived twelve days later with a further two-thousand muskets and cartridge-belts, four thousand swords, four-hundred braces of pistols, two thousand pike-heads, and twenty-thousand pounds of gunpowder, an army of fully equipped soldiers and sailors, and 150,658 coins to finance the war effort. These supplies afforded Rinuccini significant input into the internal politics of the Confederate government and army. To maintain this influence Rinuccini did not distribute the cash directly to the Confederate government or Supreme Council, as he was instructed to do, but rather doled out small portions of money and arms for specific military projects as he saw fit. Additionally, Rinuccini later stirred in-fighting among the Irish and Norman factions, hoping to prevent a peace treaty with Charles I that would grant Ireland home rule and religious freedom.²²⁵

Despite some early successes, Rinuccini’s presence ultimately proved more harmful than helpful. After the disastrous Battle of Dungan’s Hill, the Confederates entered into a second round of peace treaty negotiations with the English crown. Determined to prevent the treaty, Rinuccini inspired a major schism that the confederacy never recovered from, ultimately resulting in their defeat. Having grown fearful of the worsening political situation, Rinuccini left Ireland on the 23rd of

²²⁴ Donal F. Cregan, “The Confederate Catholics of Ireland: The Personnel of the Confederation, 1642–9,” *Irish Historical Studies* 29, no. 116 (1995): p. 490.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

February, 1649.²²⁶ Upon his return, Pope Innocent tasked Rinuccini with authoring a detailed report of his mission, identifying “what went wrong.” Upon his return to Fermo, Rinuccini enlisted the aid of two Irish friars, Richard O’Ferrall and Robert O’Connell, to help with his report. However, Rinuccini died shortly thereafter, and the two young friars were left to complete his account of the *Commentarius Rinuccinianus*, later written in five volumes. This account assigns blame to “local tribal divisions” for the Catholic disunity in Ireland. He assigns even further blame to the “Norman-Irish” for the eventual Catholic defeat, as he felt that the Irish, “despite being less civilized, were more sincere Catholics.” This account would remain unprinted and unavailable for public consumption until 1949.²²⁷

In the world of the play, Deevy’s Wadding acknowledges his own shortcomings, ruefully agreeing when one of his followers laments “Perhaps Cardinal Rinuccini was the wrong person to send to Ireland...” It is then revealed that Wadding intercepted a letter from the Irish Confederacy of Kilkenny to an aging Urban VIII, requesting that he be made a Cardinal. Here Deevy is dramatizing a historical truth, Wadding did refuse the rank of Cardinal on multiple occasions, for fear that it would result in him ascending to the papacy. Urban openly expressed his desire for Wadding to become his successor after his death,²²⁸ and Wadding feared that such a position would require him to abandon his efforts in the Confederate War, knowing that without his continued fiscal support the cause would be lost. Despite refusing the rank of Cardinal, an informal pre-

²²⁶ Rev. Edward Alfred D’Alton (1912). “Rinuccini, Giovanni Battista”. In Herbermann, Charles George (ed.). Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. XIII. New York: The Encyclopedia Press. p. 61.

²²⁷ Donal F. Cregan, p. 491

²²⁸ Ludwig Pastor, p. 503.

requisite for the papacy, Wadding received a number of votes at the 1644 papal conclave.²²⁹ In fact, if not for the political maneuvering of Pamphili, Wadding may even have won.²³⁰ Instead, he continued to invest his time into the War effort, as well as to his scholarship and fellow Franciscans. After the conclave he was made Procurator of the Order of Friars Minor and Vice Commissary of the Franciscan Order.²³¹

In Deevy's retelling, Fr. Francis laments "When your name was sent into the Conclave, I was leaping with joy — I was sure we had you..." Wadding reassures his follower that he sacrificed the chance of assuming the papacy for "the hope of a free Ireland." An unnamed emissary arrives from Kilkenny, bearing ominous news of infighting among the Irish and Norman factions of the Confederacy, fearing a schism. Here Deevy dramatizes yet another historic event, when the parliamentary commander forged an alliance with the more moderate Confederates. Rinuccini responded by excommunicating the roughly 2,000 supporters of the Truce. At this juncture Catholic Ireland became more polarized than ever, and the battle lines between the "moderate party" and the "extreme faction" were formalized on the 11th of June 1649 when Owen Roe O'Neill and the army of Ulster declared war on the Supreme Council. Ohlmeyer notes that these "Internecine quarrels mystified foreign observers, who could not understand the myopia of the Irish:"²³²

²²⁹ Nick Maxwell (2013). "Luke Wadding (1588–1657): The Only Irishman to Receive Votes in a Papal Conclave." *History Ireland, Early Modern History (1500–1700), Early Modern History Social Perspectives*, Issue 4, Volume 15, p. 1.

²³⁰ Philippe Boutry (2002). "Innocent X". *The Papacy: an encyclopedia*. Routledge. p. 801.

²³¹ Flanagan, Urban. *Luke Wadding* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1957). p. 22.

²³² Jane Ohlmeyer. "A Failed Revolution? The Irish Confederate War in its European Context." *History Ireland, A Failed Revolution? The Irish Confederate war in its European context (3:1) Published in 1641 Rebellion, Confederate War and Cromwell, Early Modern History (1500–1700), Features*, Issue 1, Volume 3 (Spring 1995) p. 4.

What really surprises the majority of those who contemplate the affairs of Ireland [the French ambassador in London reported back to Paris] is to see that people of the same nation and of the same religion—who are well aware that the resolution to exterminate them totally has already been taken—should differ so strongly in their private hostilities; that their zeal for religion, the preservation of their country and their own self-interest are not sufficient to make them lay down—at least, for a short time—the passions which divide them one from the other.²³³

Division was only intensified by the sudden death of O'Neill, which marked a decisive blow for the Confederates. At the time many believed the unsubstantiated claim that he was poisoned, a theory Deevy herself propagates. O'Neill's death, compounded by the change of papal regime, and the growing political tensions between Spanish and French Catholic coalitions “progressively swallowed all potential resources for the Irish.”²³⁴

Left crippled and divided, the Confederacy eventually fell at the hands of Oliver Cromwell, who invaded Ireland in August of 1649. Earlier that year the Confederates had allied with the English Royalists, who had been defeated by the Parliamentarians in the English Civil War, but by May 1652, Cromwell's Parliamentary army had defeated the Confederate and Royalist coalitions in Ireland and occupied the country, effectively ending the War.²³⁵ Cromwell then passed a series of infamous penal laws against Roman Catholics as punishment for the rebellion. Almost all lands owned by Irish Catholics were confiscated and given to Protestant settlers. The Act of Settlement 1652 formalized the change in land ownership, and the remaining minority of Catholic landowners were transplanted to Connacht. Catholics were then barred from the Irish

²³³ Ohlmeyer, p. 5

²³⁴ Ibid

²³⁵ Philip McKeiver, *A New History of Cromwell's Irish Campaign*, (Advance Press, 2007).

Parliament and forbidden to live in towns or “inter-marry” with Protestant citizens. The Parliamentary conquest proved brutal, “as Roman Catholic worship was banned, Irish Catholic-owned land was desecrated, and captured Catholic clergy were publicly executed.”²³⁶

Deevy’s seventh and final scene jumps nine years into the future to 1655, amidst the horrors of the penal era. The action begins with the arrival of Fergus Ryan and his wife Catherine, “a Waterford woman.” Ravaged by Cromwell’s war, Fergus and Catherine have sojourned to Rome, as Catherine’s brother Cooney will begin studying at the Almo Collegio Capranica, the oldest college in Rome.²³⁷ Deevy’s decision to have Cooney study at Capranica alongside continental Europeans, rather than at St. Isidore’s alongside his fellow Irishmen, is no doubt representative of Wadding’s declining influence during the penal era. The couple arrives at St. Isidore’s and request a meeting with “the Caretaker,” expecting to meet Wadding. Instead, they are met by Fr. Ambrose, who asserts the need for Irish colleges with “things being so much worse now in Ireland... after all the disastrous failures.” He then remarks that “things would be easier in Ireland if people believed in and followed the great Lord Ormond,” a major adversary of the now defunct Confederation. Outraged by his comments Catherine exclaims “It’s easily seen you’re far from Ireland or you’d know him for a villain! And they telling us ever of the ‘great Irishmen’ in St. Isidore’s College.” Fr. Ambrose responds “Must every Irishman have the same opinion? I never agreed with Fr. Wadding and still hold that he was mistaken. It is better that his power has lessened... People have seen his disastrous

²³⁶ John Lowe (1964). “Charles I and the Confederation of Kilkenny, 1643–9”. *Irish Historical Studies*. 14 (53): p. 19.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

failures; some feel now they were foolish; some are wondering why Fr. Wadding did not use his power more wisely..." With even greater outrage Catherine counters "Those people... are not Irish...At home everyone loves him. I come from Waterford city... You'd see faces light up when his name is mentioned."²³⁸

The trio proceeds to discuss the brutal realities of the penal laws, with Fr. Ambrose begging Catherine "not to paint too gloomy a picture of Ireland" for a sickly, aging Wadding. With the invocation of his name, Wadding appears, overjoyed by the arrival of his guests. The merriment is cut short, as they begin to discuss the widespread "massacres of priests in Ireland." Inspiring a monologue from Catherine about the disparities between men and women during the War, while the "men were out fighting, the women were sitting at home, thinking and ignored." She is then silenced by her husband, who dismisses her words as "foolish." Wadding changes the subject to his hope for the arrival of new Irish seminarians. Refusing to ignore the inevitable violence said seminarians will face after ordination, Catherine shares that she recently witnessed the brutal murder of her local priest, Fr. Finbarr. Her husband remarks that the event "broke her," with Catherine countering "I am not broken." Inspired by her confidence, Wadding assures Catherine that her brother will be well looked after in Rome. He then shares that his health is rapidly failing, and he longs to die in Waterford; "The river (Suirr) is changeless – I loved the river... I hope to go there on a longer journey... The grand one, the big voyage."²³⁹ After a beat, Wadding

²³⁸ Teresa Deevy. *Supreme Dominion*, adapted by Philip Rooney. The Teresa Deevy Archive, Maynooth University County Kildare, Ireland. Acquired 2017, p. 44

²³⁹ Teresa Deevy, pp. 48 - 49

beseeches Catherine, in an ominous sequence that seemingly looks ahead to the twentieth century,

Wadding:

Pray for the priests now in Ireland being tried and persecuted... Pray too for others, in future generations who may be tried through their own power... that is the hardest test... Pray God that in Ireland we will always be truly humble.

Catherine:

Priest having power? I couldn't believe it!

Wadding:

That day will come...

Catherine:

A happy time surely...

Wadding:

No. Another test...²⁴⁰

Catherine is perplexed by Wadding's ominous premonition and informs him that she has brought the young son of his fallen comrade, Turlough O'Connor. Catherine and Fergus then fetch the boy, named Luke, and depart. The young Luke proudly announces to his namesake that he has recently made his first communion, a sacrament now illegal in penal Ireland. This elicits an emotional response from Wadding who exclaims, "Offer your life to God... like a wafer, ready to be changed, crushed, and immolated... Rejoicing always in His Supreme Dominion... Then you will be very happy. Ah, God bless you... God bless you!"²⁴¹

Throughout this scene Deevy positions her final act of historical revision, centering the voice of a Waterford woman and child within the violent realities of the

²⁴⁰ Teresa Deevy, p. 51

²⁴¹ Teresa Deevy, p. 52

penal era. It is the woman who is “not broken” at the sight of bloodshed, it is the child who, facing the threat of imminent danger, braves undergoing the sacraments. Here Deevy invokes the key tenements of Liberation theology by centering the disenfranchised and reconsidering the historical and temporal dimensions of violence within Catholic Ireland. At this juncture, she leaves her audience with more questions than answers; is violence justified as a means of liberation? Is the theology of the disenfranchised one of perpetual suffering? And, perhaps most importantly, can faith exist beyond the cyclical failures of the Catholic imagination? In positing these questions, and many more, *Supreme Dominion* proffers an origin myth for a burgeoning Republic, whilst simultaneously interrogating the misgivings of the contemporary church. Much like her peers Kate O'Brien and Frank O'Connor, Deevy embraced “an impulse towards republicanism compounded by disillusionment for the gendered violence of the Irish Catholic state.”²⁴² Here she embodies the woman theologian's impulse to “confess the past,” with the keen understanding that “the continuation and representation of her theological praxis will happen again.” In the wake of contemporary church failings, exacerbated by both the growing religious tensions of the IRA border campaigns, and a widespread culture of faith sanctioned patriarchal violence, Deevy crafts a dramaturgy of liberatory dimensions, one in which ‘Supreme Dominion,’ is the inheritance of the marginalized. Said inheritance, of “marginalized,” or “Queer” theology would prove a major theme in Deevy's next drama, *In the Cellar of My Friend*.

²⁴² Eibhear Walshe, p. 133.

Chapter Four:

***In the Cellar of My Friend,*
Autofiction as Queer-Coded Canticle**

Teresa Deevy's penultimate play, *In the Cellar of my Friend*, was written in the mid 1950s towards the end of her life. In what is arguably her most nuanced, if not perplexing drama, Deevy progresses further into an era of playwriting deemed "pure, unexplicated poetic statement."²⁴³ The play is, at its core, a comedy of errors in which each character is operating with a different understanding of the prior twenty-four hours: Belle believes she is marrying Barney, Tom believes he is marrying Belle, and Barney believes he is marrying Christ. Meanwhile the witty spinster aunt Patty, by her own omission, "knows nothing." These various miscommunications unravel to illuminate what appears to be a tale of unrequited love. However, boiling just under the surface are elements of allegory and confession, both rooted in a delicious spiritual mysticism. While previously thought to have been unproduced during Deevy's lifetime, a recent article by Kate McCarthy and Una Kealy in the *Irish University Review* reveals that *Cellar* was in fact produced in 1957 at Madame Barnard Cogley's Studio Theatre Club in Dublin.²⁴⁴ Deevy's archived correspondence at the National Library indicates that four years later in 1961 she submitted the play for broadcast at RTÉ, where it was ultimately rejected by Micheál Ó hAodha, a known advocate of her work, as he felt it was "primarily a stage play unsuitable for radio."²⁴⁵ Her letters also reveal that the John Jordan inquired about including the play in his critical study, *Teresa Deevy: An*

²⁴³ Jordan, p. 22.

²⁴⁴ Kate McCarthy and Una Kealy, "Writing from the Margins: Re-Framing Teresa Deevy's Archive and Her Correspondence with James Cheasty c.1952–1962," *Irish University Review* 52, no. 2 (2022): 322–40

²⁴⁵ Teresa Deevy, Letter to Micheál Ó hAodha, (undated) in "Letters from Teresa Deevy to Micheál Ó hAodha," The National Library of Ireland.

Introduction. In response to said inquiry, Deevy advised “do whatever seems best,” with Jordan ultimately choosing to exclude details of the play.²⁴⁶

In the Cellar of My Friend would eventually make its North American debut in 2017, presented by Mint Theater Company in New York City under a bill of four Deevy one-acts collectively titled *The Suitcase Under the Bed*. Andy Webster, in reviewing the play for *The New York Times*, deemed the production a “Critic’s Pick” of the 2017 theatrical season, writing,

Thank heaven for the unwavering commitment of Jonathan Bank, the theatrical archaeologist whose Mint Theater Company unearths long-forgotten plays and imbues them with new life. Perhaps his greatest discovery is Teresa Deevy (1894-1963), an Irish dramatist who flourished at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in the 1930s. (Deaf from 20, she later wrote radio plays.) Deevy’s work often bears a feminist subtext uncommon in her country in her day. The second play on the evening’s bill, “*In the Cellar of My Friend*” concerns the 20-somethings Barney and Belle (A. J. Shively and a glowing Sarah Nicole Deaver), childhood friends who have (seemingly) found romance, until Barney’s officious father (Colin Ryan), a widower with designs on Belle, intervenes. What emerges is a subtle portrait of paternal psychological abuse, which Barney’s sympathetic aunt (Cynthia Mace) can only helplessly observe. True to Mint tradition, Andrea Varga’s costumes and Jane Shaw’s gentle sound design reflect a rich understanding of the era, as does Mr. Bank’s assured direction. He clearly adores Deevy, and ultimately so will the audience.²⁴⁷

Other notices were distinctly less effusive, with *New York Theatre Guide* writing “the evening’s second offering, *In the Cellar of My Friend*, is the weakest of the batch. It’s a strange tale about a father in love with his son’s girlfriend. Turns out, the son is not really that into her anyway. And the girl herself is clueless about both men’s intentions.

²⁴⁶ Teresa Deevy, Letter to John Jordan, (undated) in “Letters from John Jordan to Teresa Deevy,” The National Library of Ireland.

²⁴⁷ Andy Webster, “Review: Ireland in Four Dimensions, by a Pioneering Playwright,” *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*, August 25, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/25/theater/the-suitcase-under-the-bed-review.html>.

The action consists mostly of finding ways to put off learning why Barney has no interest in the perfectly delightful Belle, despite (her) charm and stunning appearance.”²⁴⁸ Conversely, *TheatreMania* bemoaned “*In the Cellar of My Friend* hinges on an ultra-contrived misunderstanding between two ex-lovers that goes on entirely too long to be plausible or amusing.”²⁴⁹

What’s remarkable is that nowhere in Deevy’s script does she identify Belle as Barney’s “girlfriend” nor his “ex-lover.” However, both qualifiers appear concurrent throughout most, if not all the productions’ reviews. In a similar vein, during a conversation surrounding *In the Cellar of My Friend* at a 2021 symposium hosted by the Waterford Institute of Technology entitled “Disability and the Archive: Teresa Deevy in Context,” Una Kealy stated that “this is the play that has always perplexed me.”²⁵⁰ *Cellar* has puzzled theatre scholars and practitioners alike for decades, posing numerous questions regarding the drama’s plot, structure, and overall meaning. However, the application of Queer theology as well as the playwright’s personal correspondence and family biography, illuminate new dimensions of the play that have previously gone unexplored. To answers these questions, we must first interrogate Deevy’s source material.

The play borrows its title, and many of its themes, from a line of *The Spiritual Canticle*, a long form verse poem by St. John of the Cross, or San Juan de la Cruz. Juan

²⁴⁸ Stanford Friedman, “Review of Mint Theater Company’s Production of *The Suitcase Under the Bed* at Theatre Row,” New York Theatre Guide.com, August 25, 2017, <https://www.newyorktheatreguide.com/reviews/the-suitcase-under-the-bed>.

²⁴⁹ Zachary Stewart, “Review: *The Suitcase Under the Bed*,” TheaterMania, August 24, 2017, https://www.theatermania.com/news/the-suitcase-under-the-bed_82156/.

²⁵⁰ *Disability and the Archive: Teresa Deevy in Context*, YouTube (Maynooth University, 2021), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UViD7e7pisw>.

was a 16th century Spanish mystic who served at the forefront of the Counter-Reformation in Spain, a period of Catholic resurgence initiated to combat the growing Protestant Reformation.²⁵¹ He famously wrote this lengthy spiritual epic as a diary during a prolonged period of incarceration after being censored and imprisoned in Toledo.²⁵² The Saint was born on the 24th of June, 1542 in Castilla la Vieja; christened “Juan de Yepes y Álvarez” by a wealthy “converso” family. Converso’s were historically Jewish citizens who had settled in Al-Andalus (modern day Spain) sometime during “La Convivencia” or “The Coexistence”, before ultimately being forced to convert to Christianity after the Reconquista in 1492.²⁵³ During Andalusian rule, 711 through 1492, the Castilian state was defined by a “remarkable kaleidoscope of peoples,” consisting of Muslims, Jews, and Mozarabs, or Christian who lived under Muslim influence.

Often cited by modern Hispanists as arguably the most peaceful period in Iberian history,²⁵⁴ both the cultural assimilation and religious plurality of La Convivencia birthed new and innovative forms of creative practice; chief among the art of calligraphy and “muwashshah” poetry. Celebrated today as “the literary embodiment of the coexistence of different languages and ethnic groups in medieval Spain,” muwashshah is a genre of long form, secular verse poetry written in hybrid configurations of Arabic, Spanish, and Hebrew. The art of muwashshah inspired both

²⁵¹ Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley (2003). *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Volume 3. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans. p. 362.

²⁵² Kieran Kavanaugh, (1991). "General Introduction: Biographical Sketch". In Kieran Kavanaugh (ed.). *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*. Washington: ICS Publications. p. 9

²⁵³ Miriam Bodian, “‘Men of the Nation’: The Shaping of Converso Identity in Early Modern Europe”. *Past & Present* 143 (1994).

²⁵⁴ Jerrilynn Dodds, et. al, *The Arts of Intimacy Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Making of Castilian Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. p. 5.

“the most prolific outpouring of Jewish poetry since the reign of King David,” as well as the introduction of secular themes into Judeo-Christian mystical literature.²⁵⁵ As the child of conversos, Juan descended from a culture where secular poetry was as ubiquitous as daily prayer, an important influence when interrogating his authorship of *the Canticle*.

The Spiritual Canticle is a loose adaptation of the *Song of Songs*, sometimes known as the “*Canticle of Canticles*,” a controversial poem which occupies a unique position in the Old Testament, as it is the only biblical text that does not interrogate “the Law” or the “Covenants between God and the people of Israel,” nor does the text impart wisdom like *Proverbs* or *Ecclesiastes*. Rather, the book celebrates sexual intimacy through “the voices of two lovers, praising each other, yearning for each other, proffering invitations to enjoy.”²⁵⁶ In his adaptation, Juan interrogates the “mystical quest of the soul seeking perfect unity with God” in the form of an erotic love poem. It is worth noting that prior to authoring *The Spiritual Canticle*, Juan drew criticism from the Vatican for translating *The Song of Songs* to Spanish from the original Latin, an act previously deemed sacrilegious. What’s more, he inspired further vitriol when publishing his adaptation, as the poem makes no explicit references to God, and is comprised of erotic, if not overtly sexual imagery between “the Bride,” representing the priest, and “the Groom,” representing Christ. Juan was later asked to author an introduction to the poem, “illuminating its mystical allegory.” In doing so he wrote

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Duane Garrett. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*. (B&H Publishing Group. Nashville, Tennessee, 1993), p. 366.

Since these songs were composed in love and in abundance of mystical understanding, they are not intended to exhaust any understanding, nor is it my intention to do so. My intention is only to shed some general light since your Reverence has so requested. I take this to be the better option since utterances of love are best left in their broadest sense, so that one can benefit from them in accordance with the mode and capacity of their spirit rather than limiting them to one single meaning in a way that falls short of pleasing every palate. Thus, although some explanation is given to these stanzas, there is no need to bind ourselves to these understandings, because mystical wisdom *which is given out of love and is the subject of these songs*²⁵⁷, need not be understood in any given way to effect love and affection in the soul.²⁵⁸

Catholic theologian Carl Telford identifies the central theme of *The Spiritual Canticle* as “the love of God for the human soul, and the soul’s quest to return this love. It is bridal mysticism. The soul is lovesick. This is a love song between the Beloved and the soul.”²⁵⁹ In the poem’s first section, “the bride” anxiously searches for her beloved. “This is a hurried searching” — the bride looks across both the mountains and watersides “to no satisfaction” — and, while searching, becomes “ever more wounded.”²⁶⁰ The poem begins with the lines, “Where have you hidden, Beloved, and left me moaning? / You fled like the stag after wounding me; I went out calling you, but you were gone.” The knowledge of the groom’s absence “wounds the bride to death. “Since seeking God demands a heart naked, strong and free from all evils and goods that are not purely God, the soul speaks in both this verse and the following stanzas about the freedom and fortitude one should possess in looking for him.” Throughout the first

²⁵⁷ Italics are mine.

²⁵⁸ CE, Prologo, 2. Juan wrote this commentary for ‘The Spiritual Canticle’ upon the request of Madre Ana de Jesús, prioress of the Discalced Carmelite nuns of St. Joseph in Granada in 1584.

²⁵⁹ Fr. Carl Telford, “St John of the Cross - The Spiritual Canticle” (Marist Messenger RSS, July 30, 2021), pp. 1-5.

²⁶⁰ Ibid

section, the bride come to accept “the trials, bitterness, and mortifications of the journey,” confident that suffering serves a greater purpose.²⁶¹

In the second sequence the bride arrives at the meadow in bloom and catches sight of the groom. At this juncture the tone of the poem changes from anxious desperation to calm fixation. The bride takes stock of “the flowery beds, the cellar of spiced wine, and the balsam around them.” The groom is to the bride “like the mountains is to the wooded valleys, and the silent music is to the tranquil night.” However, the bride is not wholly free, “the appetites and rebellions of sensuality, run rampant.” This fleeting vision is only another trial on the road to unity. In the third and final sequence the spiritual marriage between bride and groom finally materializes, and “the highest summit of perfection in this life is reached.” In the final stanzas, the bride is euphoric, “the small white dove has returned to the ark with an olive branch; and now the turtledove has found its longed-for mate by the green riverbanks. She lived in solitude and now in solitude has built her nest; and in solitude He guides her, He alone, who also bears in solitude the wound of love.”²⁶²

In his book *Queer God de Amor*, contemporary theologian Miguel Diaz documents the overwhelming tendency of theologians like Telford to dismiss the profound theological significance of sexuality conveyed in *The Spiritual Canticle*. Diaz argues that *The Canticle* is not only an explicitly erotic poem, but rather an implicitly homoerotic

²⁶¹ “St. John of The Cross. *The Spiritual Canticle*, mbfallon.com (MBFallon, May 2014), http://www.mbfallon.com/spiritual_canticle/12.stanzas.22-35.pdf.

²⁶² St. John of The Cross. *The Spiritual Canticle*, mbfallon.com (MBFallon, May 2014), http://www.mbfallon.com/spiritual_canticle/12.stanzas.22-35.pdf.

confession, and should be read as an early example of Queer theology.²⁶³ Diaz posits that, at its core, the poem conflates the experience of “coming out” with that of “mystical unification;” an allegorical journey from the intimacy of the dark night into the splendor of the morning. In *The Spiritual Canticle* Juan chronicles a process of purification and illumination that “transforms the will and the mind towards its central purpose, helping readers push beyond familiar notions of where God is found, how God is known, and how man is loved.”²⁶⁴ In recontextualizing the poem as an allegory for both “divine love and coming out,” Juan’s text simultaneously “outs God from heteronormative closets” and “outs human sexuality to resource theology.” This metaphorical “outing” ostensibly positions Juan’s poem as a “Queer mystical disruptor” of the Christian tradition. What is more, engaging with the queerness of divine and human life enables readers to “better align theoretical reflections on the mystery of God with the experiences of queer Catholics.”²⁶⁵ Beyond just *the Canticle*, Juan’s mystical theology, which highlights the notion of “God as lover” and God’s “erotic-like relationship with human persons,” provides a framework to rethink the Christian doctrine of adoration. “At the heart of Trinitarian theology is the affirmation that God is personal and relational, and that human persons created in God’s image are also called to exist from and for others.”²⁶⁶ Diaz urges that “relating Juan’s mystical Trinitarian theology to the daily lived experiences of human sexuality and the sexual subject offers new resources and insights into Christian theological traditions.”

²⁶³ Miguel H. Díaz, “Disruptive Cartographers: Doing Theology Latinamente”, Essay in *Queer God de Amor*, (Fordham University Press. Bronx, New York. 2023), p. xxviii.

²⁶⁴ Díaz, p. 30.

²⁶⁵ Díaz, p. xxviii-xxix.

²⁶⁶ Díaz, p. 8-9.

According to Diaz, this theology “(1) bridges the Christian spirituality of a Spanish mystic and the doctrine of God in relationship to the experience of human sexuality;” effectively eradicating subsequent, puritanical Church teaching of sex in relation to shame. (2) “Challenges existing interpretations of Juan’s mystical theology, drawing on his works in Spanish rather than relying on English-language translations, in order to highlight the incarnational nature of his Trinitarian theology;” allowing for nuances in language lost to earlier attempts of translation. (3) “Expands conventional interpretations of his mystical theology, which tend to minimize his sexual analogies and interpret them through a heteronormative lens;” effectively reclaiming *The Canticle* as a journey of “coming out” and self-acceptance. And (4) “Queers Juan’s notions of divine and human persons as a way to deepen the Catholic analogical imagination. In Juan, we can discover that theological ‘queerness’ is ‘not entirely alien to the theological tradition,’²⁶⁷ but in fact, is essential to affirm the mystery of God.²⁶⁸” Conversely, Queer theology’s foremother, Althaus-Reid, defines the discipline as “a first-person theology: it is diasporic, self-disclosing, autobiographical, and responsible for its own words.”²⁶⁹ This brings us back to Deevy, and the veiled confessions made throughout her play of an underlying queerness in the margins of both family and the self.

Cellar opens in familiar Deevy territory: a lazy summer’s day at the Keane family estate in County Kilkenny, surrounded by a beautiful meadow. Here the playwright

²⁶⁷ Susannah Cornwall and Lisa Isherwood, “Stranger in Our Midst: The Becoming of the Queer God in the Theology of Marcella Althaus-Reid,” essay, in *Dancing Theology in Fetish Boots: Essays in Honour of Marcella Althaus-Reid*, ed. Mark D. Jordan (London, England: SCM Press, 2010), 103.

²⁶⁸ Díaz. p. xxv

²⁶⁹ Marcella Althaus-Reid, “Queering Theology,” essay, in *The Queer God* (London, England: Routledge, 2007), p. 8.

mirrors a juxtaposition that runs concurrent throughout Juan's poem: the interior anxiety of the domestic contrasted by the exterior tranquility of the natural world. The events of the play remain confined to a single local, a "breakfast room" described by Deevy as "pleasant, suggestive of space and of leisure." Deevy then establishes one of the play's most significant themes, confused frustration, via a nonverbal written sequence throughout opening stage directions. "Lights rise on Patricia "Patty" Keane a woman in her fifties, spare and grey-haired, but full of energy: her movements are jerky and irregular," as she sits alone eating breakfast. "A plate with the remains of cold ham has been pushed aside: she now starts eating a piece of toast, this she does in the manner of one attacking – and disapproving – of the toast, the breakfast, and the whole world."²⁷⁰ The action begins with the seemingly unceremonious arrival of Belle Dobbyn. The two women proceed to exchange pleasantries, throughout which Deevy offers necessary exposition. The Dobbyn family are close friends of the Keanes and occupy the neighboring estate. Since childhood Belle has referred to Patty as her "Aunt," a term of endearment she "might have grown out of, but now feels more appropriate." Here Deevy presents the first allusion to the events of the prior evening. Over the course of the play, we'll soon discover that through a tangled web of miscommunication, each character is operating with drastically divergent understanding of recent events. When discussing her nephew Barney, Patty's tone and demeanor changes; suddenly the chatty, somewhat loquacious older woman becomes tired and reticent. At this juncture, Deevy begins to code descriptions of Barney as Queer. First identified in Vito Russo's

²⁷⁰ Teresa Deevy. "In the Cellar of My Friend." *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed: Volume II*, edited by Jonathan Bank et al., Mint Theater Company, New York, NY, 2017, p. 111.

seminal text, *The Celluloid Closet*, “Queer coding” is the subtextual identification of characters in literature and media as gay/lesbian through implicit suggestion rather than explicit language.²⁷¹ The identification of and interrogation of Queer coding, is achieved via a process of Queer reading, or “Queering.”

Queering is a literary technique derived from queer theory of the late 1980s, designed to challenge heteronormativity by analyzing places in the text that use supposed heterosexuality or identity binaries.²⁷² In the context of Drama, Queer theorist Hanna Kubowitz notes that “‘Queer reading strategies’ or ‘Queering’ refers to strategies that readers may apply to unearth queer meanings in ostensibly straight texts. Analogously, ‘Queer writing strategies’ or ‘Queer Coding’ refers to strategies which authors may apply in order to convey Queer meanings without addressing them explicitly.” The first instance of Queer coding in *Cellar* occurs as early as the second page of dialogue, in which Patty remarks “all the same I feel sorry for Tom, my poor brother — with a son like Barney...”²⁷³ Belle challenges Patty’s remark, to which she responds that her brother was “lonely”²⁷⁴ having lost his wife rather young, and “frustrated” by “watching his son grow up so different.” Later in their conversation, as Belle tries and fails to inform Patty of her supposed “engagement” to Barney, Patty insists that Belle and Barney were “always more like brother and sister,” as while Barney is “nice, kind and considerate” he is also “terribly sensitive...” Bearing this in mind, Kubowitz notes that effective literary queer coding often draws on language that

²⁷¹ Vito Russo, “Introduction,” chapter, in *The Celluloid Closet* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

²⁷² Eve Sedgwick. Hall, Donald E.; Jagose, Annamarie; Bebell, Andrea; Potter, Susan (eds.). *Queer and Now. The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*. (New York: Routledge, 2013). pp. 3–16.

²⁷³ Deevy, p. 112.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

“others” the character, effectively isolating them from their wider community, whilst simultaneously liberating them from the confines of heteronormativity. Conversely, throughout this sequence Deevy replaces implicit words for homosexuality with coded stand-ins that “other” Barney, like “different,” “sensitive,” and “queer.”²⁷⁵

Belle and Patty’s conversation is interrupted by the appearance of Tom Keane, who Deevy describes as “a man of forty-eight, slightly built and very spruce: he does not look his age: (he) wears mixed tweeds, and a carnation in his buttonhole, and in one hand he holds a few field poppies.”²⁷⁶ Tom explains that he sent a note requesting Belle to meet him in the meadow between their two homes, prompting Patty to deliver what is arguably the thesis statement of the play, “very seldom are messages properly delivered.”²⁷⁷ Belle inquires why Tom wanted to see her, to which he responds that he is being “deserted by his son.” She assumes he is referring their engagement and is surprised by Tom’s apparent anger. Tom, entirely none the wiser, proceeds to share that “by now Barney is gone... out of the way... no one between us.”²⁷⁸ Belle, alarmed by his forwardness, reveals that Tom’s message had been delivered correctly, but she wanted to speak with Barney before meeting him. Patty returns in a huff, announcing that Barney has left “his baggage gone, his bed not slept in,” to which Tom offers a sigh of relief, declaring that his son has made his choice. Tom fears that Belle will blame him for Barney’s departure, despite his best efforts to convince his son to stay. Patty

²⁷⁵ Hanna Kubowtiz. “The Default Reader and a Model of Queer Reading and Writing Strategies Or: Obituary for the Implied Reader” in *Style*, Summer 2012, Vol. 46, No. 2, “Literature, Bio-psychological Reality, and Focalization.” (Penn State University Press Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2012), p. 23

²⁷⁶ Teresa Deevy. “In the Cellar of My Friend.” *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed: Volume II*, edited by Jonathan Bank et al., Mint Theater Company, New York, NY, 2017, p. 111.

²⁷⁷ Deevy, p. 113-114.

²⁷⁸ Deevy, p. 114.

responds by commenting on the miscommunication afoot, stating “Of late I notice a great incoherence... It’s the curse of clever people... and of people living in cities. But here in the country, you *should* speak clearly.” With this line Deevy infers for the third time, that Patty, despite being a self-proclaimed “spinster who knows nothing,” may be the only character in possession of all the facts.

Barney then appears with his luggage and announces that he’s missed his train and will have to wait at the house. He is shocked to find Belle with his father and aunt, exclaiming “You there! (*Injured tone*) What brought you? I wrote a letter. I sent it over... (*Almost as a child to another who has broken the rules of a game*). Didn’t you get it?” Belle, unable to speak, shakes her head, indicating “no.” Tom, confused by this interaction, inquires if his son has done anything “dishonorable” with Belle. Barney laughs at the question, prompting Tom and Belle to both leave. Here Deevy introduces a recurring action that further queer codes the character; when confronted with questions of romantic or sexual feelings towards Belle, Barney responds with incredulous laughter, as if to suggest the impossible. Left alone, Barney and Patty sit down to eat breakfast. Throughout this scene we piece together that Barney was raised by Patty prior to being sent away to boarding school, as his mother died in childbirth. The two share a tender moment, after which Patty informs Barney that Belle “has told her of his news,” again prompting his laughter. Belle, having returned unseen accuses Barney of “being afraid of his father,” an accusation he readily accepts, failing to understand her meaning.

When Belle, heartbroken, finally confronts Barney as to why he hasn’t informed anyone of “their engagement,” he responds “Our what? (*Mystified*) You see it was about

something else we were talking.”²⁷⁹ He then urges her to go home and read his aforementioned letter. She threatens to throw said letter away, prompting an anxious, somewhat mysterious response for Barney, who explains the contents are “for you, and you alone.” The friends proceed to argue until they are interrupted by Martin, an elderly domestic servant. Martin proves a calming presence, recalling how he use to settle many of their arguments as children. Throughout this interaction Barney’s queer coding is further solidified when Martin recalls how he would often have to hide the boy when he was young, protecting him from his father’s bouts of anger and violent “lashings.” Martin’s account harkens back to Patty’s earlier comment about Tom’s anger with Barney “being so different.”

Martin departs, and Barney tries once again to clarify his conversation with Belle from the night prior, explaining

Last night something happened... I was... invited... (*Slow – looking for words to describe an experience*). To come nearer... Not for the first time... but always before I had drawn back – dreading. Last night, being happy, I went on, in spirit I mean... I opened the door – or it was opened for me... Something was offered... How foolish is all of our dreading! (*Exultant*) Our withdrawals... hesitations – how utterly foolish!”²⁸⁰

In this moment, nearly two-thirds of the way through the dramatic action, we are confronted with Deevy’s greatest subversion of expectation; this is not Belle’s play, but Barney’s. Martin’s story invokes the aforementioned “startling explosions of physical violence”²⁸¹ that Temple Lane deemed synonymous with Deevy’s dramaturgy. In *Cellar*

²⁷⁹ Deevy, p. 116.

²⁸⁰ Deevy, p. 118.

²⁸¹ Lane, p. 3.

however, this trope been subtly subverted, re-appropriating the violence enacted on “the traditional Deevy heroine,” and placing onto the Queer-coded hero. Much like Annie Kinsella and Katie Roche, Barney has been subjected to physical and psychological abuse at the hands of his father. Furthermore, we will soon learn that like these heroines, Barney has also made the life-alternating decision to marry, via the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Patty returns carrying fresh coffee and, noticing the tension in the room, exclaims once again that “she knows nothing” and exists. The friends sit down to drink, as Belle announces that she has decided to marry Tom. Barney appears thrilled by the news and hopes that his friend’s gentleness will help soften his hard father. Tom reappears and Barney exits in search of his ever-elusive letter. Tom inquires if Barney has told Belle about where he is going, to which she responds, “I only know he does not want me... nothing else matters,” prompting Tom to ask if she never really loved him. Here Deevy, at the height of her powers, delivers dialogue reminiscent of the mystical poets, with Belle responding, “Never loved him? I have always loved him every day, my whole life... without knowing. I have lived a long time since last evening.”²⁸² Confused and seemingly heartbroken, Belle accepts Tom’s proposal.

In the play’s final sequence Barney and Martin return carrying scraps of torn paper, remnants of his letter to Belle that has been devoured by puppies. Barney proclaims that “Maybe the puppies had some wisdom... I thought I had written something that mattered... I’m going now – leaving fragment only fit for the wastepaper basket...” With this Martin leaves, and Barney bids Tom and Belle one final farewell.

²⁸² Deevy, p. 119.

Patty returns asking if this is his true goodbye, to which Barney replies that he “won’t be coming back, not this time” before exiting. Tom announces that Barney has left to become priest. Belle, overcome, begins gathering and smoothing out the pieces of his torn letter. Tom finds a single legible scrap which he reads aloud,

Here’s the word *explanation*, and some lines quoted:

Last night I drank deep in the cellar of my Friend
 And coming forth knew nought of all
 this plane
 And lost—”²⁸³

Barney’s letter contains a fragment from the final sequence of *the Canticle* in which Juan equates the sacraments of Marriage with Holy Orders, identifying “the Bride’s” journey as an allegory for the priesthood. Working within Diaz’s framework, this line can also be interpreted as an allegory for “coming out of the proverbial closet.” Upon hearing these words Belle at last understands; exuberant and tearful, she watches her friend cross the meadow one last time.

Utilizing clues peppered throughout Deevy’s dialogue, one can assume the following: the night before the events of the play Barney asks Belle to meet him in the meadow outside his home. There, he confides his intentions to join the priesthood, and perhaps even the unspoken dimensions of his sexuality, via quoting lines from *the Canticle*. Misunderstanding his meaning, Belle interprets his recitation as a proposal for marriage, awakening suppressed desires within her that have previously gone unexplored. Afterwards Barney approaches his father with the same confessions, sans

²⁸³ Deevy, p. 120.

the use of poetic allegory, eliciting his disapproval. Patty, meanwhile, spends the evening “awake by all the voices,” overhearing the entirety of both conversations. The dimensions of “queerness” at play in *Cellar*, much like *The Canticle* itself, are twofold. In this vein, Kubowitz offers two contrasting, yet interwoven definitions of queerness,

One meaning is considered to be closely linked to sexuality, while the second meaning is taken to signify strangeness, oddity, peculiarity or extra-ordinariness irrespective of sexuality. By the first meaning of queerness I understand a relational term indicating a certain distance or deviance from the norm, especially from heteronormativity, which denotes some sort of sexual otherness. This can be same-sex sexuality but may also be any other form of marginalised, “non-straight hetero-sexual or hetero-normative” sexuality, with the norm implying a monogamous and domestic lifestyle.²⁸⁴

Diaz demonstrates how Juan employs this duality of “queerness” by positioning “the call to join the priesthood” as synonymous with queer self-acceptance. In *Cellar*, Barney voyages on Juan’s mystical journey from the intimacy of the dark night into the splendor of the morning. Barney monologue, featured prominently during the climax of the play’s dramatic action, describes an experience of “opening a door” and abandoning all shame and “dreading.” Both pieces effectively position the sacrament of Holy Orders as a queer alternative to the heteronormative sacrament of Holy Matrimony. This theory, in addition to Deevy’s coded descriptions of Barney, provides a foundational argument for the play’s Queer subtext. However, the dimensions of *Cellar*’s queerness are further illuminated by the playwrights’ biography and personal writing.

It is worth noting that in Amanda Coogan’s 2022 documentary *Tribute: The Teresa Deevy Story*, Deevy’s grandniece Claire Brazil, recalls her family’s anxiety over

²⁸⁴ Kubowitz, p. 23

elements of the playwright's later work purportedly gleaning inspiration from their own family history.²⁸⁵ Seeing as *Cellar* is Deevy's only drama set in her parents' native Co. Kilkenny, one could argue that the play is ultimately an expression of dramatic autofiction. Autofiction, short for autobiographical fiction, is a genre of literature that combines elements of autobiography and fiction. In autofiction, "details of the author's life blend with fictional information, characters, and events."²⁸⁶ The genre enables the author to both reimagine events of their life, and express key details of their person via the protective veil of fiction.

The character of Barney appears to be inspired by Deevy's maternal uncle Fr. Thomas Feehan. Referenced in the first chapter of this thesis, Feehan was a parish priest in Co. Kilkenny who rose to national prominence for his high-profile involvement with the Land League.²⁸⁷ Feehan was a close friend and advisor to Anna Parnell,²⁸⁸ whom he aided in founding the Ladies Land League. He would often accompany Parnell on many speaking engagements for the League, and even invited the Rathdowney chapter to hold meetings in his home after encountering trouble with the local police. In 1882 Feehan utilized his pulpit to organize the wider Catholic community; urging his congregants to band together and combat the widespread eviction of tenant farmers. Said organizing put him at odds with Bishop Patrick Moran, ultimately resulting in his censorship and imprisonment. Records from Fr. Feehan's trial reveal that he was

²⁸⁵ *Tribute: The Teresa Deevy Story, RTE.ie* (Raidió Teilifís Éireann, 2022), <https://www.rte.ie/player/movie/tribute-the-teresa-deevy-story/326740520026>.

²⁸⁶ George Plimpton, "The Story Behind a Nonfiction Novel." (16 January 1966). *The New York Times*.

²⁸⁷ Sean Dunne. "The Journal of Irish Literature: A Teresa Deevy Number", Proscenium Press, Volume XIV, No. 2 (May, 1985), p. 4.

²⁸⁸ The younger sister of famed Irish Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell, Anna is remembered in her own right for co-founding the Ladies' Land League, and cultivating transatlantic diplomacy between Ireland and the United States.

charged and convicted for “disrupting the peace,” under statute 34 of King Edward III.²⁸⁹ The presiding judge called for Feehan to be “imprisoned and duly punished according to the law and customs of the realm” for allegedly advising his parishioners that “if any one of their number should be evicted for non-payment of rent, to (collectively) cease all payment, no rent till such evicted tenant be restored to his holding.”²⁹⁰

The diary of a local Kilkenny nun, Sister Birdie Fitzpatrick, offers a detailed account of the events leading up to Feehan’s arrest, trial, and sentencing. She writes that

During the height the Land League strife Lord Castledown's agent raised the rents on every improvement the farmers made. Their patience was exhausted and by 1882 Fr. Feehan had emerged as a fearless curate, who at a public meeting urged the people to fight it out and refuse to pay. The story goes that as the priest was walking down the street to the church for Mass, he was handed a letter from the Bishop (Dr Moran, afterwards Cardinal Moran of Sydney) suspending him. Fr. Feehan was then arrested, and his trial fixed for the 10th of May in the Rathdowney Courthouse. On the date of his trial all the tenants and sympathisers came in from all parts of Co. Kilkenny and Tipperary. The multitude were seething with discontent and grumbling, vowing vengeance on the Police and Magistrates. But a Fr. Maher from Clonmore assembled the people, and appealed to them for self-restraint and said that no good would be got by violence. He averted what would have turned out ugly work. Shortly after when the Bishop came for Confirmation, the people boycotted it and would not attend.”²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ Danby Pickering, “C.A.P I,” essay, in *The Statutes at Large from Magna Charta, to the End of the Eleventh Parliament of Great Britain, Anno 1761 Continued to 1806* (Cambridge: Printed by J. Bentham, 1762), 135–36.

²⁹⁰ Various, “R. Feehan v. Queen’s Company J.J.” Entry in *vLex: Your World of Legal Intelligence*. Accessed July 12, 2023. <https://ie.vlex.com/vid/r-fee-han-v-queen-805342493>.

²⁹¹ Fitzpatrick, p. 217-218.

Feehan ultimately served six months in Maryborough, now Portlaoise prison. After receiving his verdict, the priest attempted to return to his home in High St, where police officers stood in wait, refusing him admittance. Sister Birdie notes that “at this time there were no proper benches in the Church only forms around the walls. The Royal Irish Constabulary were the only people who had Church pews, so as a reprisal, some of his parishioners took out the pews, and made matchwood of them, and for this, three or four men did six weeks in jail.” These events inspired a nation scandal, with articles in *The Irish Times*²⁹² and *The Irish Magistracy*.²⁹³ *The Freeman's Journal* featured Feehan's story with “great prominence,” publishing a picture of “the Red Coats stripping the Priest of his vestments,” accompanied by an article entitled “Landlord Bishop suspends Patriot Priest.” “The Diary of Fr. Feehan” an account authored during his time in incarceration, was extant in Landscape until at least as late the 1970s.”²⁹⁴

Much like Barney, Feehan was born into one of Kilkenny's wealthy “Catholic Big Houses.” His mother died in childbirth, and his father remarried a younger woman, who would later give birth to Deevy's mother, Mary Feehan. Consistent with the account of Barney's childhood in *Cellar*, Feehan attended boarding school as a boy, later matriculating at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, where he studied Rhetoric and “carried off honours,” before ultimately joining the priesthood.²⁹⁵ What's more, Feehan appears to have been intimately acquainted with *the Canticle*. Post incarceration he spent much

²⁹² “Imperial Parliament: The Arrest of Fr. Feehan.” The Irish Times Archive, *The Irish Times*, 6 May. 1882

²⁹³ Various, “The Irish Magistracy.” *Welcome to Knowvation™*, Dublin, M.H. Gill and Son, 1885, <https://opac.oireachtas.ie/>.

²⁹⁴ Christie Fox, “Teresa Deevy.” *Irish Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide*, edited by Alexander G. Gonzalez, (Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 2006), p. 84.

²⁹⁵ “Fr. Tom Feehan.” Geni Family Tree: Public Ancestry Records, July 15, 2023. <https://www.geni.com/people/Fr-Tom-Feehan/6000000015212036795>.

of his adult life as a Professor at St. Kieran's College in Kilkenny. Established immediately after the passing of the Catholic Relief Act of 1782, St. Kieran's was the first college in Ireland to be founded by the Catholic Church since the introduction of the penal laws.²⁹⁶ The college's motto, *Hiems Transiit* or "the winter has passed" is taken from 3:17 of *the Canticle*; "My beloved speaks and says to me: Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone."²⁹⁷ According to public ancestry records, Feehan was also a "distinguished poet" and a "wit,"²⁹⁸ a historically feminine moniker²⁹⁹, routinely assigned to some of Ireland's most famous Queer coded men of letters, including Oscar Wilde, Micheál Mac Liammóir, and John Jordan. In addition to Feehan's opaque resemblance to Barney, Deevy's uncle also shares multiple biographic similarities with *the Canticle's* author, San Juan de la Cruz. Both men were Catholic priests who aligned themselves with powerful women during periods of political turmoil, ultimately being censored and imprisoned for said allegiances; de la Cruz for his connection to Teresa of Avila, and Feehan for his work with Anna Parnell. Within their respective countries, the arrests of both men stirred national news and inspired public protests. Not to mention that both Juan and Feehan were accomplished poets and scholars who kept diaries of their incarceration. Ultimately, via lens of queer reading, the progressive journeys of these men can be read

²⁹⁶ William L. Smith, *Irish Priests in the United States: A Vanishing Subculture* (University Press of America, Lanham, MD. 2004).

²⁹⁷ Bible. English. New American standard. 1973., "Canticle of Canticles," essay, in *New American Standard Bible* (La Habra, Calif: Foundation Press, 1973), 3:17, p. 11.

²⁹⁸ "Fr. Tom Feehan." Geni Family Tree: Public Ancestry Records, July 15, 2023. <https://www.geni.com/people/Fr-Tom-Feehan/6000000015212036795>.

²⁹⁹ Rebecca Beach, "Turning Their Talk: Gendered Conversation in the Nineteenth Century British Novel," The University Press of Kentucky. Lexington, Kentucky. 2015.

a queer, as they both eschewed heteronormativity and domesticity by “othering themselves” and embracing queer union with the divine masculine.

As a mystic, Juan deployed the language of “romance, courtship, and conjugal love”³⁰⁰ as a means of communicating and understanding the journey of the human soul to divine mystery, and of individual shame to a divine, queer union.³⁰¹ Ultimately, his erotic, if not homo-erotic love poem superimposes “the Bride,” as a stand-in in for “the priest;” manipulating binary, gendered language as a means of achieving a coded eros. This allegorical, if not mystical journey of “coming out,” as defined by Juan, is characterized as intrinsically masculine, a voyage for the sons, not the daughters, of Christ. Historically, homosexuality within the Catholic tradition is a masculine sin, rooted in the phallus; with church dogma failing to mention female same-sex relations, systemically erasing the existence of queer Catholic women.³⁰²

In this vein, one could posit that within *Cellar*, Deevy has positioned Barney, and by extension her uncle, as a masculine stand-in for the queer-coded self. In the aforementioned RTÉ documentary *Tribute*, Deevy’s grandniece describes the playwright with queer coded qualifiers including “wonderfully eccentric,” “never having a romantic relationship with a man,” and “unconcerned with feminine fashion.” Photographs of Deevy depict her wearing traditionally “masculine” attire while living in

³⁰⁰ Díaz, p. 94

³⁰¹ According to David Jensen, “Mystics are highly attuned to the ordinary and to the flesh rather than degrading the desires of the flesh and its expressions. Mystics do not call us to flee from the world, rather the paradox of mysticism is this: “the more intensely we are drawn toward our Beloved, the more fully we love the world. All true desire, according to the mystics, finds its home in God who loves the world. This homecoming in God, moreover, does not neglect our earthly loves; since our desire is always on the way to God, nothing is ‘left behind’ as God cultivates desire in us.”

³⁰² Barbara Zanotti, “Introduction,” in *A Faith of One’s Own: Explorations by Catholic Lesbians* (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1986).

Dublin and London, during a period when said dress was illegal in the United States on grounds of “homosexuality.”³⁰³ What’s more, close examination of Deevy’s archived correspondence with fellow writer Florence Hackett further illuminates the unexplored dimensions of the playwright’s gender and sexuality.

Much like Deevy, Florence Hackett was the youngest daughter born to one of Kilkenny’s old, well-to-do Catholic families. Celebrated by The Kilkenny Archeological Society as possessing the county’s “most distinguished twentieth century men and women of literature” the Hackett family also achieved great strides in the fields of politics and medicine. Hackett’s father, Dr. John Byrne Hackett, was originally from Cork, having been born the son of one of the city’s wealthy “merchant princes.” Throughout his adult life John served as a close friend and personal physician to Charles Stewart Parnell. He famously treated Parnell by licking wet plaster out of his eyes after an assault during an 1890 bye-election meeting in Castlecomer, saving the Nationalist Leader’s eyesight. He would later go blind in one eye while protecting Parnell from a subsequent attack during a bye-election meeting in Co. Carlow.³⁰⁴ John’s affinity with Parnell would cause his family to become ostracized by Kilkenny’s wider Catholic community, inspiring his children to move towards secularism. Despite leaving their local parish, Hackett’s elder brothers would go on to attend the prestigious Clongowes

³⁰³ Hugh Ryan, “How Dressing in Drag Was Labeled a Crime in the 20th Century,” History.com, accessed June 27, 2019, <https://www.history.com/news/stonewall-riots-lgbtq-drag-three-article-rule>.

³⁰⁴ Eamonn Kiely. “The Hackett Family of Patrick St Kilkenny,” *The Kilkenny Archeological Society Journal*, July 5, 2019. pp. 1 - 4

Wood Jesuit College, as “the school’s attitude was more enlightened than that of the local religious.”³⁰⁵

Hackett’s many accomplished siblings included an emigre brother, Francis Hackett who found success as a novelist in the United States, and his wife, the celebrated Danish born writer Signe Toksvig. Toksvig would prove instrumental in Deevy acquiring the rights to adapt Chekhov’s short story *Polinka*.³⁰⁶ Archived correspondence between Hackett and Toksvig displays a shared scrutiny of the Free State’s growing theocracy, decrying a number of topics ranging from widespread literary censorship, to the lack women’s contraceptive health.³⁰⁷ Toksvig published vehement critiques of Catholic Clergy’s treatment of women and sexuality in American periodicals. Her 1929 essay “Why Girls Leave Ireland” for *The Survey*, notes how Irish priests’ police the sexuality of young women. “With actual whip in hand” she writes, “(the priests) walk the lanes at night on the hunt for those committing the previous sin of ‘company keeping.’” Toksvig address this topic in a letter to Florence the year prior writing, “I think the priests would do better to set up free birth control clinics than to be doing this futile police work! (Burn this letter!)”

While there is no record of Hackett traveling to the United States, her work was well received there. In 1924 her novel *With Benefit of Clergy* was published by Liveright Publishing Corporation in New York City. She subsequently published short stories in both Ireland and the United States on the pages of *The New Republic*, *The Dublin*

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Teresa Deevy, Letter to Florence Hackett, (undated) TCD, Ms. 10722.

³⁰⁷ Lis Pihl, “A Muzzle Made in Ireland’: Irish Censorship and Signe Toksvig,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Winter, 1999, Vol. 88, No. 352 (Winter, 1999), pp. 448-457

Magazine, Studies, Pearson's Magazine, and The Irish Jesuit Quarterly. Additionally, her play *Sweepstakes* was performed Off-Broadway in New York City by the Irish Drama League in 1927.³⁰⁸ She often submitted her plays to the Abbey Theatre with no success, later finding a home in radio.³⁰⁹ Hackett was ultimately the only one of her seven siblings to remain in their native Kilkenny, serving as caregiver to her parents throughout their old age. It was during this period that she began her lengthy correspondence with Deevy.

Deevy's archived letters to Hackett reflect a tenderness and intimacy unique exclusively to their correspondence. After the death of her parents in the early 1930s Hackett resolved to move out of her childhood home.³¹⁰ The two women subsequently engaged in a month's long back and forth, where Deevy attempts to convince Hackett to move to Waterford city "and be close to her." At one-point Deevy even offers (perhaps facetiously) to buy Hackett a house. Despite Deevy's urging, Hackett ultimately resolved to stay in Kilkenny and build a modest one-story cottage on College Road called "Ad Astra." After completing renovations on Ad Astra Hackett seems to have mailed a photograph to Deevy, inviting her to visit. Deevy responds

My dear F.H. ... I have the photo of your little house tacked up on the wall of my bedroom, so that when I hop out of bed each more morning, and lie down each night, I think of you... Love, T.D.³¹¹

³⁰⁸ Teresa Donohue, "Florence Hackett," essay, in *Dictionary of Kilkenny Writer* (Kilkenny, Co. Kilkenny: Kilkenny County Council, 1975)

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ The former Hackett family estate on Ormonde St, Garden is now the Hibernia Hotel.

³¹¹ Teresa Deevy, "Letter to Florence Hackett," Feb 21st, 1941 (31), TCD, Ms. 10722.

Here Deevy's language proves interesting, unlike her other archived correspondence, when writing to Hackett she begins with the greeting "my dear" and ends with the complimentary "love." The names of both women are reduced to non-gendered initials, and Deevy abandons her more traditional signatures, "Tessa, Teresa, and Miss Deevy" that run concurrent throughout her other archived correspondences. For example, when writing to other close friends like Jack B. Yeats and Patricia Lynch she utilizes a more traditional greeting and complimentary; beginning "dear (name)" and ending "Sincerely, Tessa."³¹²

Deevy's correspondence with Hackett documents the many ups and downs of her career. For example, Deevy writes to Hackett after being approached by BBC Northern Ireland about adapting her play *The King of Spain's Daughter* for Radio In 1936. She initially seems hesitant, unsure of both the medium and having to travel to Belfast. However, upon returning from her first recording session, she writes to Hackett stating

This visit to Belfast was grand — most stimulating — when going up I felt doubtful as to whether I could ever be really enthusiastic over writing for radio — now that's settled. I loved the place — and their way of production.³¹³

Deevy proceeds to recommend that Hackett, feeling shut out by the Abbey, consider adapting her plays for radio. Over the course of the next decade, Hackett would go on to author nine plays for both BBC Northern Ireland and RTE, in response to Deevy's

³¹² The practice of reducing the names of both the recipient and the sender to mere initials as a means of coding gender is rather commonplace in lesbian love letters.

³¹³ Teresa Deevy, Letter to Florence Hackett, (undated) TCD, Ms. 10722.

encouragement. Deevy would later write to Hackett after watching her sisters listen to her first Radio play,

My dear F.H. — Hearty congratulations! It was splendid — at least, if I can judge by the family reaction. They were all highly entertained last night. ‘Nell and Peg were convulsing over their tea’ — Nance accused in a more dignified manner! Nell meanwhile had her face in her hands and said — between laughs — “Horrid! Horrible things!” — you should feel complimented!

A sense of mutual trust and collaboration is existent throughout these letters, with both women sending works-in-progress to the other, often seeking counsel and advice.

These letters provide insight to the writing process for Deevy’s most celebrated play *Katie Roche*, which appears to have been a great labor, undergoing countless rounds of writing and revision. This process feels reminiscent of Anne Margaret Daniel’s assertion that collaboration between same-sex writers can create a proverbial child.³¹⁴

Aside from just creative collaboration, Deevy’s letters to Hackett suggest that the two women spent a great deal of time alone together, with letters referencing various joint holidays and trips to visit each other’s homes. After one such occasion Deevy writes to Hackett in a reproachful, apologetic tone,

I think I was cross last time you were here — I promise I won’t be cross again!!!³¹⁵

³¹⁴ Anne Margaret Daniel, ““Lost in Translation: Oscar, Bosie, and Salome,”” *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 2007, 1-6.

³¹⁵ Teresa Deevy, Letter to Florence Hackett, (undated) TCD, Ms. 10722.

Their correspondence continues throughout the 1940s and 1950s, covering topics ranging from the death of W.B. Yeats, the events of World War II, and the process of growing older. Across these many letters are suggestions of quiet desperation and desire, with Deevy beginning numerous entries stating some variant of

“I hope you don’t mind me writing. You haven’t responded to my last letter...” or
 “I have started and re-started this letter numerous times, as there is so much I want to share with you!”

Throughout the remainder of their perspective lives Deevy’s letters suggest subtle hints of longing and affection. Hackett was ten years her senior, born in 1884, but ultimately the two women would die in the same year, 1963, just weeks apart from one another.

The question of whether any form of sexual intimacy existed between these women is moot. Regardless of sexuality, these letters proffer decades of romantic intimacy between Hackett and Deevy, unlike any of Deevy’s other known relationships. Additionally, the content of these letters further illuminates the argument for a queer subtext within *In the Cellar of My Friend*, and the potential dimensions of a Queer theology that underscored Deevy’s life and work. Just as San Juan de la Cruz utilized poetry, Deevy utilizes drama to probe the ineffable and interrogate the interplay between queerness and the metaphysical. In the same manner that Diaz “queers” reconsiderations of de la Cruz and *The Spiritual Cantic*, this framework can be applied to Deevy and *In the Cellar of My Friend*. Queer theologian Chris Greenough notes that “In addition to the definition of “queer” as “odd”, and as a collective grouping for non-normative identifications of gender/sexuality, there is a third, critical usage of the word which emerges from its use as an academic term. In this context “queer” means to

“disturb” or “disrupt”. It is this definition that was later applied to theory, and theology, as a critical lens. It calls for the uncovering and dismantling of the past.”³¹⁶

The process of “queering” Spain’s complex history is well documented. A noted Iberophile, in *Cellar* Deevy draws on a long held Iberian tradition of homoerotic poetics. Sixteenth century Toledo is not only the site of *The Spiritual Canticle*’s authorship but was also the home of the eponymous princess who defied heteronormative gender conventions in Deevy’s *The King of Spain’s Daughter*. What’s more, the city is also a historic site of medieval homoerotic life writing. Louis Crompton, a pioneer scholar of LGBT Studies notes an erotic thread in Toledo’s medieval Hispano-Arabic love poetry, which was written “by men to or about other males.” He continues, “In the literature of Sufi mysticism, rapturous poetry addressed to male lovers might even symbolize union with the divine. So Muslim religion paradoxically forbade, allowed, and exalted homoerotic desire. It provided striking similarities with Judaism and Catholicism in the sphere of law but fostered a radically different literary, social, and affective atmosphere that was much more tolerant.”³¹⁷ Diaz argues that Juan’s writings has suffered the same fate as numerous other forgotten queer literary giants of the medieval Iberian peninsula, noting that “the erasure of homoeroticism that has taken place in three principal ways: misreading; the conscious use of ambiguity; and decontextualization.”³¹⁸ As a derivative work of *The Spiritual Canticle*, *Cellar* seems to

³¹⁶ Chris Greenough, “Introduction,” essay, in *Queer Theologies: The Basics* (London, England: Routledge, 2020).

³¹⁷ Louis Crompton, essay, in *Homosexuality & Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006), 167.

³¹⁸ Diaz, pp. 98-99

have received similar treatment. Noted Queer theologian Hugo Córdova Quero observes that

To queer the past is a performative disruption in order to open up spaces for other discourses from the past to arise and to be heard in the conversation nowadays, as well as dealing with the performances of different discourses in the academy. To queer the past is not to transplant gays, lesbians, bisexuals or transsexuals into the past, but to disrupt monolithic discourses that oppress historical periods. It also refers to the fact that we need to be conscious that our own lenses should be disrupted and that the result of that process of disruption is not to reiterate hegemonic heteropatriarchal discourses.³¹⁹

In this vein, I do not wish to assign meaning to either *In the Cellar of Friend* or Deevy's personal letters without cause, but rather gesture towards the previously unexplored dimensions of the playwright's romantic life. I intentionally queer both Deevy's dramaturgy and personal correspondence as a means of reopening the past, exploring the lost dimensions of LGBTQ Catholic women and femmes in mid-twentieth century Ireland. Conversely, I challenge the implicit and explicit heteronormative lens routinely assigned to Deevy's life and work, which across multiple dimensions continues to elude us. *In the Cellar of My Friend* is arguably Deevy's most complex drama, fashioned via a framework of homo-erotic mysticism, and honoring a poem in which God's self-communication appropriates and transcends queer intimacy as an expression of divine love. The cornerstone of both Queer Theology and Queer literary criticism, is generative revisionism. Any "revisiting of itinerary is an opportunity to note

³¹⁹ Martín Hugo Córdova Quero, "Friendship with Benefits: A Queer Reading of Aelred Rievaulx and His Theology of Friendship," essay, in *The Sexual Theologian: Essays on Sex, God, and Politics*, ed. Lisa Isherwood and Marcella Althaus-Reid (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 2004), p. 28.

sites missed, and discover alternative roads that may yield new directions, and new truths.”³²⁰ Here Deevy invokes the woman theologian’s impulse “to embrace the memory of significant events,” providing encouragement for new Catholic understanding, as well as “forgiveness for the oppressive theological past” through revision. Revisionism proves a powerful through line throughout Deevy’s final three plays, as both a literary device employed by the playwright and a critical tool with which we can examine these texts. Moving forward from the self-revision existent within *In the Cellar of my Friend*, Deevy’s progresses towards feminist revisionist myth-making in her final play, *One Look and What it Led To*.

³²⁰ Ibid.

Chapter Five:

***One Look and What it Led To,* Reclaiming Mary Magdalene in the Midrash Tradition**

Teresa Deevy's final play, *One Look and What it Led To*, was written just before her death in 1963 and was broadcast posthumously on the 22nd of March 1964 by Radio Éireann.³²¹ The play functions as a dramatic biblical revision in which Deevy retells the four gospel accounts attributed to the Mary Magdalene figure of Western Judeo-Christianity. From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, the play is noteworthy for a multitude of reasons, chief amongst them Deevy's near clairvoyant propensity for feminist theology and revisionist myth. Written six years prior to the 1969 Church Referendum on Magdalene, Deevy's retelling preemptively eradicates the "repentant whore" narrative that was still at large in twentieth century Ireland, reclaiming her heroine as a devout apostle capable of performing miracles. What's more, the play's impressive dramaturgy, reminiscent of the Hebraic midrash tradition of "retelling," foreshadows the rise of Feminist Revisionist Mythmaking, a practice popularized nearly a decade later during the 1970s in response to the transatlantic women's movement. These innovations were not only well ahead of Deevy's time but stood in direct opposition to centuries of patriarchal propaganda attributed to the Saint.

Throughout much of the last millennia the "Mary Magdalene figure" of Western Christendom has differed radically from the biblical character found in the synoptic gospels and subsequent apocrypha. Synonymous with lust and temptation, Magdalene has long been positioned as the "repentant whore who after being forgiven by Christ became subsequently devoted to Him."³²² Only in recent decades have feminist biblical

³²¹ Teresa Deevy. Letter to Micheál Ó hAodha. "Letter from Teresa Deevy to Micheál Ó hAodha about Her Radio Play 'One Look and What it Led To.'" Dublin, Ireland: The National Library of Ireland, 1962.

³²² Mary Ann Beavis, "The Deification of Mary Magdalene." *Feminist Theology*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2012, pp. 145–154

scholars and womanist theologians begun reclaiming the now canonized Saint as a biblical heroine, extricating her legacy from the long existent “whore mythology.” The misidentification of Magdalene as a prostitute began in 591 AD, during the Easter sermon of Pope Gregory I, who conflated Magdalene, a holy woman introduced in Luke 8:2,³²³ with both Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus introduced in Luke 10:39³²⁴ and the unnamed “sinful woman” who anointed Christ’s feet in Luke 7:36–50.³²⁵ Pope Gregory's words propagated a widespread mythology of Magdalene as a remorseful sinner or redeemed “fallen woman.”³²⁶ Elaborate medieval legends later emerged across Western Europe, popularizing exaggerated tales of Magdalene’s wealth and beauty, as well as her alleged journey to southern Gaul, modern-day France. The conflation of these three women was still a major controversy in the years leading up to the Protestant Reformation, inspiring various new factions in Protestantism to reject the prevailing sexual stigma. During the Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church began to reposition Magdalene as a symbol of “penance,”³²⁷ but never one of devotion or piety. A Church referendum on Magdalene did not occur until 1969 under Pope Paul VI,³²⁸ and the Saint did not receive a formal feast day until as late as 2016 under the current Pope Francis.³²⁹

³²³ Michael David Coogan, et al. “The New Testament.” The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2018. Luke 8:2

³²⁴ Coogan, et al., Luke 10:39

³²⁵ Coogan, et al., Luke 10:39

³²⁶ Carol L. Meyers, (2000). Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament. Houghton Mifflin. p. 122

³²⁷ A. D. Wright, *The Counter-Reformation: Catholic Europe and the Non-Christian World*. Ashgate, 2005.

³²⁸ Bill Broadway, “Theologians Repaint Image of Magdalene.” The Washington Post, WP Company, 16 July 1994, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1994/07/16/theologians-repaint-image-of-magdalene>

³²⁹ Junno Arocho Esteves - Catholic News Service June 10, et al. “Pope Francis Raises Memorial of St. Mary Magdalene to a Feast Day.” America Magazine, 18 July 2019, <https://www.americamagazine.org>

Contemporary theologian Mary Ann Beavis notes that the term “Magdalene” is widely believed to be a reference to the Saint’s hometown of Magdala, a fishing center on the Sea of Galilee, although it should be noted that there are no first-century references to a town of that name.³³⁰ “A minority view holds that the name Magdalene, meaning “Tower,” was actually honorific, referring to her status as a beacon of faith during the early church.”³³¹ Her importance is confirmed throughout the synoptic Gospels, as the evangelists always list her name first amongst Christ’s female disciples (Matthew 27:56, 61; 28:1; Mark 15:40, 47; 16:1; Luke 8:2-3; 24:10). She is also the only woman in the New Testament who is named without being associated with a man, either brother, husband, or father. Looking to the canonical gospels, Luke names Magdalene as one of the women who traveled with Christ and helped support his ministry “out of their own resources,” indicating that she was perhaps a member of the ancient Jewish aristocracy. The same passage also states that “seven demons had been driven out of her,”³³² a statement repeated in Mark 16.³³³ The only continuous Magdalene narrative throughout all four Gospels is her role in Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection, in which she recurs as key witness to all three events. All four Gospels identify her, either alone or as a member of a larger group of women, as the first to witness the empty tomb, and as the first to witness Christ’s return. For these reasons, Magdalene is known in some traditions as the “apostola apostolorum” or “apostle to the

³³⁰ Mary Ann Beavis, “The Deification of Mary Magdalene.” *Feminist Theology*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2012, pp. 145–154. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735012462840>.

³³¹ Jerome Stridon, “St. Jerome, Letter to Principia, 127.” *Church Fathers: Letter 127 (Jerome)*, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001127.htm>.

³³² Coogan, et al. Luke 8

³³³ Coogan, et al. Mark 16

apostles".³³⁴ The Gospel portrait of Magdalene as a disciple and "proclaimer of the good news of Jesus" bears little resemblance to the western cultural stereotype of the penitent sinner. Unequivocally, the notion that Magdalene led a sinful life before she met Christ is a direct byproduct of patriarchal papal interference.

Magdalene is also a central figure in later Gnostic Gospels, including "the Dialogue of the Savior," "the Pistis Sophia," "the Gospel of Thomas," "the Gospel of Philip," "the Gospel of Mary," and the heavily contested "Secret Gospel of Mark," which is no longer existent.³³⁵ These texts portray Magdalene as not only a female apostle, but as Christ's most beloved confidant, and as the only disciple "who truly understood his teachings." In the Gnostic texts Magdalene's closeness to Christ results in tension with other apostles following his death, namely Peter, due to her gender and Peter's envy of the "special teachings" that Christ left exclusively with her. In the Gospel of Philip, she is described as "Christ's companion," "the disciple Christ loved the most," and "the one He kissed on the mouth,"³³⁶ resulting in the myth that she was His lover, a belief popularized in modern times by Dan Brown's 2003 best-selling novel and subsequent film, *The Da Vinci Code*. Feminist theologian Mary Anne Beavis argues that another feature of the claim that Magdalene was Christ's wife "is the assertion that as His female counterpart, she symbolizes the Divine Feminine." She notes that while not entirely credible, Brown makes use of this idea in his novel, as his protagonist Robert Langdon

³³⁴ Anna Fedele, "The Route of Mary Magdalene." *Looking for Mary Magdalene: Alternative Pilgrimage and Ritual Creativity at Catholic Shrines in France*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2013, p. 8.

³³⁵ Sanka Knox, "A New Gospel Ascribed to Mark; Copy of Greek Letter Says Saint Kept 'Mysteries' Out A Secret Gospel Ascribed to Mark". *The New York Times*. December 30th, 1960.

³³⁶ Vladimir Antonov, ed. (2008). *The Gospel of Philip* (PDF). Translated by Anton Teplyy and Mikhail Nikolenko. p. 33.

is a Harvard “symbolologist” researching a book on “Symbols of the Lost Sacred Feminine,” writing that “the secret of Mary Magdalene is not simply that she is Jesus’ wife and the mother of his messianic heir, but that she embodies the sacred feminine who to this day is worshipped by her devotees as the Goddess, the Holy Grail, the Rose, and the Divine Mother.”³³⁷ This sacred marriage points to the meaning of sex as a “mystical, spiritual act” in which “man” achieves the “spark of divinity...through union with the sacred feminine,” and, presumably, by which woman unites with the sacred masculine to create a royal bloodline.³³⁸ However, contemporary theologian Margaret Starbird, a prominent supporter of Christ and Magdalene as historic husband and wife, believes that the royal bloodline hypothesis is “basically irrelevant”: arguing that the implications of Christ having a romantic partner point towards the “full humanity of Jesus,” and for the restoration of Magdalene as “the Lost Bride of Christ, and image of the sacred feminine.”³³⁹ Beavis notes that “while the notion of Magdalene as a female messianic counterpart to Christ may be somewhat appealing from a feminist standpoint, there is little to no canonized Biblical evidence to substantiate these claims; and while some Gnostics recognized female divine figures, there is no evidence that Magdalene was among them.”³⁴⁰ Never-the-less, the myths conflating Magdalene and the Divine Feminine would persist throughout various diasporas of folk religion in Western Europe, specifically in the south of France.³⁴¹

³³⁷ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, Doubleday, New York, 2003, p. 334.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ Margaret Starbird, *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar: Mary Magdalen and the Holy Grail*, Bear & Co., Santa Fe, NM, 2006, p. 178.

³⁴⁰ Mary Ann Beavis, pp. 145–154.

³⁴¹ Alban Butler, Herbert Thurston, and Donald Attwater, “St Mary Magdalen (First Century),” in *Butler’s “Lives of the Saints:” Complete Edition* (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1968), p. 1644.

Visual, literary, and performance art depicting Magdalene as the “bride” or successor of Christ began to spread by the end of the nineteenth century, becoming increasingly popular in the early twentieth century. In 1910 the German poet Rilke translated and published an anonymous manuscript found in St. Petersburg, apparently dating from the eighteenth century, entitled *L’amour de Madeleine*. That same year the Belgian Playwright Maurice Maeterlinck would publish his play *Mary Magdalene*, depicting Christ’s crucifixion as the byproduct of a torrid love triangle. In the following years the French sculptor Auguste Rodin would create two works depicting Magdalene and Christ as lovers, and in 1931 D.H. Lawrence published a story entitled *Man Who Died*, describing the love story between Christ and a pagan priestess inspired by Magdalene.³⁴² An undated and unproduced screenplay by Irish novelist Kate O’Brien, most likely authored in the 1940s, makes the bold assertion that Magdalene and Mary mother of Jesus, the twin origins of the Madonna-Whore archetype, were actually the same person.³⁴³ Magdalene scholar Anna Fedele notes that “the unifying theme throughout most of these spiritual-esoteric works of Magdalene literature and visual art is their local, ancient France, as they are all derived from Catholic folk-legends about the Saint’s arrival in Gaul as well as her subsequent travels, purported miracles, death, and final resting place.” This brings us back to the work of Teresa Deevy, a devout Catholic and proto-feminist, and her bold reimagining of the mid twentieth-century Magdalene mythology.

³⁴² Anna Fedele, p. 8.

³⁴³ Amy Finlay-Jeffrey, “Liminal Spaces and Minority Communities in the Twentieth Century.” *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2022, pp. 55–80., <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003176503-3>.

The opening stage directions of *One Look and What it Led To* identify the setting as “(ancient) Palestine on a road near the gate of the city of Naim.” In a remarkable progression of Deevy’s dramaturgy she indicates the use of incidental music. The plays’ action begins with the arrival of a group of strangers who subsequently comment with a fractured-collective voice on the dramatic action, functioning as a post-modern Greek chorus. The play unravels into five scenes, four of which rewrite canonical biblical events, “The Raising of Lazarus” (John 11), “The Anointing of Jesus” (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 7, and John 12), “Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem” (Luke 23), and “The Resurrection of Jesus” (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20) all told through the perspective of unnamed women. The fifth and final scene references the Provence Legend in “Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume,” in which Magdalene travels to continental Europe after the death of Christ, spending her final days performing miracles in a cave. A long tradition holds that Magdalene was exiled from Palestine a decade after the resurrection and sought sanctuary in Provence, where she “evangelized the region, bringing it to faith in Jesus Christ.” The crypt that holds her relics in the Basilica of Saint Mary Magdalene has been called “the third most important tomb in Christianity.”³⁴⁴

Deevy’s play is rife with premonition delivered by her female characters, the majority of whom go unnamed, functioning as clever inversion of the midrash tradition of “naming.” “Midrash,” a Hebrew word meaning “investigation” or “study,” denotes both “the ancient method of biblical interpretation in the Hebrew tradition and the subsequent literature that has resulted from the application of said methodology.”³⁴⁵

³⁴⁴ Fedele, p. 5

³⁴⁵ Lou Hackett Silberman, “The Talmud and Midrash in Judaism.” Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Talmud/Codes>.

Midrash “fills the space in-between the silences of Biblical stories” and imagines, or retells said stories via alternative viewpoints, oftentimes through the eyes of the women, who have previously gone unnamed.³⁴⁶ From a socio-political standpoint, midrash can respond to contemporary problems by crafting alternative stories, making connections between new social realities and unchanging biblical texts. In his 1998 book *Midrash as Literature*, contemporary theologian Philip Alexander compares twentieth century midrash literature to “reader-response literary criticism.”³⁴⁷ Conversely the poet-critic Alicia Ostriker identifies the growing popularity of midrashic poetry and drama by women as a new genre of storytelling entitled “Feminist Revisionist Mythmaking,” in her 1976 book *Stealing the Language*. Informed by feminist literary criticism and the politics of feminism more broadly, Feminist Revisionist Mythmaking engages with “mythology, religion, motherhood, and tales of origin.” Ostriker argues that

We cannot measure the work of women writers, past or present, without a thorough – and if possible demystified – awareness of the critical context in which they have composed and continued to compose their work. We need to recognize that our customary literary language is systematically gendered in ways that influence what we approve and disapprove of, making it extremely difficult for us to acknowledge certain kinds of originality – of difference – in women’s writing. The belief that true poetry (or drama) is genderless — which is a disguised form of believing it is in fact masculine — means that we have not learned to see women writers generically, to recognize the tradition they belong to, or discuss either the limitation or the strengths of that tradition.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁶ Marie Howe, “Marie Howe on ‘Magdalene’ and ‘What the Living Do.’” Christian Scholars’ Conference 2017 Plenary. Christian Scholars’ Conference 2017 Plenary, 9 Aug. 2017, Nashville, TN, Lipscomb University.

³⁴⁷ Philip Alexander, “Midrash as Literature.” *Midrash - Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Routledge Press, <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/midrash/v-1>.

³⁴⁸ Alicia Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women’s Poetry in America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986. p. 9.

Feminist Revisionist Mythmaking holds two key components, feminist revision and revisionist myth. Feminist revision is a generative literary practice designed to combat the prevailing patriarchal system of canonical exclusion and erasure, while revisionist myths utilize a strategic repositioning of gendered religious imagery as a means of "subverting and transforming the life and literature women inherit."³⁴⁹ Deevy extends this tradition to the spiritual life that contemporary Irish women inherent by boldly reclaiming the namesake of Ireland's twentieth century institutions for incarcerated "fallen women," the Magdalene Laundries.

In the plays first scene, "The Raising of Lazarus," Deevy rewrites the narrative found in John 11. In the biblical account the titular figure Lazarus is introduced as a devout follower of Christ who lives in the town of Bethany near Jerusalem, or "the village of Mary and her sister Martha." In contemporary translations of the Bible, Mary of Bethany is identified in John 11 as "the woman who anointed Christ's feet with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair,"³⁵⁰ despite the prevailing assertion from both the papacy and independent scholars that this was another woman, neither of whom is related to Magdalene.³⁵¹ The sisters send word to Christ that Lazarus is gravely ill, and Christ tells his followers: "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Instead of answering the sisters' call with urgency, Christ intentionally remains where he is for two more days before beginning the journey. The disciples are afraid of returning to the West Bank, but Christ says: "Our

³⁴⁹ Ostriker, p. 211.

³⁵⁰ Coogan, et al. John 11:2

³⁵¹ Butler, p. 1644.

friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him." When the apostles misunderstand, he clarifies, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe."

When Christ arrives in Bethany, he finds that Lazarus is dead and has already been in his tomb for four days. He meets first with the sisters, who lament his late arrival, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died," to which Christ replies with the well-known statement, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he who believes in me, though he were dead, will have eternal life: And whosoever live and believe in me shall never die". Martha affirms that she believes and states, "Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who has to come into the world." Later the gospel narrator gives the famous phrase, "Jesus wept". In the presence of a crowd of Jewish mourners Christ asks for the stone of the tomb to be removed, but Martha interjects that there will be a smell. Christ responds, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" Over the objections of Martha, Christ has them roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb and says a prayer. After they take the stone away Christ looks up and says: "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." He then calls Lazarus to come out and he does, Christ then calls for someone to "take off his grave-cloths and let him go." The narrative ends with the statement that many of the witnesses to this event "believed in him," while others "reported the events to the religious authorities in Jerusalem."³⁵²

³⁵² Coogan, et al. John 11:1-57

In Deevy's version a group of unnamed women gather to witness a funeral procession pass through their city, as the death of a beloved young man, "the only son of a heartbroken widow," has sent shockwaves through their community. One of the women questions why the family did not send word to "the prophet," and a debate ensues over the legitimacy of "His miracles." Reference is then made to the Wedding Feast at Cana, the first miracle attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John venerated as one of the luminous mysteries of the rosary. The debate is interrupted by the arrival of Joanna "the great beauty" and her companion Magdalene "a woman of no importance." A second argument ensues among the women, over Magdalene's "beauty," the "nobility of her bearing," and her apparent vanity. After which the chorus recounts the funeral procession, the arrival of Christ, and the miraculous resurrection of Lazarus. Deevy places her account *en media res*, choosing to have Christ dramatically interrupt the funeral procession in the street, rather than arrive at the tomb four days late. Joanna and Magdalene, overwhelmed by what they have witnessed, fall on their knees in devotion and begin to pray. The chorus of onlookers states they are "nearly more impressed" by a display of piety from Magdalene than they are by the resurrection of Lazarus. The chorus moves on, leaving Joanna and Magdalene alone. The two women rise from prayer, with Magdalene exclaiming

Joanna, he looked at me! He looked. From the distance he saw me, and as if we were close together... saw me... saw what I am, and yet loved me... (*voice trembles.*) How can I thank him? I was full of evil... trapped by devils... They've gone now! Banished by one look! ... Oh, -- most lovely! ... Never again can they dominate me... *I have that look.... (Low.)* Dear Joanna, (*Tender; speaking very gently.*) two people have been raised from death this day... the young man's

body... and my soul. You brought me here. Oh! Joanna, how can I thank you...
How did you know?³⁵³

Here Deevy replaces the painful exorcism of literal demons found in Luke 8, with a metaphorical exorcism of Magdalene's fears, insecurities, and vanity. This sequence references the title of the play, which insinuates a radical act of intimacy between Magdalene and Christ, one that surpasses language. Here Deevy posits that beyond the word, a single look from Christ can forgive all transgressions, heal all affliction, and satiate every need.

The substitution of Martha with Joanna is perhaps Deevy's most deliberate act of feminist revision. "Joanna the wife of Chuza" is a recurring figure throughout the Gospel of Luke and Pauline Epistles. Described by Luke as a noblewoman who traveled with Christ and the apostles from city to city as their patroness. She is a canonized Saint in the Catholic Church, venerated for her role in both preparing the body of Christ for burial, and for bearing witness to his resurrection. She is described by Paul as continuing Christ's ministry during the years following his death, identifying her as one of the earliest foremothers of the Catholic Church.³⁵⁴ Joanna does not appear in any of the Gospel accounts of "the Raising of Lazarus," and Deevy's decision to incorporate her in this midrash retelling is both clever and calculated. Positioning Magdalene as Joanna's companion not only separates her from the Mary of Bethany character, but

³⁵³ Teresa Deevy. "One Look and What it Led To." *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed: Volume II*, edited by Jonathan Bank et al., Mint Theater Company, New York, NY, 2017, p. 128.

³⁵⁴ J. D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (2011), p. 742.

also identifies her station among the Sadducees, the wealthy aristocracy and ruling class of ancient Jerusalem.³⁵⁵

Returning to the plays action; after the departure of the Chorus, Joanna reveals that their run in with the “the prophet” was not mere happenstance but was actually orchestrated on the orders of the prophet’s mother, “Mary of Nazareth.” The Chorus then returns just as Mary appears. The two women meet and engage in conversation, their dialogue is both poetic and abstract, lifted nearly verbatim from Luke 1:47-49,³⁵⁶ Psalm 18,³⁵⁷ and Psalm 51.³⁵⁸ At the scene’s conclusion Magdalene asks if she can see the prophet again, inspiring an emotive premonition from Mary of Nazareth, foreshadowing Christ’s passion, death and resurrection; promising Magdalene that she will “be the one to see him again.” Deevy rewrites Magdalene and Joanna’s first encounter with Christ; opting to exclude their exorcisms, instead positioning them as witnesses to the Raising of Lazarus, and choosing to include Mary the mother of God, as their leader and divine guide.

The plays’ second scene combines elements from four conflicting accounts of “The Anointing of Jesus,” found in Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 7, and John 12. While canonically the Gospel of Matthew appears first in the New Testament, contemporary theologians assert that the text is derivative of the Gospel of Mark, containing nearly 90% of the same material.³⁵⁹ Therefore, Matthew and Mark’s accounts are almost

³⁵⁵ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, “Chapter 13,” in *The Antiquities of the Jews* (S.I.: The Floating Press, 2017), p. 298.

³⁵⁶ Coogan, et al. Luke 1:47-49

³⁵⁷ Coogan, et al. Psalms 18

³⁵⁸ Coogan, et al. Psalms 51

³⁵⁹ Amy-Jill Levine, “Matthew,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, exp. ed., ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), p. 348.

identical, set days before the Last Supper, at a Passover meal in the home of Simon the Leper. Both accounts foreshadow Christ's crucifixion with the appearance of an unnamed wealthy and pious woman who, carrying an alabaster jar of oil, interrupts Christ's meal to administer a blessing reminiscent of Jewish burial rights. Her actions are deemed frivolous by the apostles, who scold the woman for buying and wasting a luxury item that "could have been sold to feed the poor." Christ in turn scolds the apostles by praising the woman's actions and offering a premonition of His own impending crucifixion, stating, "Why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you will always have the poor with you, and you should show kindness to them whenever you can, but you will not always have me. She has done what she could, she has anointed my body for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."³⁶⁰ ³⁶¹ Conversely, the Gospel of John depicts a similar sequence between Christ and Mary of Bethany, set in the home of Lazarus shortly after his resurrection. Contemporary biblical criticism illuminates how these three accounts foreshadow the important role of women in Christ's Passion: walking beside him on the road to calvary, preparing his body for burial, and proclaiming his resurrection.

Contrary to Matthew, Mark, and John, the events outlined in Luke reposition the blessing of an unnamed pious woman as an act of "repentance" from an unnamed, "sinful woman." Christ is invited to attend Passover at the home of Simon the Pharisee, but is seated at the "lower table," without receiving the traditional right of hospitality,

³⁶⁰ Coogan, et al. Matthew 26:1-12

³⁶¹ Coogan, et al. Mark 14:1-9

including the washing of one's feet. An unnamed woman arrives and performs what has been deemed by the papacy as an "erotic ritual," bathing Christ's feet in tears before drying them with "exposed hair," a line frequently assumed to mean she was a sex worker. Simon chastises Christ, saying "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is — that she is a sinner." Christ responds with a parable about the repayment of debt, and the power of forgiveness, to which Simon concedes. Christ then turns towards the woman and says, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little." Christ then tells her, "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in peace."³⁶² By setting her scene in the home of Simon the Pharisee, Deevy seemingly positions her retelling in the Gospel of Luke.

Deevy's second scene opens with incidental music combined with "voices and laughter" denoting "a passage of time." The chorus gathers in front of the doors to the home of Simon the Pharisee to witness "the Master" attend "a grand banquet." Deevy's chorus identifies Simon's insult from the Gospel of Luke, stating "Would you believe this – his place is laid at the lower table, down among the lesser people... Simon is half in doubt you see, – he's afraid of being laughed at... if the Master does nothing the guests may jeer, so he mustn't be made too much of – in the beginning." Magdalene is seen at a

³⁶² Coogan, et al. Luke 7:36-50

distance, and the Chorus shifts focus, observing “Here’s that woman, Magdalene, what a change has come on her. She’s quite different since the raising of that widow’s son: that’s a few days only, but for her there must have been a whole lifetime of feeling... How else could she be completely changed.” Magdalene arrives carrying a “costly jar of alabaster,” in reference to Matthew and Mark, and the chorus advises her against attempting to attend Simon’s banquet uninvited. She ignores their warning and enters, with the chorus narrating “She is a living flame, since that day she first saw the Prophet,” a reference to the poem “The Living Flame of Love” by San Juan de la Cruz. During a pantomime sequence Magdalene gains admittance to the banquet, with one of the men commenting “her beauty won entrance for her,” and a woman challenging “No. It was the urgency of her great longing to be with Him.”³⁶³

In her next act of feminist revision, Deevy combines elements from all four Gospels during a second pantomime sequence in which Magdalene both washes Christ’s feet with her tears and anoints his body with a blessing for burial. Simon, angered by her actions has the guards shut the doors to the banquet, closing on a tableau of Christ and Magdalene. Joanna appears and approaches the chorus as they reiterate Magdalene’s actions, praising her newfound piety and humility. Shortly thereafter Magdalene emerges from the banquet doors and gathers Joanna and the unnamed women with a call to action, “Let us form a group now, and follow him always... Let us group together and minister to him, following him from city to city... Time will come when he’ll need us... (voice trembles.) ... He will suffer... Some will mock, others will fail him... Let us be faithful... faithfully loving...” The women rejoice in unison, exclaiming

³⁶³ Deevy, pp. 130-132.

“Yes! Yes, Magdalen... with you to lead us!” proceeding to sing “Mary’s Song” from Luke 1 into blackout.³⁶⁴ In this brief interaction Deevy ties together the feminine premonition of Christ’s Passion found in Matthew 26 with the assembly of “Female Disciples in Christ” found in Luke 8, while simultaneously positioning Magdalene as successor of Christ’s ministry in accordance with the apocryphal Gospel of Mary.

Deevy’s third scene draws from “The Way of the Cross,” depicting the eighth station, “Christ Meets the Weeping Women of Jerusalem.” The Way of the Cross is a series of religious reflections depicting Christ carrying the cross on the road to calvary. Most Catholic churches, as well as many Episcopal, Lutheran, and Methodist parishes, contain physical “Stations of the Cross,” typically placed at intervals along the sidewalls of the nave, ranging from small plaques to large mural paintings.³⁶⁵ The performative act of moving around the Stations to commemorate the Passion of Christ is historically associated with St. Francis of Assisi, becoming a popular ritual in medieval Europe. It is traditionally performed on Good Friday, but it can be performed on alternating Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the Lenten season.³⁶⁶ The eighth station is taken from a line found in Luke 23, “A great number of people followed him, and among them were his female disciples who were beating their breasts and wailing. Jesus turned to them and said ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say Blessed are the

³⁶⁴ Deevy, pp. 132-134.

³⁶⁵ George D. Chryssides and Margaret Z. Wilkins. *Christians in the Twenty-First Century*. Taylor & Francis. 2014. p. 51.

³⁶⁶ Mary Weitzel Gibbons. *Giambologna: Narrator of the Catholic Reformation*. University of California Press. 1995. pp. 72

barren and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.”³⁶⁷ The presence of Christ’s female disciples during the Crucifixion is noted in all four Gospels, however there are different interpretations of how many and which women were present. Although some Christian traditions hold that there were “Three Mary’s “at the cross, only one gospel claims this, and these names differ from the other gospels. Nevertheless, Magdalene is noteworthy, recurring in each of the gospels apart from Luke who excludes all individual names of women present at the crucifixion. Mary, mother of James and Joseph is mentioned by Matthew and Mark, and Mary, the mother of Jesus; Mary, the mother of the sons of Zebedee; Salome, and Mary of Clopas are all mentioned once by either Matthew, Mark, or John.

Deevy’s stage directions indicate “sad incidental music,” and the arrival of five unnamed women, who assemble to lament “the Way of the Cross.” The women provide much needed exposition, detailing the events between Passover and the Crucifixion. They identify Magdalene at a distance (offstage), as she comforts Mary of Nazareth. In her next act of feminist revision, Deevy suggests that the Saint herself orchestrated the events of the Eighth Station, with the appearance of a messenger who advises the women, on behalf of Magdalene, “to group together and bewail his suffering as he passes, offering love.” The chorus follows her instructions, acting out their lamentations in a nonverbal pantomime. In the follow sequence Christ is nailed to the cross with Magdalene at his side, as the Chorus describes the version of Magdalene found in the Biblical apocrypha, a woman of status and power, possessing supernatural abilities, and an intimate connection with Christ. The chorus then narrates a second pantomime

³⁶⁷ Coogan, et al. Luke 23:26-31

sequence in which Magdalene “falls to the ground, embracing the cross, her arms pressed low.” Deevy, once again at the height of her powers, finds poetry in her source material, juxtaposing the image of Magdalene washing Christ’s feet in her tears, with Magdalene weeping at the foot of the cross; “No longer can tears wash those dear feet.” Magdalene remains with Christ until his final breath when a mighty earthquake overtakes the stage, ending in blackout.³⁶⁸

Deevy’s fourth scene depicts “The Resurrection of Jesus” in line with the overlapping accounts of Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20. Mark offers two versions, written as “The Shorter Ending of Mark” and “The Longer Ending of Mark” in chapter 16. The shorter version ends with Magdalene, Salome, and Mary the mother of James discovering Christ’s tomb. A young man in a white robe at the site of the tomb announces to them that Jesus has risen and instructs Magdalene to “tell Peter and the disciples that he will meet them in Galilee, ‘just as He told you’” (Mark 16). The longer version (which is a later addition) recounts that Jesus appeared to Magdalene, then to two followers outside Jerusalem, and then to the eleven remaining Apostles, commissioning them to spread “the good news” (often referred to as “The Great Commission”), stating: “The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.”³⁶⁹ In Matthew, Luke and John, the resurrection announcement is followed by Christ appearing to Magdalene first, then to his other followers. The Gospel of Matthew describes a single appearance in Galilee, Luke describes several appearances in Jerusalem, while John mentions appearances in

³⁶⁸ Deevy, pp. 134-135.

³⁶⁹ Coogan, et al. Mark 16:16

both cities. At some point, these appearances ceased in the early Christian community, as reflected in the Gospel-narratives: the "Acts of the Apostles" says that "for forty days he had continued to appear to them". The Gospel of Luke describes Jesus ascending to heaven at a location near Bethany.

In the Gospel of Matthew, an angel appears to Magdalene at the empty tomb, telling her that Jesus is not there because he has been raised from the dead, and instructing her to tell the other followers to go to Galilee, to meet Jesus. Jesus then appeared to Magdalene and "the other Mary" at the tomb; and next, based on Mark 16:7, Jesus appeared to all the disciples on a mountain in Galilee, where Jesus claimed authority over heaven and earth, and commissioned the disciples to preach the gospel to the whole world. Matthew presents Jesus's second appearance as an apotheosis, commissioning his followers to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." In this message, the end-times are delayed, "to bring the world to discipleship." In the Gospel of Luke, "the women who had come with him from Galilee" come to his tomb, which they find empty. Two angels appear and announce that Christ is "not there but has been raised." He later appears to two followers on their way to Emmaus, who notify the eleven remaining Apostles, who respond that Christ has appeared to Peter. While describing this, Christ appears again, explaining that he is "the Messiah who raised from the dead according to the scriptures," and that "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

In Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, two works written by the same author, Christ then ascended into heaven, “his rightful home.” The Gospel of John offers the most well-known account of the resurrection, in which Magdalene alone discovers the empty tomb and fearing “graverobbers” run to tell Peter and another unnamed disciple. The three set out for the tomb only to discover Christ’s missing body and empty burial cloth. The two men “did not understand the scripture that he must have risen from the dead” and return to their homes. Distressed and alone, Magdalene enters the tomb to see for herself, only to discover “two angels dressed in white” who greet her with the question, “Woman, why are you weeping?” Magdalene responds, “They have taken away my master’s body and I do not know where they have taken him.” She exits the tomb only to discover the resurrected Christ dressed as a gardener. He begs the same question as the angels and engages Magdalene in conversation. However, she fails to recognize him until he calls her by name, to which she exclaims “rabboni” and attempts to embrace him. He warns her against touching him as he “has not yet ascended,” and sends her off to “proclaim the good news of his resurrection.”

Deevy’s retelling draws on elements of all four Gospels. Her stage directions indicate incidental music that “swells gradually to a sweet happiness,” before the lights rise to reveal two Roman soldiers stationed outside the tomb of Christ. Upon witnessing “a beam of light” the men flee, fearing the supernatural. Shortly thereafter Magdalene appears, accompanied by the same group of unnamed women from the previous scene. Magdalene, anxious over the missing stone and guards, enters the tomb only to discover Christ’s body is missing as well. She departs to find Peter and John, and the chorus of women encounter an angel, who decrees “Be not affrighted: you seek Jesus of

Nazareth... he is risen, he is not here... Go tell the disciples and Peter that he goeth before you in Galilee.”³⁷⁰ The chorus debates whether or not to share what they have seen and heard, for fear of the men not believing them. They repeatedly lament Magdalene’s absence: “If Magdalene were with us it would be different; she has the grace of wisdom.”³⁷¹ Magdalene returns with Peter and John who, confusing the empty tomb for a crime scene, depart to consult the other male apostles. Upon their departure Magdalene enters the tomb to weep, where she is met by Christ and engages in a dialogue lifted nearly verbatim from John 20. The scene ends with Magdalene, alone on stage, proclaiming “I must go now... (Regretfully) leave this happy spot, bringing the message – as He bade me...”³⁷² In this moment Deevy switches to using the upper case “H” in Christ’s pronouns, denoting Magdalene’s revelation that her master is the Messiah of the Old Testament, and the son of God.

The plays fifth and final scene, set in “the wild countryside of ancient Gaul,” dramatizes the popular Provence Legend. Here Deevy’s impressive dramaturgy progresses beyond the biblical Magdalene and explores the figure of western folk religion. According to a legend popularized in the Middle Ages by Jacobus de Voragine (ca. 1260), following the crucifixion Magdalene and a group of other early Christians set sail, frequent names associated with the story include Maximin, Lazarus, Marta, Sara, and two other Marys, Maria Jacobé and Maria Salomé.³⁷³ They arrived in a boat at the current French coast at a place that would thereafter take the name of “the Holy Mary’s

³⁷⁰ Deevy, p. 137

³⁷¹ Deevy, p. 139

³⁷² Deevy, pp. 136-139

³⁷³ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, ed. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

of the Sea,” or Les-Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. After preaching in Marseille and converting the inhabitants of what is now Provence, Magdalene retired to a cave in the mountain of La Sainte-Baume and lived there for an unspecified amount of time in contemplation (originally thirty-seven years) without eating or drinking and being lifted to the sky by angels seven times a day. Before her death she asked Saint Maximin to give her extreme unction and was then buried in what is now the church of Saint-Maximin-en-Provence, where her remains are on display to this day.³⁷⁴

Deevy’s fifth scene opens with incidental music denoting “a long passage of time... and a change of surroundings... If possible, a high desolate mountain spot.” In accordance with the Provence legend, the scene is set thirty-seven years after the death of Christ, on the mountain trail of La Sainte-Baume. The lights rise on a pair of young French children, “Antoinette” and “Pierre” who, replacing the chorus from scenes one through four, provide necessary exposition, explaining the legend of Magdalene’s journey to Southern France. The scene is noteworthy as the two children deliver the majority of the dialogue, together they debate details of the Saint’s past, including her journey across the sea and subsequent ministry. When the children complete their climb up the mountain path they describe a feeling of warmth wash over them, “What’s happened to us? You and I saying nice things about one another!... There must be a lot of love about this place... When I came up, I felt so cross, almost angry, but now I’m happy... and nothing matters...”³⁷⁵ The children then stumble upon the entrance to Magdalene’s cave, exclaiming “Look!... those birds at the entrance... fluttering round...

³⁷⁴ Fedele, p. 9

³⁷⁵ Deevy, pp. 139-140

doves and seagulls together..." In combining seagulls, an Old Testament symbol of hunger and impurity, with doves, a New Testament symbol of faith and purity, Deevy positions Magdalene as a female messianic successor to Christ.

The children wander through Magdalene's seemingly empty cave dwelling, as they discuss reports of her purported miracles, healing the sick and wounded. They fear that the Saint "must be hiding," and retreat into the caves dark corner. When Magdalene eventually emerges, the children gush to themselves over "her great beauty" until the saint begins a conversation with an unseen partner. Magdalene reveals that she hid from the children for fear of "danger," but after witnessing their sweetness asks the lord to "Please bless them, now, and grant whatever they came to ask for, grant it, Lord, in *Your own way*..." She then asks the lord to provide food for the birds, and while crouching down stumbles and falls, praying "All my life I've stumbled... Lord, need it be, for not much longer..."³⁷⁶ Then suddenly, in her final act of feminist revisionist mythmaking, Deevy superimposes the Assumption of Mary, the Mother of God³⁷⁷ onto Magdalene, who ascends body and soul to Heaven.

Deevy's portrait of Magdalene, while radical in the context of 20th century Catholicism, bears a striking resemblance to Alban Butlers' account of Magdalene in his 1756 hagiography, *The Lives of Saints*. A popular English language adaptation of Jean Bolland's 1643 hagiography, *The Acta Sanctorum*, Butlers' text was particularly prevalent in 20th century Ireland. Deevy most likely would have read *The Lives of Saints*

³⁷⁶ Deevy, pp. 140-142

³⁷⁷ "The Assumption of Mary" is one of the four Marian dogmas of the Catholic Church. Pope Pius XII defined it on November 1st, 1950 in his apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* as follows: "We proclaim and define it to be a dogma revealed by God that the immaculate Mother of God, Mary ever virgin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven."

throughout her childhood, both at home and as part of her education at the Ursaline Convent in Waterford. Butlers' biography stands in stark contrast with the Magdalene of Wester Christendom, as he identifies the saint as a female apostle and repeatedly refutes her false legacy as a "fallen woman." He offers decisive praise for the saint while recounting the four major biblical narratives in which she appears, before lamenting her legacy as a sexual scapegoat of the Church, writing

and yet Mary Magdalen is remembered for other things. In the darkest hour of our Lord's life, she stood at some distance, watching Him on the cross; and with 'the other Mary' she saw the great stone rolled before the door of the tomb wherein lay the body of the Lord. But the crowning mercy of the life of Mary Magdalen was yet to come, for it was she who, bearing sweet spices and weeping by the sepulchre early on the first day of the week, was the first to see, to be greeted by, and to recognize, the risen Christ; she, the contemplative, was the first witness to that resurrection without which our faith and our preaching are alike vain; it was to the abused flesh of the penitent that the radiant and glorified body of the Son of God was first made manifest.³⁷⁸

Butler also pays special attention to the Provence Legend and "the Golden Myth narrative." Writing that

Much has been written on the subject of St. Mary Magdalen's coming to Provence, but it is impossible to allow any sort of probability to the view which venerates the Sainte Baume as the home of her last years. According to Eastern tradition, Mary Magdalene after Pentecost accompanied our Lady and St John to Ephesus where she died and was buried; the English pilgrim St Willibald was shown her shrine there in the middle of the eighth century. But according to the tradition of France, in the Roman Martyrology and by the granting of various local feasts, she, with Lazarus, Martha, and others, evangelized Provence. The last thirty-seven years of her life, it is claimed, were spent in a cavern of a rock,

³⁷⁸ Alban Butler, Herbert Thurston, and Donald Attwater, "22: St. Mary Magdalen, First Century," essay, in *Butler's Lives Of The Saints Complete Edition* (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1996), pp. 161–163.

La Sainte Baume, high up among the Maritime Alps, to be transported miraculously, just before she died, to the chapel of St Maximin; she received the last sacraments from and was buried by that saint.³⁷⁹

However, Butler ends his biography refuting the credibility of the legend, stating that “neither the relics nor the story of the voyage of the friends of our Lord to Marseilles can be relied on as authentic; in spite of the defense of those piously concerned on behalf of the local belief, it cannot be doubted that the whole story is a fabrication.” Ultimately, Magdalene’s tomb in Saint-Maximin-La-Sainte-Baume, as well as the Saint’s veneration throughout France is representative of a widespread Pan-European appropriation of ancient Orientalism during the Middle Ages. Various foot holes of Western Catholicism possess invented legends of ancient evangelism, Joseph of Arimathea bringing “The Holy Grail” to Glastonbury, England, the crucifixion of St. Peter in Rome, Italy, and the evangelism of St. James the Apostle in Galicia, Spain. Each of these stories are representative of a western impulse to integrate Christian experience into the fabric of European life via the act of revisionist myth. The ramifications of these fabrications are widespread, chief among them the popularity of Catholic pilgrimages to fictitious, often neo-pagan sites spread across Western Europe.

French anthropologist Anna Fedele illuminates this phenomenon in her 2013 book *Looking for Mary Magdalene*, in which she offers a comprehensive ethnography of various post-modern “alternative pilgrimages” made to French Catholic shrines dedicated to the Saint. Drawing on more than three years of extensive fieldwork, Fedele

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

offers detailed accounts of pilgrimages inspired by Catholic doctrine as well as spiritual theories and practices derived from the transnational Neopagan movement of the early twentieth century. She examines how “pilgrims devise their rituals; why this kind of spirituality is increasingly prevalent in the West; and the influence of anthropological literature on the participants. Among these pilgrims, spirituality is lived and negotiated in interaction with each other and with textual sources: Jungian psychology, Goddess mythology, and ‘indigenous’ traditions merge into a corpus of theories and practices centered around the worship of the divine feminine.”³⁸⁰ Fedele’s book opens with a first-hand account from a middle-aged Irish woman called Margot, who “always felt a particular connection” to the Saint having been born in one of Ireland’s Magdalene Laundries.

I think [that when I was young] I had a very strong connection [with Mary Magdalene] in a less conscious way: as a baby who was born in secret into a convent and adopted because her mother couldn't keep her and had to have her in secret. I was born into a convent and, as I grew, the sense of what it meant grew with me. It was around the time of my own puberty that I realized that my mother had been an unmarried woman, so in that sense she was seen as a "fallen woman." There were lots of attitudes around "bad blood" for me as an adopted baby. I might turn out bad like my mother. Later on, I myself had a child outside of marriage. So my sense of Her [Magdalene] grew as I did. In those days I associated Her with the woman who was stoned, the scorned one, later as the chosen one. And for myself also, I was a chosen one. I was a baby who was given away, but also chosen. So that sense of Magdalene as the scorned woman and the chosen one was very poignant for me. As I grew up, I reclaimed my sexuality and my right to have a child outside of marriage; to live my sexuality unbound by convention.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ Fedele, p. 9.

³⁸¹ Fedele, p. 3

Margot's story is representative of over tens of thousands of women incarcerated by the Irish State during the twentieth century. Post the War for Independence, the Catholic Church, acting in conjunction with the Irish state, operated a network of institutions for the concealment, punishment, and exploitation of the 'fallen women of Ireland', namely in the form of the Magdalene Laundries and the network of Mother-and-Baby Homes. The Irish Free State facilitated and funded the growth of these institutions, as it viewed illegitimacy and sexual activity "out of wedlock" as "grave social problems," outsourcing punishment to the religious orders. From 1922 until 1996 "at least 56,000 women and young girls were imprisoned, forced to carry out unpaid labor, and subjected to severe psychological and physical maltreatment in these institutions named after the "controversial Saint." In the twenty-first century they have since been described as "carceral, punitive institutions that ran commercial and for-profit businesses, primarily laundries and needlework."³⁸²

After 1922, the Laundries were operated by four religious orders: The Sisters of Mercy, The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, the Sisters of Charity, and the Good Shepherd Sisters, in ten different locations around Ireland. The last Laundry ceased operating on the 25th of October, 1996. The women and girls who suffered in the Laundries included those who were perceived to be 'promiscuous' unmarried mothers, the daughters of unmarried mothers, those who were considered a burden on their families or the State, those who had been sexually abused, or those who had grown up in the care of the Church/State." Confined for decades on end – and isolated from their families and society at large – many of these women became institutionalized over time, as they

³⁸² Hogan, pp. 45-47.

were deemed “physically or mentally unfit to re-enter society unaided,” becoming dependent on the convents that once imprisoned them. In addition to the Laundries were secondary “Magdalene institutions,” the Mother-and-Baby Homes. The official statistics for illegitimate births remained low throughout the Free State period. From 1921-1922 these births accounted for just 2.6 percent of all births in the twenty-six counties, and in 1933-1944, the percentage peaked at 3.5 percent. What began to appear during the late 1920s, however, was a bifurcated policy towards unmarried mothers: essentially, women who became pregnant out of wedlock were hidden from view. In most cases these women were forced to give their children up for adoption, with some being illegally trafficked to the United States with falsified birth records. Mortality rates in these institutions were shockingly high, and the discovery of a mass infant grave at the mother-and-baby home in Tuam became a global scandal in 2014.³⁸³

As a byproduct of these institutions Magdalene’s name and legacy occupies a complex place in twenty-first century Irish culture. While outside the auspices of organized religion the Saint has been reclaimed by survivors and their descendants as a symbol of grace and the Divine Feminine, she is still widely viewed as a “reformed prostitute” by the Church. Most recently, Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare received backlash for making disparaging and ahistorical comments on Magdalene in April of 2021 during a televised homily for Divine Mercy Sunday on RTÉ. In an article responding to the scandal Irish journalist Sarah MacDonald and British theologian Tina Beattie note that biblical scholars, church historians, and feminist theologians agree

³⁸³ Neil Michael. “Mother and Baby Homes Report Fails to Fully Address the Issue of Illegal Adoptions.” *The Irish Examiner*, 14 Jan. 2021.

that the reputation of Magdalene as a reformed prostitute is the result of the conflation of several stories surrounding women in the Gospels and the early church, stating "There is no suggestion in Scripture that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. As the woman who first preached the Resurrection to the other apostles, she was widely portrayed in medieval art and hagiography as a preacher." Beattie also notes that the tradition of Mary's "colorful past" is often traced back to the sixth century's Pope Gregory I. She goes on to assert that "However colorful her imagined past might have been, what matters surely is that the risen Christ chose a woman to go and preach the good news, to be the apostle to the apostles, and the significance of that is something the Irish Catholic Church has yet to recognize."³⁸⁴

Marie Kelly notes in her research packet for the Abbey Theatre's 2017 revival of *Katie Roche* that Deevy's literary connection to the Magdalene institutions is well documented. She argues that Deevy's work in the 1930s creates images of "the hidden history of those whose access to citizenship was barred by illegitimacy, poverty, gender, or other disadvantages," and this is an "essential aspect in analyzing her work for twenty-first century audiences, that as Ireland continues to come to recognize institutional abuses that were widespread, and to consider how institutional censorship, self-censorship and collusion have obscured this history, these plays open questions concerning the vulnerable, their experience of interpersonal and social violence, and the silence that walled them in. Key amongst her characters are figures victimized by institutions of church and state whose fates reflect those chronicled in a

³⁸⁴ Religion News Service Heather Greene et al., "Irish Bishop's Reference to Mary Magdalene's 'Colorful Past' Draws Criticism," National Catholic Reporter, accessed December 12, 2022, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/irish-bishops-reference-mary-magdalenes-colorful-past-draws-criticism>.

series of recent damning reports and publications, including recognitions of organized exploitations such as Mother-and-Baby Homes and the Magdalene Laundries.”³⁸⁵ In her final work, Deevy advances her dramaturgy towards the spiritual life that contemporary Irish women inherited by vividly reclaiming the namesake of Ireland’s twentieth century institutions for incarcerated “fallen women,” as an icon of the Divine feminine. In doing so, Deevy embraces the woman theologian’s final endeavor to engage with “communities from past and present in order to create a new understanding.”

³⁸⁵ Marie Kelly, “Abbey Theatre Research Pack: Katie Roche.” (Abbey Theatre, Aug. 2017). p. 24

**Conclusion:
The Catholic Imaginary**

In reflecting on the dramaturgical impulse behind Deevy's writing, Cathy Leeney notes that "history and politics are narrowly defined to exclude female experience, women's work is unlikely to be identified under a 'national rubric,' and is pushed to the margins." She posits that when "post-colonial hyper-masculinity" took ownership of national identity, "women were represented as icons of this cause, as subservient to it. Therefore, in the theatre, as in life, they effectively became "exiles in their own country."

³⁸⁶ The poet Eavan Boland would articulate a similar sentiment in her memoir *Object Lessons*, noting that it is "easy, and intellectually seductive, for a woman artist to walk away from the idea of a nation. There has been, and there must continue to be, a great deal of debate about the energies and myths women writers should bring with them into a new age. 'Start again' has been the cry of some of the best feminist writers. 'Wipe clean the slate, start afresh.'" ³⁸⁷ A literary foremother to Boland, Deevy was arguably the first Irish woman dramatist to assert herself as "the maker of images," counteracting the constricting pressures of the Catholic imagination existent in twentieth century Irish culture. Bearing this in mind, her later works not only trace a progressive journey, but map an explosion of imaginative vision, followed by a gradual retreat into coded images of resistance, self-censorship, and revisionist mythmaking.

Deevy's relationship to Catholicism is defined, like so many other women writers of era, by the fact that she was once "a passive and controlled image within it." ³⁸⁸ Her

³⁸⁶ Cathy Leeney. *Irish Women Playwrights 1900-1939: Gender and Violence on Stage*. Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2010. p. 6.

³⁸⁷ Eavan Boland, "Outside History," essay, in *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (Manchester, England: Carcanet Press, 2006).

³⁸⁸ Eavan Boland, "The Irish Woman Poet: Her Place in Irish Literature'." Essay. In *Creativity and Its Contexts*, edited by Chris Morash. Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1995. p. 32

dramas disruption of that control redefine the connection between theology, performance, and national identity. What's more, Deevy helped redefine the carefully crafted image of the free Irish people within the national literature; effectively subverting the "land of scholars and saints" by documenting the violent hardships of working-class women. It stands to reason that not only were her plays well ahead of their time, but that her very outlook on the dramatic tradition offered an almost clairvoyant hope for the future; a new theology in which women are not only the architects of their own stories, but the archivists of the violent injustices carried out in the name of establishing a new Republic. In doing so, Deevy claims "the theological episteme of the woman theologian." Each of these final plays, at their core, function as revisionist history, and collectively achieve the woman theologians aforementioned "confession of the past" through discerning a transmission of belief.

In *Supreme Dominion* Deevy's revisionist considerations emerge, positing a post-colonial Irish liberation theology foregrounded in history, and compounded by daring experiments of the corporal and temporal. Here she invents an intrinsically Irish mythology by sojourning beyond the shores the island and invoking a continental theological framework. Deevy's imagined space does not represent the contemporary church and state, but rather the Catholic Ireland that could have been, one where women and children embody a courage and patriotism of mythic proportions. This is the woman theologian's re-representation of a theological praxis that will happen again. In containing her story within the sacred cycle of thirty-three years, Deevy subverts the present, and envisions the future, by returning to the past. Working within this temporal framework, one can deduce that the twentieth century Waterford of her

upbringing is the same city that Wadding yearns for by the play's end: a city of the Redmondites, the Ursuline convent, and Annie Sullivan.

In *In the Cellar of My Friend* Deevy's revisionist considerations turn inward, as she employs a Queer theology informed by Iberian mystical poetics and matrilineal auto-fiction. Feeling isolated from her artistic community in Dublin during her final years in her childhood home, Deevy mourns her once vibrant social life by regressing into the mythology of her family of origin. It is in this regression that she gestures towards dimensions of her interior world that appear naked to the untrained eye. In this vein, *In the Cellar of My Friend* functions as not only as an elegy for her maternal uncle John Feehan, but also as a love letter to the self. Much like its source material *The Spiritual Canticle*, this play conflates the experience of "coming out" with that of "mystical unification," proffering an allegorical journey from the intimacy of the dark night into the splendor of the morning. This is the woman theologian's belief in "resurrection," and her forgiveness of the oppressive theological past.

Finally, in *One Look and What it Led To* Deevy's revisionist considerations turn outward, embracing her preexistent inclination towards continental Catholicism, and reclaiming the namesake behind Ireland's infamous institutions for "fallen women." In what is arguably her *magnum opus*, she employs radical new experiments in form, like the utilization of both incidental music and pantomime. It is the nonverbal intimacy of this final play that ultimately speaks volumes. Here Deevy eradicates the "repentant whore" narrative still at large in twentieth century Ireland and reclaims her heroine as an embodiment of the Divine Feminine. This is the woman theologian's impulse to engage communities from both the past and present in order to create a new

understanding. In this way, “the theology of Teresa Deevy” is not only a framework with which one may interpret these plays, but rather an invitation to reconsider the spiritual and temporal qualities of the Catholic imaginary.

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