



Maley, W. (2019) 'She done Coriolanus at the Convent': empowerment and entrapment in Teresa Deevy's *In Search of Valour*. *Irish University Review*, 49(2), pp. 356-369. (doi: 10.3366/iur.2019.0411)

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Deposited on 03 July 2019

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‘She done *Coriolanus* at the Convent’: Empowerment and Entrapment in Teresa Deevy’s *In Search of Valour* (1931)¹

‘She done *Coriolanus* at the Convent beyond ... She rose my heart in one hour till I seen the scum we are’.² This striking image – the heart rising to reveal the scum beneath – is crucial to Teresa Deevy’s *In Search of Valour* (1931), which draws its dramatic force from the passionate recollection of a convent production of *Coriolanus* witnessed a ‘couple of years’ earlier by its young protagonist Ellie Irwin. The memory of this performance is all the more significant for the fact that the title role in this Shakespeare tragedy was taken by a young woman like Ellie herself.³ *In Search of Valour* is set in Mrs Maher’s ‘ill-kept room in a tumble-down house’ (p.3). Sixteen-year-old servant girl Ellie is a spirited character – ‘Spirit I likes more than prayer!’ (p.3) – who possesses, as a stage direction informs us, ‘an air of smouldering fury’. For Ellie, as for her namesake in Shaw’s *Heartbreak House*, ‘There seems to be nothing real in the world except ... Shakespear’.⁴ Galvanised by *Coriolanus*, she goes in search of valour, or, rather, she sulks in Mrs Maher’s parlour hoping that valour will find her.

Originally entitled *A Disciple*, Deevy’s ‘Comedy in One Act’, directed by Lennox Robinson, opened at the Abbey on 24 August 1931, and ran for seven nights, sharing the bill with W. B. Yeats’s and Lady Gregory’s *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and G. B. Shaw’s *The Admirable Bashville; or, Constancy Unrewarded*.⁵ The play had its critics. Joseph Holloway was singularly unimpressed and claimed to be in good company as he deployed a Shakespearean allusion to dismiss Deevy’s drama: ‘The piece was all noise and bustle, signifying nothing and most of the audience laughed at the sheer absurdity of the whole thing and kept wondering if the Directors had gone

dotty in seeing merit in such a whirlwind of noisy shouting'.⁶ There is irony in a deaf dramatist being accused of 'noisy shouting', but Deevy's plays are all intensely dialogue-driven and *In Search of Valour* – especially in the person of Ellie Irwin – is a veritable explosion of speech.

Deevy's play was published three times in a decade under different titles – as *A Disciple* in *The Dublin Magazine* in 1937; as *The Enthusiast* in the *One Act Play Magazine* the following year; and as *In Search of Valour* in a collection of her work entitled *The King of Spain's Daughter and Other One Act Plays* in 1947.⁷ It was broadcast on 27th May 1938 as a Friday Regional BBC radio play (London and Northern Ireland), and again on BBC TV on 28 June 1939 (repeated 4th July), directed by fellow playwright Denis Johnston, who had staged his own version of *King Lear* at the Abbey a decade earlier.⁸ This eve of war broadcast seems especially poignant in retrospect.

Coriolanus in Ireland

Studies of Shakespeare and Ireland seldom touch on this slight drama, or indeed on *Coriolanus*, the play-without-the-play.⁹ Yet *Coriolanus* itself has a fascinating Irish afterlife. Thomas Sheridan, godson of Jonathan Swift, in his 1755 hybrid version fused Shakespeare's play with James Thomson's 1749 non-Shakespearean adaptation of Livy's account, early evidence of the willingness of Irish writers to innovate and experiment in their adaptations.¹⁰ *Coriolanus* was 'one of only three Shakespeare plays to be staged at the Abbey Theatre during Yeats's lifetime'.¹¹ Yeats, inspired by the Parisian riots in 1933-4 provoked by the Swiss writer René-Louis Piachaud's pro-fascist interpretation, planned a Blueshirt version for the Abbey that proved a damp squib.¹² Frank O'Connor clashed with Yeats over this proposed production, opposing the idea of a 'contemporary' adaptation of *Coriolanus* on the grounds that 'with Spain

bleeding to death, my judgment as a theatre man was influenced by not wanting to have any part in Fascist propaganda'.¹³ But Yeats remained steadfastly committed to this most vexed and violent of dramas. Commenting on Hugh Hunt's 1936 Abbey production, John Ripley observes: 'Politics was in fact more evident off the stage than on it. Outraged nationalists, who saw the production of Shakespeare as a subversion of the Abbey's mission, mobilized public opinion against Hunt's experiment'.¹⁴ Stanley van der Ziel observes of *Coriolanus*: 'The impatient, anti-democratic impulse of the eponymous hero of that, Shakespeare's most political tragedy must certainly have struck a chord with the politically attuned Irish Yeats in the years and decades immediately following Irish independence'.¹⁵

But what happens when the eponymous hero is played by a woman? In the production that ignited Ellie's fantasies of a great escape from domestic drudgery Shakespeare's militantly masculine protagonist was played by 'Miss Charlotta Burke ... the kind of person [Ellie thinks] made for the world to be under her feet' (p.7). We do not see Charlotta play *Coriolanus* – this event has happened in the past. Instead, in the parlour where she paces like a caged creature, Ellie recalls this performance as something that has had a profound effect on her, and from Mrs Maher's impatient reaction it is clear that this is a well-worn topic of conversation, or rather a muse for Ellie's monologues in which she craves a romantic release from her confinement. Charlotta's inhabiting of Shakespeare's hero is a sounding board for Ellie's aspirations and unhappiness with her lot. This convent *Coriolanus* was unconventional. Unlike Shakespeare's stage, where no women tread, here was a stage no man could strut. And in its 'distinct ... representation of class politics and in its treatment of sexuality and gender', it is ideal not only at speaking to the times, where

authority is at stake, but also for the kind of gendered power negotiations in which Deevy's devious drama is engaged.¹⁶

Ellie's *Coriolanus*

In the convent *Coriolanus* witnessed by Ellie it is voice rather than costume that conveys the play's passion, proof of the transformative power of language. Miss Charlotta Burke, barred from cross-dressing, 'done *Coriolanus*' by heart and head:

The nuns wouldn't leave [i.e. let] her wear men's clothes, but she made up for that: no one could take their eye from off her face: she carried the house, – 'twas only a room, but she carried it easy: no one in the end but cheerin' for her... They thought to make a nun of her, thank you, says she, and went to London, and on to the stage – and done well. (p.7)

The revelation that Charlotta's was not a cross-dressed performance and the wry line about carrying the room rather than the house are nice touches, but Ellie's claim that Charlotta 'done well' affronts Mrs Maher, who knows the end she met, killing herself with poison. She exclaims, 'Done well! God forgive you ...!' But for Ellie this final act is part of Miss Burke's triumph, a grand exit that seals her heroic status: 'There was a lot wrote about it – she was that high up – They asked the why and the cause – and who was chasing her.... She said nothing – only died.... She done things proper ... Off the wrapper that was round the seakale I was reading it.... She kept to *Coriolanus* for sure' (p.8). And Ellie keeps to *Coriolanus* too; it is the script she lives by. Cathy Leeney remarks that 'Ellie's lament is not for the loss of one man, but for the failure of masculinity to live up to its own mythology, to be "Coriolanus-like"'.¹⁷

In fact, Ellie's lament is for the loss of one woman. The failure of masculinity is that it fails to live up to the valour she witnessed first-hand in that convent *Coriolanus* through Burke's performance, suggesting that Deevy – and Ellie – are operating beyond a purely masculine paradigm.

The influence of Burke's heroic performance of *Coriolanus* is such that violence does not scare Ellie but, on the contrary, inspires her. When '*there comes the noise of banging zinc from outside*', Mrs Maher is affrighted, but Ellie '*listens as to a friendly sound*' and says: 'Likely the old gate – that is swingin' on the hinge. It puts me thinkin' on *Coriolanus*...' (p.4). Mrs Maher bustles '*as one who has heard too much of Coriolanus*', but Ellie persists with her monologue: 'Coriolanus.... Caius, Marcius, *Coriolanus*... he done things proper ... tramplin' on the lot of them to the end of his life' (p.4).

The equation of 'tramplin'' with doing 'things proper' indicates Ellie's desire not so much for violence, as for the high emotion of conflict. In this regard, Ellie (who follows fanatically the lives of 'them that lives' in the newspapers), is taken with the tale of a recently wed couple – the Glitterons – who are now divorcing. Mrs Maher is absorbed by a less glamorous story, of a killer on the loose, and when the gate bangs again she cries: 'Holy St. Joseph! They're saying Jack the Scalp is in hiding round here!' (p.4). Still beguiled by Charlotta's passionate portrayal of a great Roman warrior, Ellie is unmoved at the prospect of 'a killer on the loose' and sighs: 'I'm stuffed with Jack the Scalp! What good is he no more than any common thief and murderer – but a man like Mr. Glitteron here that would be after goin' through that amount of wives!' (p.4). Mrs Maher cries: 'Holy Mary! and I may be deaf sooner than have scandal in my ears!', and the stage direction – '*(Partly covers her ears)*' – emphasises Mrs Maher's refusal to listen to Ellie, a refusal which we shall see is

shared by critics of the play. Ellie is caught up in a reverie about the glamorous life she envies and wishes to lead:

Like fire they do be dartin' here an' there, and we mouldin' our life away with every day the same shadow fallin' on the flag –! ... If the likes of them knew how *we* lived they'd laugh! They'd say what was we but worms! (p.5)

The 'shadow falling on the flag' suggests patriotic emblem as well as paving stone, in other words a play on double sense of the word 'flag'.¹⁸ Mrs Maher interrupts, 'Look at St. Joseph that never asked but to hammer a nail –', but Ellie pushes through: 'What was we but worms ... worms that do be in old furniture... ... They're tramplin' ... they're conquerin', and we ... splatterin' holy water' (p.5). The opposition between heroic violence and Catholic domestic ritual brings home Ellie's feelings of frustration with her cloistered life. The gate bangs again. Mrs Maher fears it is Jack, but no domestic demon can frighten Ellie:

Sure what is Jack? Only a man that might have been born in the one house with yourself. 'Tisn't so long gone that the same Jack was at the poor school over in Ballycullane. Sure what interest could be took in a man that would eat the same bread might be in your own mouth? (p.5)

Ellie, flitting from hope to hope, hero to hero, plays along with the idea that Jack 'took the scalp off a woman and she alive.... From the Injuns he learned!' (p.8).

Before Jack arrives on the scene the not so glamorous Glitterons appear and fail to set Ellie's heart aglow. Mrs Glitteron proves a particular disappointment. Ellie

sneers: 'A treacherous old reptile turnin' on him! And I puttin' the like on you of Miss Charlotta Burke!' Mr Glitteron is equally disappointing, and with the shine taken off the Glitterons, Ellie is left itching for a fight with only Jack the Scalp to look forward to. First impressions are good. 'We have a Man in it now!', exclaims Ellie, an ironic comment given that her opening gambit on hoped-for heroism was a woman playing a man (p.11). Jack, alas, is only a lad. Unafraid of a dozen policemen – 'They'll be fewer goin' home' – Jack is spooked when Ellie insists on calling him Marcius – 'Marcius is a name I likes ... Caius Marcius Coriolanus' (p.12). Ellie sees in Jack her ticket out of the bog: 'I knew my fate was coming this night'. She gets her coat: 'I knew you'd come. I was pinin' for you. A man like yourself'. But Jack's aghast at Ellie's boldness: 'But... but I'm a respectable man ... I had no dealin' with a woman ever! ... I was brought up respectable!' (p.12-13). In a paradoxical manoeuvre typical of Deevy's subtle revelations, Jack's response underlines that Ellie's sexually forward challenge to patriarchal social values is perceived as a greater threat than his physical violence.

Ellie is taken aback as she sees her means of escape receding: 'Fearin' me that should be like dust under your feet! (p.13). Jack makes good his escape, leaving Ellie crestfallen. She sinks into a chair. Like Shakespeare's servant, she knows the difference between what is 'sprightly walking, audible, and full of vent', and what is 'a very apoplexy, lethargy, mulled, deaf, sleepy, insensible',¹⁹ hence her last lament: 'There is no MAN livin' now. Small wonder any woman to take poison! ... Them were best off that were born long ago. Wirra – why weren't I born in a brave time?' (p.13). This ending echoes Pegeen Mike's plaintive cry at the close of Synge's *Playboy*, and anticipates a later Deevy protagonist. Ellie is a precursor of Annie Kinsella in *The King of Spain's Daughter* (1935), who says hopefully of the man

she's settled for: 'He put by two shillin's every week, for two hundred weeks. I think he is a man that – supposin' he was jealous – might cut your throat. (*Quiet, exultant, she goes*)'. Mrs Marks – the Mrs Mahon of this play – has the last exasperated word: 'The Lord preserve us! that she'd find joy in such a thought!' (p.26). So desperate for drama is Ellie, that she craves violence. This is, of course, a degenerate version, perhaps inevitable in the stifling context of 1930s Ireland, of the trampling and conquering of Miss Charlotta Burke playing Coriolanus in her own clothes.

Critical responses

Caoilfhionn Ní Bheacháin recognises the significance of Deevy's decision to cast Charlotta as military leader: 'That it was a woman who took the title role in the production of *Coriolanus* suggests that Deevy may be making the political point that while women were instrumental in ousting the former British regime, there was no room now for their anti-colonial militancy in the new state'.²⁰ Earlier critics were less likely to locate the play's politics in the realities of the Free State. 'This alarming child is an admirer of Coriolanus', one commentator observed, neglecting to root this admiration in the convent production that inspired Ellie.²¹ A *New York Times* reviewer who witnessed the original Abbey production noted: 'This girl, having seen a performance of "Coriolanus", becomes a worshiper of men who defy law and custom'.²² The same reviewer, ignoring the story of Charlotta Burke entirely, homes in on Mr Glitteron: 'Her first hero is a much-divorced man'.²³ On the contrary, her first hero is Coriolanus as played by a woman. Likewise, for Janet Clare and Stephen O'Neill, 'Ellie ... is frustrated in her reading of *Coriolanus* because the play's model of heroism is a masculine one'.²⁴ In fact, the only two characters who show any substance are Charlotta and Ellie. Cathy Leeney also sees Ellie's identification as

patriarchal, rather than performative or liberating.²⁵ Ellie only identifies with the warrior insofar as a woman plays the part, yet the critical consensus is that she aspires to the male role, and that Deevy's drama moves towards containment rather than release.²⁶ According to Leeney:

Ellie is stalled by her gender, her social powerlessness and the impossibility of being, or being with, a Coriolanus. The source of her thwarted vehemence is revealed as patriarchal exclusion. Deevy exposes how Ellie cannot stand outside the system of power that circulates around her. She is embroiled in it while she is stymied by it.²⁷

The language here – 'thwarted vehemence' – does not quite capture the poetry or passion of Ellie's speech or her search for something greater than the dead-end in which she finds herself. As for 'amoral striving', this is relative in the world of 1930s Ireland. That it was seeing a woman play the part of Coriolanus that inspired Ellie would seem to qualify the claim of 'patriarchal exclusion', as Leeney acknowledges elsewhere when she remarks:

Ironically, she has seen Coriolanus played by a woman, therefore why might she not see herself in the same, real-life role? Ellie identifies with the male hero, as women in a patriarchal society tend to do.²⁸

Here, the second sentence seems to contradict the first. Does Ellie identify with 'the male hero' or does 'she see herself in the same, real-life role?'²⁹ The only object of Ellie's admiration to emerge unscathed is Charlotta Burke, yet in her most recent

essay Leeney fails to mention the female player that provoked Ellie's dreams of breaking out of her domestic entrapment – indeed, fails to mention the *Coriolanus* context at all – thus enabling her to say of Ellie: 'Since she has already internalized the idea that she can never be heroic herself, she looks to Jack the Scalp, a comically deromanticized Christy Mahon figure, to be her vicarious hero'.³⁰ Critics are too quick to leap over Deevy's engagement with Shakespeare's complex study of class, gender and war. What makes Ellie unlike Pegeen Mike is that it was not a 'playboy' who offered her the first tantalising glimpse of a life beyond her solitude and servitude but a fiery young woman in the role of a warrior. In a subtle discussion of Deevy's 'rebellious heroines', Eibhear Walshe concludes: 'For Deevy, the lost dominions of sainthood, heroism and self-realisation remained constant as a deprivation in her dramatic imagination and influenced her work as profoundly as any possible feelings of protest at the loss of female autonomy'.³¹

Mary Rose Callaghan captures the essence of Deevy's drama in a short biographical entry:

Despite her broad range, Deevy is remembered most for her brilliant portraits of high-strung, romantic young women caught in rural Ireland. Through remarkable poetic dialogue, she catches them almost in flight at a moment in life when they put aside their youthful illusions and accept a greyer but more plausible adult reality.³²

Callaghan recognises Deevy's 'remarkable poetic dialogue', but remarks of Ellie: 'She works as a maid and wants a man like Coriolanus who "done things proper"'.³³ Again, we must bear in mind that Ellie's introduction to *Coriolanus* in the convent

was as a part played by a young woman who also ‘done things proper’. That phrase is applied to both Coriolanus and Charlotta. Callaghan’s claim that Ellie ‘is fascinated by the local bandit, Jack the Scalp’ also has to be seen in a context where Ellie is quite withering about Jack before and after she meets him and is only momentarily taken in by his bluster.³⁴ Sean Dunne likewise plays down the performance of gender: ‘Ellie Irwin, a young servant girl, continuously hopes that life will match the splendour of a production of *Coriolanus* she once saw, but discovers that life is more mundane’.³⁵ The splendour lay precisely in the gender cross-casting: ‘Woman she wasn’t! but a great actress’, as Ellie says of Charlotta.

Significantly, Shakespeare critics have located gender trouble at the heart of *Coriolanus*, whose protagonist also searches, like Ellie, for a heroic ideal:

In his attempt to separate himself from his mother specifically and more generally from all manifestations of the female, Coriolanus is unable merely to assert an independent male identity. Instead he seeks out an alternative object of identification, an ideal embodiment of the ‘hard’, thing-like masculine self he aspires toward, and he finds – or invents – such an object of identification in Aufidius.³⁶

Here same-sex attraction or admiration is key to self-realisation. *Coriolanus*, as well as mapping out a particular model of militant masculinity, is a play preoccupied with gender boundaries. Janet Adelman’s perceptive remarks on Shakespeare’s Roman warrior take on a different complexion in light of Charlotta Burke’s convent performance: ‘Casting the theatrical as the feminine, Coriolanus himself refuses to participate in it: spectacle is for him the sign of boundary confusion, a dangerously

feminizing self-exposure'.³⁷ Critics are right to see Ellie as trapped in a patriarchal social model in which women are treated as, and imagine themselves as, objects. Yet in overlooking the centrality of Charlotta Burke to Ellie's idealisation of Coriolanus, they miss the extent to which the counterpoint, or even solution, to Ellie's predicament is not a heteronormative hero, or a binary view of gender and morality, but a hybrid vision in which femininity and masculinity are united and transcendent. This union, as my opening quote makes clear, shows not only the degradation inherent in the patriarchal world – 'the scum' – that Ellie lives in, but also reveals an alternative where the heart is free to *rise*, in both the emotive and revolutionary meanings of that word.

Radical politics?

According to Chris Morash and Shaun Richards, 'even thematically radical Irish plays, from Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* and Seán O'Casey's Dublin plays to the angular realism of Teresa Deevy, generally observed the stylistic norms of realism, often to an extent not found elsewhere in Europe'.³⁸ If Deevy's 'angular realism' fails to break free of 'stylistic norms', just as Ellie fails to break free of her prison-like parlour, then we must look elsewhere for the play's radicalism, to its gender politics. Elsewhere, Richards sees Deevy's protagonists, unlike Synge's, as 'emotionally unstable rather than purposeful'.³⁹ More recently, he remarks: 'The protagonists of Teresa Deevy's plays ... resist social conformity but ultimately succumb to its pressure'.⁴⁰ On the contrary, Ellie resists gender stereotypes as well as social conformity and it is hard to see in what way she succumbs. Her entrapment at the play's end is marked by the same defiance she has shown throughout. Her last

lines may echo Pegeen Mike's in Synge's *Playboy* but her lasting inspiration is a spirited resistance she first witnessed in a young woman.⁴¹

Richards is not alone in reading Ellie as defeatedly succumbing to the powers that be. 'Deevy's heroines', in Leeney's view, are 'remarkable yet disempowered individuals'.⁴² However, Leeney goes on to qualify this claim: 'Deevy was not content to resign herself to the image of disempowerment and defeat which Pegeen so eloquently represents at the end of *Playboy*'.⁴³ Leeney's deft handling of Deevy's dramatic dilemma and her strategies for dealing with entrapment illustrates the ambivalence embedded in the question of empowerment:

Ellie is entirely disempowered at the end, stranded as much as Pegeen was at the end of Synge's *Playboy*. However, dramatically she is empowered. The action and style of the piece create in her an impressive authority despite her social vacuum. The question the play can only pose, not answer, is how a woman may be the author of herself.⁴⁴

Yet Deevy herself provides the answer to Leeney's question, as she authors this remarkable play in which a female character is inspired by the performance of a woman playing the male lead, and in which both female figures refuse to settle for seclusion or stagnation.

Deevy's deceptively slight drama chimes with Lisa Lowe's contention 'that *Coriolanus* asks us to "worry" the association of "gender" and "politics," and to resist in our literary criticism – as the play resists – polarization, division, and opposition'.⁴⁵ *In Search of Valour* likewise asks us to 'worry' the association of gender and politics, explicitly by offering a female figure of inspiration and challenging notions of female

passivity and disempowerment. Perhaps it is ironic that the setting of the play's most liberating, and liberated, image is a convent. Indeed, the convent as the site of dramatic revelation illustrates that confinement is not always synonymous with oppression, and that in this case the convent proves more liberating than the subsequent life of a domestic servant. More work needs to be done on Irish convent theatre, and on convent culture more broadly.⁴⁶ Deevy was educated at the Ursuline Convent in Waterford, where an older sister taught as a nun.⁴⁷ She does not dwell on drama in her school diary – the only play mentioned is Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird* (1908) – but the idea for *In Search of Valour* may have come from her convent years.⁴⁸ In 1945, Liam Ó Briain's Irish prose translation of *Coriolanus* prompted one reviewer to declare: 'It would do our secondary and university students a world of good if they would, in large numbers, get passages of this version off by heart and learn to declaim them'.⁴⁹ Though it is highly speculative of me to ask, I can't resist wondering if perhaps there had been some dramatic declaiming of an English version of *Coriolanus* at St Ursula's in Deevy's day? A tantalising glimpse of just such a possibility is furnished by Professor Thomas Bodkin, Irish lawyer and art historian, who in a birthday toast to Shakespeare in 1946 remarked that 'since playing the part of Bottom in a "wizard" convent production of the "Dream" his daughter was the family authority on the drama'.⁵⁰ This confirms that gender cross-cast Irish convent productions of Shakespeare plays were not uncommon.

Conventionally viewed as sites of disempowerment, convents could be places of enchantment. A recent study of Irish nuns suggests that the romantic vision of Deevy's heroine was not so far-fetched: 'Relating the fantasies they had about missionary life, the women surveyed tended to present themselves as the heroine of the tale, at the center of a drama that was usually played out in the public sphere, be

that the school, the hospital, or simply the outside'.⁵¹ And in the conclusion to her essay on Irish nuns, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford captures the complexity of the world inhabited by Teresa Deevy and her creation, the fearless fantasist Ellie Irwin:

Theology ... cooperated with politics and economics to produce an environment from which a disproportionate number of women were forced to flee. Some of those who remained became the obedient accomplices of male institutional power, and some became sadistic abusers; but others found in the convent a room of their own, work in the community, and perhaps even a particular friend.⁵²

Deevy chose to stay in Ireland, finding a room of her own beyond the convent, and, in *In Search of Valour*, as in her other plays, she shows her audience the struggle for space, and for solidarity, that women went through in 1930s Ireland.

Deevy's unstifled voice

With the rise in critical interest and productions of Deevy's work now, hopefully, this playwright is finding the audience she deserves. Deevy is the missing link between Lady Gregory and Marina Carr. Synge too is an obvious precursor, but Deevy also faces forward. Like Shakespeare she is our contemporary. According to Christie Fox: 'The women of Deevy's plays of the 1930s ... are all caught in a changing world not of their own making, a world that seeks to control, limit, and shape Irish womanhood'.⁵³ How much has changed?

Temporal Powers, Deevy's next play after *In Search of Valour*, won an Abbey Award for best play. Samuel Beckett was apparently unimpressed, labelling it 'the

usual rubbish'.⁵⁴ Or at least that is the impression one gets from reading Paul Sheehan's chapter on 'Modernism: Dublin/Paris/London' in *Samuel Beckett in Context*. But in fact the letter in which Beckett makes this comment, dated 13th September 1932, the day after Deevy's play opened – a whingeing letter full of disappointment and resentment about his own frustrations with writing and publishing, as well as money and health worries – suggests that Beckett had not in fact seen the play: “‘Temporal Powers’” seems to be the usual rubbish’, is what he actually says.⁵⁵ Yet this second-hand judgment is characteristic of Deevy's reception. Speaking of her historical silencing, Christopher Murray says: ‘The stifled voice is at once the condition and the distinction of women's drama in Ireland’.⁵⁶ Ellie Irwin proved the prototype for future Deevy characters like Annie Kinsella in *The King of Spain's Daughter*, Katie Roche in the play of that name, and Nan Bowers in *Wife to James Whelan*, all of whom dream of a quiet getaway. As Emilie Pine recently observed, ‘Deevy is a writer for right now, not a figure to be relegated to the dusty past of theatre history’.⁵⁷ The Abbey Theatre was a springboard for the modern one-act play and had three of its great practitioners in Yeats, Lady Gregory and Synge.⁵⁸ Teresa Deevy belongs in that exalted company, and *In Search of Valour* is just one of her hitherto hidden gems.

NOTES

¹ An earlier version of this piece was presented at the Joyce to Beckett: Ireland & Modernism Symposium at Magdalene College, Cambridge, on 22 March 2018. I wish

to thank the organisers, particularly John Kerrigan, for the invitation. I am also grateful to the editor and the two anonymous readers for enabling the transition from conference paper to essay.

² *In Search of Valour*, p.7. This and all further references to Deevy's work are taken from the Mint Theater Company edition, *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed*, vol. 2., edited by Jonathan Bank, John P. Harrington and Christopher Morash (New York: Mint Theatre Company, 2017). Further references in parentheses in the text.

³ One early critic saw Deevy's one-act plays as her real strength. Temple Lane, 'The Dramatic Art of Teresa Deevy', *Dublin Magazine* 21 (1946), 35-42 (p.40).

⁴ G. B. Shaw, *Heartbreak House*, in Dan Laurence (ed.), *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw: Collected Plays with their Prefaces* (London: Max Reinhardt, 1970), 7 vols., 5: 11-197 (pp.165-66).

⁵ Martina Ann O'Doherty, 'Deevy: A Bibliography', *Irish University Review* 25, 1 (1995), 163-70 (p.164). Kearney mentions a favourable review from the opening run whose title suggests a playwright going places as well as a rush of language. 'A Dramatist of Hurry: First Production of *A Disciple* at the Abbey', *Irish Statesman* (25 August 1931), cited in Kearney, 'Teresa Deevy', p. 84.

⁶ Cited in Eibhear Walshe, 'Ineffable Longings', *Selected Plays of Irish Playwright Teresa Deevy, 1894-1963* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), pp.1-16 (p.2).

⁷ O'Doherty, 'Deevy: A Bibliography', p.163. The 1947 version is discussed briefly but astutely by Kathleen Heininge in *Buffoonery in Irish Drama: Staging Twentieth-Century Post-Colonial Stereotypes* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), pp.74-5. My argument – Heininge's too, despite her title – is that Deevy's treatment of reputation and romance goes beyond buffoonery.

⁸ See Christine St. Peter, 'Denis Johnston, the Abbey and the Spirit of the Age', *Irish University Review* 17.2 (1987), 187-206 (pp.193-94).

⁹ An exception is the 'Introduction' to Janet Clare and Stephen O'Neill (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Irish Writer* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2011), pp.15-16.

¹⁰ Esther K. Sheldon, 'Sheridan's *Coriolanus*: An 18th-Century Compromise', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 14.2 (1963), 153-161: 'Sheridan himself had been the surgeon who had grafted the two versions together' (p.154).

¹¹ Stanley van der Ziel speaks of 'Yeats's stubborn attempt to realise an Irish-fascist *Coriolanus*' (p.379). 'Shakespeare in *Purgatory*: "A Scene of Tragic Intensity"', *Yeats Annual* 21 (2018), 355-390 (p.379).

¹² Lauren Arrington, "'I Sing What Was Lost and Dread What Was Won": W. B. Yeats and the Legacy of Censorship', *Irish University Review* 38.2 (2008), pp.222-42 (pp.230-231). On Yeats's advocacy of *Coriolanus* for a nationalist readership see Karl O'Hanlon, "'Noble in His Grandiose Confusions": Yeats and *Coriolanus* in the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill', *English* 65.250 (2016), 211-233, esp. pp.214-15. O'Hanlon speaks of Yeats's 'defiant praise of *Coriolanus* as a beautiful lofty thing' in *The United Irishman* in 1902 (p.215).

¹³ Frank O'Connor, *My Father's Son* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999), p.161.

¹⁴ John Ripley, 'Hugh Hunt at the Abbey (1936)', in *Coriolanus on Stage in England and America, 1609-1994* (London: Associated University Presses, 1998), p.260.

¹⁵ Van der Ziel, 'Shakespeare in *Purgatory*', p.378.

¹⁶ Lisa Lowe, "'Say I Play the Man I Am": Gender and Politics in *Coriolanus*', *The Kenyon Review* 8.4 (1986), 86-95 (p.86).

¹⁷ Cathy Leeney, 'Ireland's "Exiled" Women Playwrights: Teresa Deevy and Marina Carr', in Shaun Richards (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.150-63 (p.153).

¹⁸ In Synge's *Playboy* Jimmy Farrell says 'a lad would kill his father ... would face a foxy divil with a pitchpike on the flags of hell'. J. M. Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1907), p.15.

¹⁹ William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, 4.5.222-24, in Stephen Greenblatt *et al* (eds.), *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), pp.3003-4.

²⁰ 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* 7 (2012), 79-91 (p.84).

²¹ J. D. Riley, 'On Teresa Deevy's Plays', *Irish Writing* 32 (1955), 30-36 (p.32). Riley recognises that Ellie, 'like the peasants in *The Playboy* ... has the ability to make a gallous story out of the dirtiest deed' (p.32).

²² J. J. Hayes, 'A Revival and Two New Ones', *New York Times* (27 September 1931), p. 2X. Hayes adds: 'The piece is reminiscent of "The Playboy", but the authoress so overcrowds the canvas with color and incident that she dwarfs her principal figure and brings confusion into the minds of her audience' (p.2X).

²³ Hayes, 'A Revival and Two New Ones', p.2X.

²⁴ Clare and O'Neill (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Irish Writer*, p.15. Clare and O'Neill further argue that 'Deevy's play suggests the inefficacy of Shakespeare as a mode of expression. Ellie's frustration with Shakespeare signifies a deeper frustration with inherited patriarchal ideologies that are rife in the early twentieth century Ireland' (p.16).

²⁵ Leeney, 'Ireland's "Exiled" Women Playwrights', p.152.

²⁶ Deevy has been unfavourably compared with Synge. See Shaun Richards, "Suffocated in the Green Flag": The Drama of Teresa Deevy and 1930s Ireland', *Literature & History* 4.1 (1995), 65-80. In a caustic review of Deevy's *Three Plays*, Gabriel Fallon remarked: 'One has to see the world a stage in order to attempt to bring it home to men's bosoms in the theatre ... it is a pity that Miss Deevy seems reluctant to leave the shelly cave of subjectivity for the wide out-of-doors of the great playwright'. G. F. [Gabriel Fallon], 'Review of *Three Plays: Katie Roche, The King of Spain's Daughter, The Wild Goose*, by Teresa Deevy', *The Irish Monthly* 68.803 (1940), 288. Fallon ironically opens his review by privileging performance over publication in a manner suggestive of its dramatic power over Ellie Irwin: 'A play's final and complete manifestation is only made in its performance in the theatre. No test of a play is its text' (288).

²⁷ Cathy Leeney, *Irish Women Playwrights, 1900-1939: Gender & Violence on Stage* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p.176.

²⁸ Leeney, 'Ireland's "Exiled" Women Playwrights', p.152.

²⁹ The critical tendency to overlook the fact that Deevy's protagonist is inspired by a female actor is taken to extremes in one study: 'Ellie Irwin, a country girl, once saw Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* staged by some school-boys'. N. Sahal, *Sixty Years of Realistic Irish Drama, 1900-1960* (Bombay: Macmillan, 1971), p.136.

³⁰ Cathy Leeney, 'Women and Irish Theatre before 1960', in Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 269-85 (p.282).

³¹ Eibhear Walshe, 'Lost Dominions: European Catholicism and Irish Nationalism in the Plays of Teresa Deevy', *Irish University Review* 25.1 (1995), 133-142 (p.142).

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- ³² Mary Rose Callaghan, 'Deevy, Teresa (?-1963)', in Robert Hogan (ed.), *Macmillan Dictionary of Irish Literature* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), p.192.
- ³³ Callaghan, 'Deevy, Teresa (?-1963)', p.193.
- ³⁴ Callaghan, 'Deevy, Teresa (?-1963)', p.193.
- ³⁵ Sean Dunne, 'Teresa Deevy', *The Journal of Irish Literature* 14.2 (1985), 3-17 (p.9).
- ³⁶ Burton Hatlen, 'The "Noble Thing" and the "Boy of Tears": *Coriolanus* and the Embarrassments of Identity', *English Literary Renaissance* 27.3 (1997), 393-420 (p.407). See also Jane Carducci, 'Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*: "Could I Find Out / The Woman's Part in Me"', *Literature and Psychology* 33.2 (1987), 11-20.
- ³⁷ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p.164.
- ³⁸ Chris Morash and Shaun Richards, 'The Long Crisis of Irish Realism: A Phenomenological Reading', *Modern Drama* 61.2 (2018), 192-212 (p.202). All three playwrights address the question of gender politics in innovative ways.
- ³⁹ Richards, "'Suffocated in the Green Flag'", p.72.
- ⁴⁰ Shaun Richards, 'The Mainstream: Problematising and Theorising', in Eamonn Jordan and Eric Weitz (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 31-44 (p.41, n.14).
- ⁴¹ For Cathy Leeney, the denouement of Deevy's play 'is a fascinating rewrite of Pegeen's betrayal of Christy in Synge's *Playboy*'. Leeney, 'Ireland's "Exiled" Women Playwrights', p.153. According to Mária Kurdi: 'Ellie surpasses Pegeen ... by implying the realisation that narrow-minded hypocrisy works as a damaging factor of social relations in the world of the 1930s, which can also seriously impede female self-development'. 'Intertextuality in Drama: Strategic Remodelling of Motifs and

Character Figurations in Synge and O'Casey by Irish Women Playwrights', *Eger Journal of English Studies* 10 (2010), 3-12 (p.6).

⁴² Leeney, 'Ireland's "Exiled" Women Playwrights', p.151.

⁴³ Leeney, 'Ireland's "Exiled" Women Playwrights', p.153.

⁴⁴ Leeney, 'Ireland's "Exiled" Women Playwrights', p.154. There is a deliberate echo here of Shakespeare's Coriolanus, who will 'stand/ As if a man were author of himself/ And knew no other kin' (5.3.35-7).

⁴⁵ Lowe, "'Say I Play the Man I Am": Gender and Politics in *Coriolanus*', p.95.

⁴⁶ See Elissa B. Weaver, *Convent Theatre in Early Modern Italy: Spiritual Fun and Learning for Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Dunne, 'Teresa Deevy', p.6.

⁴⁸ Dunne, 'Teresa Deevy', p.7. See also Teresa Deevy and Kitty Sheridan, 'School Notes', *St. Ursula's Annual* (Waterford: Ursuline Convent, 1911-12), pp.82-8.

⁴⁹ L. Ó B., 'Review of *Coriolanus le Shakespeare* by Liam Ó Briain, *do rinne an leagan Gaeilge* (Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1945)', *The Irish Monthly* 74, 872 (1946), 84-85. According to Philip O'Leary 'Ó Briain's translation was performed at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe [the national Irish language theatre of Ireland], 19-22 May 1938, the first production of one of Shakespeare's plays in Irish'. *Gaelic Prose in the Irish Free State: 1922-1939* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), p.636, n.64. O'Leary cites an anonymous article that ends on an ominous note: 'Who knows but the story of Coriolanus might be repeated yet in Europe in the not far distant future?' 'Was Shakespere a Fascist? / Play that Created Riots / Coriolanus Production in Galway', *The Connacht Sentinel* (17 May 1938), 2.

⁵⁰ *Stratford-upon-Avon Scene Magazine* 1-2 (1946), p.205

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- ⁵¹ Yvonne McKenna, 'Embodied Ideals and Realities: Irish Nuns and Irish Womanhood, 1930s-1960s', *Éire-Ireland* 41, 1&2 (2006): 40-63, at 49.
- ⁵² Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, "'Our Nuns Are Not a Nation": Politicizing the Convent in Irish Literature and Film', *Éire-Ireland* 41.1/2 (2006), 9-39 (p.34). See also Mary Peckham Magray, *The Transforming Power of the Nuns: Women, Religion, and Cultural Change in Ireland, 1750-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- ⁵³ Christie Fox, 'Neither Here Nor There: The Liminal Position of Teresa Deevy and her Female Characters', in Stephen Watt, Shakir M. Mustafa and Eileen M. Morgan (eds.), *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 193-203 (p.193).
- ⁵⁴ Paul Sheehan, 'Modernism: Dublin/Paris/London', in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Samuel Beckett in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp.139-149 (p.145).
- ⁵⁵ Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (eds.), *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume I: 1929-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.122.
- ⁵⁶ Christopher Murray, 'Introduction: The Stifled Voice', *Irish University Review* 25, 1 (1995): 1-10 (p.10).
- ⁵⁷ Emilie Pine, 'Review of *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed. Vol. 1, Temporal Powers, Katie Roche, Wife to James Whelan*, by Jonathan Bank, John P. Harrington and Christopher Morash', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 37.1/2 (2011), 255-257, at 257.
- ⁵⁸ Gabriel Fallon, 'The One-Act Play', *The Irish Monthly* 67.790 (1939), 267-277 (p.267).