



Teresa Deevy

I will be brave! . . . I was looking for something great to do—sure now I have it.

Katie Roche 1936.

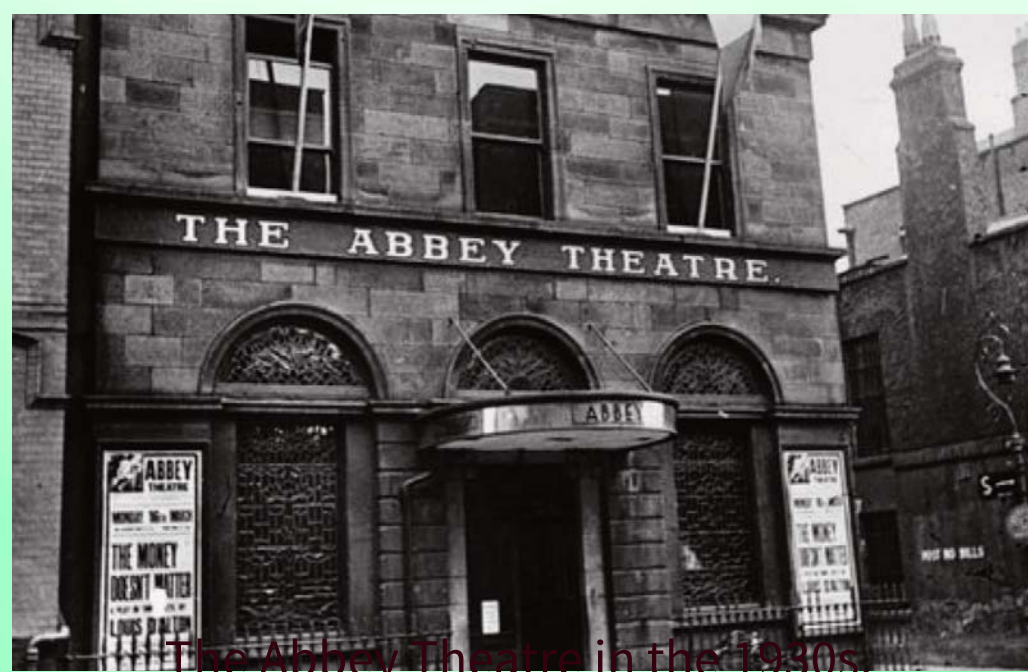


Teresa Deevy was born in Waterford City in January 1894, the youngest of thirteen children. Despite her father's death when she was two, she was well-educated, attending the *Ursuline Convent* in Waterford city and in 1913 matriculated for *University College Dublin*, where she was training to be a teacher. However, a bout of Ménière's disease in her first year at university caused significant hearing loss. Nevertheless, Teresa was determined to continue her education, transferring to *University College Cork* so could be treated at the nearby *Cork Ear, Eye, and Throat Hospital*.



Ursuline Convent Waterford c. 1908.
Source: The National Library of Ireland. POOLEWP 1819.

In 1914, her treatment in Cork having been unsuccessful, she went to London to learn lip-reading. Little is known about Teresa during these years except that she began attending plays, and when she returned home in 1919 had begun to write, having a number of articles and short stories published in the 1920s.



The Abbey Theatre in the 1930s.
Source: Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

Teresa's first significant work came in 1930, when the Abbey Theatre produced her drama *Reapers*. This marked several years of a fruitful relationship between Teresa and the national theatre, with several plays including *A Disciple* 1931, *Temporal Powers* 1932 and *The King of Spain's Daughter* 1935. Her 1936 play *Katie Roche*, which explores the inner life of an ordinary Irishwoman is perhaps the best-known of her works today and marked a new direction in Irish drama, which was seeking a new path as the first generation of Abbey actors, directors and playwrights faded away.

Despite these triumphs however, the relationship between Teresa and official Ireland, as represented by the Abbey Theatre, was becoming strained. Increasingly concerned by the extent of censorship and social conservatism in Ireland, and resenting the almost limitless powers of censors, she wrote to the *Irish Times* on the subject in 1936, asking 'by what right do they hold office? And how, in case of proved incompetence, can they be removed?'.
Teresa Deevy.

Who are the censors? By what right do they hold office? And how, in case of proved incompetence, can they be removed?—Yours, etc.,
Teresa Deevy.
Landscape, Waterford, October 19th, 1936.

Teresa Deevy's letter to The Irish Times 1936.
Source: The Irish Times.

In 1939 Teresa presented a new play, *Holiday House*, to the Abbey, but it was never performed. Similarly, her next play *Wife to James Whelan* was rejected, with no credible explanation given for the non-performance of either play. Teresa was particularly suspicious of the motives of the theatre's director, *Ernest Blythe*, who was often accused of favouring simplistic, commercially lucrative comedies over new works of literary merit.

Because of this rupture, Teresa began writing for radio, excelling in the production of material for a medium she could not personally experience. Working for both *Raidio Éireann* and the *BBC*, she wrote twelve radio plays during these years, including adapting *Katie Roche* for the airwaves.

Teresa Deevy died in Waterford in 1963, aged 68. At the time of her death the importance of her works in marking a new departure in Irish drama, and the unique insight they offered into women in the new Irish republic was being critically reassessed. This is evident in her 1954 election to the *Irish Academy of Letters*, and the eventual staging of *Wife to James Whelan* in 1956.



Rosita Sweetman launches the Irish women writers section of the Icon Walk in Dublin's Temple Bar 2018.
Source: The Irish Times.

Her attempts to redefine Irish drama, by moving past the relative conservatism of the Irish Literary Revival, the opposition she faced as a writer and the determination with which she attempted to overcome a life-altering disability offer a unique insight into the cultural world of the new Irish state.

Ernest Blythe as director of the Abbey Theatre.

