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The (De-)Coloniality of Gender in Irish Plays from the Beginning of the Twentieth Century to the Late Thirties

Abstract: The present paper focuses on Irish drama written and staged before and after independence from the perspective of the binary opposition of traditional gendered representations of colony and colonizer. From A. Gregory and W.B. Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and O'Casey's *Dublin Trilogy* (1923-26) to Teresa Deevy's *The King of Spain's Daughter* (1935) and *Katie Roche* (1936), and Seán Ó Faoláin's *She Had to Do Something* (1937), the paper underscores how these plays present women who only apparently contradict traditional and externally imposed strictures. In the light of Maria Lugones' theories on the coloniality of gender – as regards the intersection between gender, race and sexuality – the paper investigates the extent to which Irish playwrights challenged the traditional image of women and the role religion, politics and the examples of other European countries had in helping, or hindering, the construction of gendered representation.

Keywords: *Irish drama, Maria Lugones, decoloniality, gender representation*

With regard to the binary opposition of traditional gendered representations of colony and colonizer, Ireland is a particular case. In the collective imagination there is tendency to see Ireland, the former colony, as a female entity, and England, the colonizer, as male. The Irish race was seen as female, which in a hierarchically structured society signifies inferiority. Conversely, the Anglo-Saxon race was represented as dominant and male: "The Irish were depicted as genetically feminine and so, on the reigning patriarchal logic, congenitally attuned to obeying the will of masculine race like the Anglo-Saxons, provided it was robustly asserted".[1] This concept harks back to Matthew Arnold's *On the Study of Celtic Literature* that saw Celtic peoples typically "as feminine, irrational, impractical and childlike".[2] Yet when seen from a broader historical perspective, Richard Kearney suggests that within the cultural construct of subalternity, the depiction of Ireland as a woman might be philologically incorrect.[3] Kearney argues that Ireland started to be represented as a woman only *after* colonization by the English. As a woman, Ireland could not be a liberating figure in a patriarchal – or rather, male chauvinist – society, and even less so in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, where nations were setting up military figures as models of their increasingly war-driven power. For the majority of Irish women, over time this also led to the projection / introjection of an image of passive Irishness, "purely ornamental, a rhetorical element rather than an existing reality. National Sybil or fictional queen".[4]

Unlike certain other colonial societies – e.g., in Africa or North America[5] – the hierarchical distinction between men and women had been part of Irish society before colonization by the English. Ireland was part of that European cultural system that most decolonial literature sees as equivalent to

[1] Joseph Valente, *The Myth of Manliness in Irish National Culture, 1880-1922* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 12.
[2] David Cairns and Shaun Richard, "Reading a Riot: The 'Reading Formation of Synge's Abbey Audience", *Literature and History*, 12.2 (Autumn 1987), 222.
[3] Richard Kearney, *Myth and Motherland: A Field Day Pamphlet. Number 5* (Field Day Theatre Co, 1984).
[4] Wanda Balzano, "Irishness – Feminist and Post-Colonial", in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, eds., *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London: Routledge, 1996), 93.
[5] As Maria Lugones points out citing intellectuals such as Oyéronké Oyewùmí and Paula Gunn Allen. See Maria Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System", *Hypatia*, 22.1, *Writing against Heterosexism* (Winter 2007), 186-209.

the colonial power. Consequently, the adjective 'European' cannot in this specific case be read as synonymous with colonial when discussing the dynamics at play with regard to concepts of gender and coloniality. Notwithstanding this distinctive characteristic, Ireland deserves to be included in any theoretical debate on the coloniality of gender.

After independence, both the newborn Irish State and the Catholic Church, somewhat paradoxically, exploited this political metaphor by adapting and reinforcing such colonial gender representation – the living legacy of colonialism – in the form of social discrimination. As Maria Lugones states (albeit with reference to other colonial experiences),

> the gender system [the colonizers] introduced [and exploited] was one thoroughly informed through the coloniality of power. Understanding the place of gender in precolonial societies is also essential to understanding the extent and importance of the gender system in disintegrating communal relations, egalitarian relations, ritual thinking, collective decision making and authority, and economies.[6]

Lugones also comments on the relational process through which gender becomes racialized and a marker of humanity for the colonizer. As for Ireland, this argument is perhaps valid if considered with reference to the aforementioned representation of the nation as a woman, particularly after colonization. Yet, in some ways, the status of Ireland was privileged when compared to that of other colonies. After all, the Irish could not be racialized in quite the same ways as other colonized peoples outside Europe. For Ireland the trinity of "race, religion, and class" is not completely appropriate, as the controversial concept of "race" must be at least substituted with that of "ethnicity" (where "race" is defined and determined by physical / phenotypic characteristics, whilst "ethnicity" refers to a person's culture, religion, language, nationality, or place of origin, etc.). As the Irish could not be racialized but "ethnicized", consequently the position of Irish women was not comparable to that of other colonized – non-European – women.

However, the paradigm of subalternity is evidently applicable to Irish women. The so-called 'invention' of both concepts of race and gender helped construct the basis for hierarchic distinctions – and consequently, subalternity – within a nation:

> Colonialism did not impose precolonial, European gender arrangements on the colonized. It imposed a new gender system that created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers. Thus, it introduced many genders and gender itself as a colonial concept and mode of organization of relations of production, property relations, of cosmologies and ways of knowing.[7]

Though the position of Celtic women may have changed, particularly under the influence of Roman law and culture (an imperialistic and patriarchal society which saw the man as the absolute head of the household), in seventh-century Ireland a system of sophisticated laws called the Laws of the Fenechus – more popularly known as the Brehon Laws (definitively suppressed with the massive English colonial conquests of the sixteenth/seventeenth century) – held sway. In this dispensation, Irish women were given extensive rights, including the right to own land and to retain ownership after marriage:

> Women were protected by law against sexual harassment; against discrimination; against rape; they had the right of divorce on equal terms from their husbands, with equitable separation laws, and could demand part of their husband's property in a divorce settlement; they had the right of inheritance of personal property and land and the right of sickness benefits when ill or hospitalized.[8]

[6] Ibid., 201-202.
[7] Ibid., 186.
[8] Peter Tremayne, *Our Lady of Darkness* (*Sister Fidelma Mysteries Book 10): An Unputdownable Historical Mystery of High-stakes Suspense* (London: Hachette, 2010), 10.

Women's active role in ancient rural Ireland is well documented in the *Cáin Lánamna* (*The Law of Couples*), an Old Irish text dated c. 700. It is

> arguably the most important source of information concerning women and the household economy in early Ireland. The text describes all the recognized marriages and unions, both legal and illegal, and provides information regarding the allocation of property in the event of a divorce. The text was heavily glossed over a period of several centuries and provides insights into changes in the Irish legal system.[9]

According to this document, it was normal for a farmer's wife to "be involved in the major tasks of the farm, such as ploughing (ar), reaping (búain), looking after livestock in enclosures (croud), and fattening pigs (méthad). Literary sources likewise assume that it is regular for a husband and his wife (perhaps with older children) to be working together in the fields".[10] However, as occurred elsewhere, Christian Ireland became essentially patriarchal. In such a context, the Christianization of the island deeply affected the construction of a subaltern representation of women.

Early literature provided a certain corrective: "although early Irish society was male-dominated, women had a prominent role in literature".[11] In ancient Irish mythology, male characters were heroes, while the central female characters were supernatural creatures or even goddesses and thus exerted an important influence. With the Christianization of the island these women were transposed into pseudo-historical queens, tribal ancestors, fairies and saints, but they often lost many of their original characteristics as they did not conform to the Christian image of what was feminine. The case of one of these mythological characters, the Morrigan, is emblematic, being a figure that became particularly problematic. The Morrigan's traditional attributes relating to war, sex and fertility had to change, given the influence of two distinct forces of domination, namely the religious and the political. The former was imbued by the new Christian idea of womanhood with its taboos involving sexual activity; the latter sprang from a colonial rule that had also introduced the metaphorical representation of the nation as a woman, purposely intended to exploit ethnicity and gender with regard to subalternity. As coloniality needed to neutralize all political and pro-independence allegories, the Morrigan had to be divested of her military and political power.[12]

The Irish national theatre – as a mirror to the nation[13] – reflected the image of Irish femininity inherited from this complex situation. Overall, Irish women – both in the colonial and in the post-colonial gendered society – were continually associated with a subaltern status. This holds true for the gendered representation of the nation as a woman in the years of W.B. Yeats and Augusta Gregory for the apparently modern depiction of gendered roles in J.M. Synge and Sean O'Casey, and even up to the 1930s with the 1937 Constitution relegating women to the roles of mother and wife. Paradoxically, therefore, this tendency became stronger after independence.

W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory had originally exploited this gendered metaphor in their play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (first performed in 1902). Here we have a traditional image of Ireland as a "poor old woman", who seeks refuge in the Gillane family cottage in County Mayo and asks for help in standing up to the "strangers in the house", namely, the colonial usurpers. In its discussion of the position of women in Irish society, the play is famously emblematic. First, and most obviously, because it concerns

[9] Charlene M. Eska, ed., *Cáin Lánamna: An Old Irish Tract on Marriage and Divorce Law* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2009).
[10] Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish Farming: A Study Based Mainly on the Law-Texts of the 7th and 8th Centuries AD* (Dublin: School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1997), 449.
[11] Rosalind Clark, *The Great Queens: Irish Goddesses from the Morrigan to Cathleen ni Houlihan* (Colin Smythe: Gerrards Cross, 1991), 2.
[12] See Clark, *Great Queens*.
[13] Christopher Murray significantly entitles his book on the Irish theatre *Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation* (Manchester and New York: Manchester U.P., 1997).

the representation of the nation as a single female entity. Secondly, as Cathy Leeney[14] has remarked, because critics have generally paid so much attention to the main characters of the play – Cathleen and the male protagonists – whilst overlooking the other female characters and how they behave. The latter have a marginal position in society and generally passively accept its gendered hierarchical roles. This is a constant element that tends to diminish or ignore women as actors in the social and political life. A third aspect worth underlining is that for decades the play was mainly attributed to Yeats, relegating Lady Gregory to a minor role. The play was indeed a collaborative effort, and Lady Gregory contributed significantly to the dialogues. In the earliest surviving draft, Gregory added in the margins of the passages she had written: "All this mine alone"[15] – maybe a sign of her distress at the lack of personal recognition.[16] These apparently minor coincidences are useful examples of how Irish women – both as fictional characters and historical figures – have been constantly neglected, and (until all too recently) relegated to minor roles.

As outlined above, the cultural construct of the concepts of femininity and masculinity – seen as integral to a socio-historical process – has been exploited as a metaphor for political and social hegemonic roles: "Nation was to be male-identified and women's rights were to bow to its priority".[17] Yet, many Irish plays staged between 1902 and the outbreak of the Second World War ostensibly depicted a reversal of gender roles in which men were feminized and women masculinized, thus seemingly contradicting the European classification of women as inferior to men. While the aforementioned *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902) – as indeed Yeats's earlier work *The Countess Kathleen* (1892) – provided two female representations of the cultural and political image of the nation respectively, as well as the social and political dominance of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, later works staged at the Abbey Theatre presented strong female characters naturalistically. Among them was Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* (1907), where Pegeen Mike, the lively sharp-tongued female protagonist, is portrayed as a determined young woman. She knows how to deal both with her first fiancée, Shawn Keogh, who is much too God-fearing, and with Christy, hitherto much too shy and, as his father later says, inadequate. She also stands up to her father, forcing him to consent to her marriage to Christy, a criminal who has killed his own father. The same play features another strong character, who, unlike Pegeen, has the chance to stand "apart from her entire community, both geographically and morally":[18] Widow Quinn. She is the typical Syngean outsider, being someone who has nothing to lose and free from social constraints (her husband and children are dead).

Some years later, Sean O'Casey also presented women as pivotal characters in his plays. In *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923) Minnie Powell sacrifices her life to save the person she mistakenly considers an IRA gunman, while in *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) Juno Boyle – a hard-working responsible mother and wife – finally decides to leave her husband and to take care of her unmarried pregnant daughter. In *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), rather than one strong female character like Juno, O'Casey shows various women motivated by fierce determination.

And yet even in Synge and O'Casey, the way these central female characters are presented reveals that they are not quite comparable to men. It seems that the playwrights' own ideals have little to do with equal rights or female emancipation. The female protagonists are, in fact, bound to a traditional image of their own sex. Both Pegeen Mike and Juno Boyle dream of a traditional family life, where, as

[14] Cathy Leeney, "Women and Irish Theatre Before 1960", in Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2016), 267-285.
[15] Nicholas Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1999), 64.
[16] See also Cathy Leeney, *Irish Women Playwrights, 1900-1939: Gender & Violence on Stage* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).
[17] Leeney, "Women and Irish Theatre", 274.
[18] Gail Finney, *Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism, and European Theatre at the Turn of the Century* (Ithaca and London: Cornell U.P., 1991), 118-119.

wives and mothers, they would be protected by a strong male presence. Minnie Powell mistakenly believes that the soldiers will treat her better if she is caught simply because she is a woman (here O'Casey plays on the gendered cliché of violence and aggressiveness as male prerogatives: if violence is directed at men in war, it is normal; if directed at women it is immoral). In the end women are portrayed as mothers and wives forced to fulfill other roles by the tumultuous historical events. True, Synge challenges the social habits of bourgeois life and often depicts his (male and female) protagonists as outsiders and tramps. Yet, his focus on women, whether seen as strong-minded or rebellious, is often a means to an end: these heterodox anarchic female characters are a pretext to uncover and even explode bigoted and conformist views of Irish life. There is thus no real support for women's independence and emancipation. As O'Casey's *Dublin Trilogy* is set in crucial periods of recent Irish history, his political commitment is more marked, but his focus is on the failure of male authority, reflected in the militarization of society, rather than condemning gender inequality as such. As Fanon observes, "militarization and the centralization of authority in a country automatically entail a resurgence of the authority of the father",[19] an authority that O'Casey – like many other contemporary Irish writers – describes as discredited and inadequate.[20]

Thus, both Synge and O'Casey ignore the real crux of the matter, which is that women in Ireland were "doubly othered, or, in post-colonial terms, were 'other of the ex-other', as Ailbhe Smyth succinctly describes it".[21] Conversely, this issue was perfectly clear to the many women who directly fought for independence, and who perceived how their position was much more complex than that of their male comrades. As Constance Markievitz wrote, referring to her female friends and activists, "the first step on the road to freedom is to realize ourselves as Irishwomen – not only as Irish or merely as women, but as Irishwomen doubly enslaved, and with a double battle to fight".[22]

After independence, women were to condemn, and fight against, oppressive and (neo-)colonial power relations that reflected those that had underpinned the earlier colonial rule. Indeed, the strategy that was eventually adopted as part of the political agenda of the Irish Free State, and subsequently of the Republic of Ireland, was to recover what was felt to be a denied masculinity. The Irish male in a post-colonial context could not continue to be identified with feminine attributes: "agricultural rather than industrial, militarily defensive and neutral rather than imperial and proactive, the martyr rather than the victor".[23] Ireland had to reconstruct male dominance through the values of an Irishness that was seen as male, white, Catholic, settled and heterosexual, obviously to the detriment of non-conformity, otherness and what was female.

Many women had actively and effectively participated in the battles for independence in organizations such as *Cumann na mBan*, the *Irish Women Worker's Union* and the *Irish Citizen Army* (that eventually formed the *Cumann na dTeachtaire* – the *League of Women Delegates*). Yet things gradually stalled after independence. In an electoral address of 1943, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington – an independent candidate in the general election of that year – openly criticized how Irish women's expectations had been betrayed: "Under the 1916 Proclamation, Irishwomen were given equal citizenship, equal rights and equal opportunities. Subsequent constitutions have filched these or smothered them in mere 'empty formulae'".[24] Sadly, in 1937 "the new Irish constitution [gave] a 'special place' to the church and also to women. The special place for the church was at the head of Irish society.

[19] Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 109.
[20] See Fabio Luppi, *Fathers and Sons at the Abbey Theatre (1904-1938): A New Perspective on the Study of Irish Drama* (Boca Raton: BrownWalker Press, 2018).
[21] Ailbhe Smyth, "The Floozie in the Jacuzzi", *Irish Review*, 6 (1989), 10, cit. in Leeney, "Women and Irish Theatre", 274.
[22] Cit. in Leeney, "Women and Irish Theatre", 270.
[23] Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 8.
[24] Cit. in Bryan Fanning, *Histories of the Irish Future* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 167.

The special place for women was in the home. This meant that women were expected to have a life outside the home only while waiting to get married".[25] Moreover,

> laws based on the premise that women's rights were inferior to those of men survived in, and indeed even appeared on, the statute books. Despite the constitutional adulation of marriage and motherhood, the legislature preferred to keep women in the home by foul rather than fair means. Contraception was effectively illegal. The economically powerless homemaker was denied access to free legal aid. No financial aid was available as of right to unmarried mothers, deserted wives or prisoners' wives, even when they were fulfilling their "duties" in the home. The battered wife and mother could not exclude her violent husband from the home (which was almost invariably his) except by resort to the most cumbersome procedures. If she fled the home, her husband had a right to damages from anyone who enticed her away, or who harboured her or committed adultery with her.[26]

Indeed, until the 1990s divorce was illegal, homosexuality criminalized, contraception strictly controlled, and abortion outlawed except when the life of the mother was under threat. The new State and the Catholic Church mimicked / mirrored the old colonial yoke and imposed the religious imperative of regulation of and control over sexual life to promote a supposed civilization / Christianization of society.

The consequences of the new Irish state adopting this binary trap of colonial and post-colonial trivializing dichotomies (to the detriment of the subaltern – a category which included women), disappointed expectations for female emancipation. The social recognition that had been fostered during the years preceding independence and reflected in plays that featured resolute and strong female characters, came to naught.[27] It is thus constructive to read Irish plays in the light of Maria Lugones' theories on the coloniality of gender, that is, from the perspective of the intersection between gender, class, race and sexuality.[28] This counters the 'normalizing idea' that women can be defined in relation to men, i.e., by those who constitute the norm. And if men are the norm, then women are automatically relegated to the subaltern along with any other deviance from it.

Moreover, in the years preceding and during the Second World War, Ireland maintained its neutrality and followed isolationist, nationalist and conservative policies (a tendency already enacted by the Éamon De Valera government). The fact that these policies continued to be followed after the war years, contributed to the isolation of Irish women, and was an obstacle on the path towards gender equality and women's emancipation. The distance between Ireland and the rest of Europe made it difficult for Irish society to experience those instances of progress and modernity that encouraged feminists abroad in their fight for emancipation. This somber scenario is evident if analyzed with regard to several plays staged in the 1930s, a significant moment in Irish history because it saw on the one hand the promulgation of the constitution of the Irish Republic and, on the other, the aforementioned adoption of isolationist policies. Teresa Deevy's *The King of Spain's Daughte*r (1935) and *Katie Roche* (1936) and Seán O'Faolain's *She Had to Do Something* (1937) partly challenge and go beyond the traditional representation of women. Yet, although seemingly at odds with the policies that saw women relegated solely to the domestic sphere, these plays underline the negative, subaltern prospects for Irish women in the new – albeit decolonized – state.

Sean Ó Faoláin's *She Had to Do Something* is a reflection on small-town Irish life, and pokes fun at Catholic prudery with its depiction of a provincial priest, Canon Kane, who criticizes plans to have a

[25] Horgan Goretti, "Changing Women's Lives in Ireland", *The International Socialism Journal*, 91 (Summer 2001), http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj91/horgan.htm, accessed 25 November 2020.
[26] Yvonne Scannell, "The Constitution and the Role of Women", in Alan Hayes and Diane Urquhart, eds, *The Irish Women's History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1988), 73.
[27] Such as J.M. Synge's *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903) and Padraic Colum's *The Land* (1905).
[28] See Lugones, *Heterosexualism*.

Russian ballet troupe perform locally as he considers the whole thing immoral. At Mass he gives a sermon warning his parishioners not to attend what he calls an indecent exhibition, and in so doing risks ruining the fortunes of both the Russian dancers and Maxine Arnold – the wife of Patrick Arnold, a musician who is the parish organist – who first had the idea of inviting the Russian troupe to town. Mrs Arnold is thought to be a Protestant French woman – though at the end of the play her husband reveals that she is a Catholic – who wants to make provincial life livelier with artistic, though often naïve bizarre performances. The playwright is not always one-sided in his criticism. To this effect, we need only quote Mrs Arnold condemning the boredom of Irish provincial life: "I love Ireland. But nothing ever happens". Her criticism of a static society, is, however, followed by a much more controversial and less acceptable opinion: "When the Black and Tans were here and we were all murdering one another, I was *so* contented. But since. I go on and on like that (indicating a level line with her hand)".[29]

That the Canon exerts such a strong authority over the community – an authority that goes far beyond simple religious precepts touching on public, moral and social spheres – is clear when he speaks of, and to, Mrs Arnold: "Mrs Arnold is not yet within the body of the Catholic Church – but if she were […] (To Madame) you should come to me and consult me before you start any more of your crazy schemes".[30] His words reveal the power that priests held in their communities: they acted as censors in both private and public life. Mrs Arnold strongly opposes the priest, although like her antagonist, she is depicted in a way that occasionally verges on the caricature. Nonetheless, she fights to change Irish habits, siding with the needs of the new generation against the conservatism of the older one. She complains about the dullness of Irish life, wants to do away with the monotony of her town, and is also not afraid to contradict the priest both in matters of sexual behaviour and education. In this, Mrs Arnold unmasks the colonial mechanisms that govern everyday life through the control of the bodies and subjectivities (and sexuality) of the subaltern / colonized. She tells the priest:

> You are like the curate from Tramore when I was down by the sea last summer, he asked my maid, 'Have you a boy?' She said, 'I have no boy'. He said 'I vill [*sic*] kill you if I catch you with a boy'. Sacré nom de pip, how can she get married if she does not have a boy? Can she marry her grandmother?[31]

Mrs Arnold is worried about her daughter Julie's chances in life, believing that one day her child will probably feel the urge to leave Ireland and find a better life somewhere else.[32] At the end of the play, the Canon scores a personal victory in preventing the performance of the Russian ballet and sending the dancers back to Dublin, but Mrs Arnold also has a fair measure of success by managing to guarantee an increase in salary for her husband, and offering this extra money to her daughter. Julie will go to France and Switzerland to lead a different life from the one she would have had in Ireland. The sad conclusion of the play is that the only way to live a decent life in an Ireland under such a strong Catholic yoke is through hypocrisy and deceit. At the end of *She Had to Do Something* Mrs Arnold scolds her daughter in front of the Canon, denouncing the fact that in Ireland "there are canons to the right of you and canons to the left of you. And you must sit in the middle while they volley and folly and whatever it is. It pleases them and it is good for you".[33] She has to pretend that she agrees with the Canon even if she does not – and just as she has deceived the curate by pretending to be a Protestant, in the last lines of the play the audience finds out that she has also been pretending to be Mr Arnold's wife. In fact, they never actually married – a further non-compliance with Catholic morality.

[29] Seán O'Faoláin, *She Had to Do Something* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1938), 36.
[30] Ibid., 55.
[31] Ibid., 68.
[32] Ibid., 43.
[33] Ibid., 145.

This non-compliance calls into question the image of the colonial bourgeois modern man who, as Lugones explains, was supposed to be heterosexual, Christian, a being of mind and reason, and an agent and example of civilization. However, bourgeois women were not just "understood as his complement," but were considered as functional to the reproduction of the species and especially of a pure race "through [their] sexual purity, passivity, and being home-bound in the service of the white, European, bourgeois man".[34] The Irish Catholic authority reproduced this distinction in the Irish Free State and in the Republic of Ireland, denying the role women had had in previous years.

In his play O'Faoláin implies that the only way that Mrs Arnold can resist Catholic hegemony is through an unsatisfactory, and even dishonest, compromise, while for her daughter the only chance to be free as a woman is to leave Ireland altogether. She also ironically mentions another option for her daughter. This implies, however, the same crucial factor of having to leave the community: "Why don't you find me a young handsome fair-haired blue-eyed Catholic man with a private income and a knowledge of languages and an artistic temperament and a crease in his trousers and a nice smile, and I would not mind if he had not travelled – and my daughter would gladly marry him".[35] It is useful to refer here to Maria Lugones' observations about communities, with her appropriation (and subsequent denial) of Marilyn Friedman's concepts of 'community of place' (in terms of family, neighbourhood, church and nation) and 'community of choice'. According to Lugones, such a distinction does not really hold if we accept that within a community people are capable of dissent, and above all can reproduce forms of resistance. She rejects the idea of a passively received 'community of place' that does not include the chance to dissent and resist. Significantly in *She Had to Do Something*, possible room for manoeuvre is given to a woman, who, being a somewhat hybrid character, does not conform to the idea of the pure nation. What Ó Faoláin argues here is that such options (dissenting and resisting) are only available because the female protagonist pretends to be Protestant and is French, that is to say, outside the Irish Catholic community, or outside that specific 'community of place'. Mrs Arnold's special status allows her to escape the community's strict rules; rules that apparently cannot be questioned from within, but only from outside the Irish context. This opposition between what can / cannot be done also sounds as a warning against growing Irish provincialism and political autarky. Mrs Arnold is thus worried (and rightly so) about her daughter's chances of pursuing her own goals in life in such a 'community of place' where she would not enjoy the same chance of dissent as her mother. Irish society, and the state of autarky into which the country was slowly and consciously sinking, removes any prospect of rebellion. In the end, it is a colonial strategy that Mrs Arnold cannot effectively oppose: a strategy that nourishes an incapacity to fully read and respond to hegemonic understandings / colonial understandings / racist, gendered understandings. It prevents people from reacting and dissenting.

In the same period a talented woman playwright contributed significantly to productions at the Abbey Theatre until she was effectively silenced in 1937. In that year, Teresa Deevy's *Wife to James Whelan* was turned down, and although her later play *Holiday House* (1939) was accepted by the Abbey, it was never staged. From then on, she wrote almost exclusively for the radio. In many ways, her personal experience is revelatory of the general condition to which women were destined in Irish society.

In Deevy's hitherto neglected, but recently revived play *Katie Roche*,[36] the title character is a girl who has been abandoned by her father because she is illegitimate. The play depicts a stern mysterious character, a tramp called Reuben ("a man of the road"[37]), a sort of wise old man and Christian ascetic, who appears once in each act. In Act Two he admonishes Katie, and in the final act he even hits her with his stick in front of her husband (Stanislaus) to force her to adopt what he considers the behaviour that

[34] Maria Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism", *Hypatia*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Fall 2010), 743.
[35] O'Faoláin, *She Had to Do Something*, 41.
[36] Teresa Deevy, *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed, Volume One: Temporal Powers, Katie Roche, Wife to James Whelan*, edited by Jonathan Bank, John P. Harrington, and Christopher Morash (New York: Mint Theatre Company, 2011).
[37] Ibid., 79.

befits a wife, i.e., a wife according to a restrictive Catholic idea of a woman's role in a conservative patriarchal society. Reuben is not just a tramp, however. Halfway through the second act he reveals his true identity: he is Katie's father.

Being so much older than his wife, Katie's husband himself can be seen more as a father than a husband. At the beginning of the play we are even told that Stanislaus was in love with Katie's mother and that he proposed to her but was refused.[38] When Katie reproaches her husband ("do you put a good value on me at all of late?"[39]) Stanislaus replies condescendingly, "I can't delay. There's a good child". Katie tries to react to this distortion of reality: "Child! I am your wife that you married", and in so doing she reveals not only the damage done by marriages between people of different generations, but also the patronizing attitude of a supposed figure of authority who does not respect his wife – evidently seen as a subaltern – and treats her like a child. Here it is evident that the colonial racialized subaltern, described and governed in terms of nature, childhood or even animality, has been appropriated to represent a post-colonial gendered subaltern. Katie, however, clearly challenges the structure of a patriarchal society and the subordinate position of women who have inherited the 'burden of difference' that was attributed to the colonized before independence.

The two male characters in the play represent a discredited and contradictory idea of manliness and fatherhood: Reuben is both a strict man and an irresponsible father, while Stanislaus is ill at ease in his role as husband, and thus unsure of how he should deal with his young wife. At the beginning of the play he does not criticize her behaviour as Reuben does, and it is Reuben who blames him for this. Reuben, a figure of paternal authority, encourages Stanislaus to act according to an idea of gender as a means of imposing traditional (modern/colonial) power, even suggesting that Stanislaus should beat his own wife: "I'd give her a flogging"[40]. When at the end of the play Stanislaus sees that his dominant position is questioned, he decides that they should leave town in order to start a new life abroad where his wife's attempts at independence will be silenced by isolation in an unfamiliar place. For Katie, this final decision means being subjected to a restrictive life with a man who has a bigoted idea of a woman's role. Unlike the perspectives that are open to Mrs Arnold's daughter in escaping from Ireland – and going abroad where her independence will not be considered deviant – Katie is taken away to break down her resistance to the traditional gendered customs and conventions imposed in the new Ireland.

A further dichotomy implicit in Maria Lugones' theory of the coloniality of gender can be applied to this story: if colonial rule means "only the civilized are men or women", then, semantically speaking, the consequence is that there are no colonized women. The colonized was characterized as having a sex, but not a gender. Katie Roche tries to adopt and exploit this syllogism when she quarrels with Reuben for the first time. She points out that she knows (or at least suspects) that her father was a member of the Protestant Ascendancy, a class that descended from the colonizers. She tells Reuben: "[D]idn't I know always I came from great people?"[41]. This is meant to frustrate Reuben's attempt to put into practice that coloniality of power inscribed in the gendered hierarchical roles imposed on the subaltern. As we see, however, Katie's attempt to reverse her subordinate position is unsuccessful. This situation also shows how the assumption that to be Irish is to be one of the colonised is not correct. As *Katie Roche* clearly demonstrates, people might identify themselves as Irish yet as belonging to the colonial side of the binary. This further complexity inscribed in the colonial and peculiar history of Ireland surely complicates the attempt to draw a clear univocal image of Irish society.

[38] Ibid., 60.
[39] Ibid., 75.
[40] Ibid., 98.
[41] Ibid., 63.

Similarly, Deevy's *The King of Spain's Daughter* (1935)[42] presents a female character as a rebel, a woman who feels she is being forced into restrictive roles. She longs for emancipation and independence and for a gender role that is different to the one her community prescribes. Her father – who beats her for the most insignificant reasons such as giving him his dinner late – is a typically violent man in a violent bigoted society.

The young protagonist, Annie Kinsella, flirts with various young men – and her behaviour is seen as scandalous in the community ("Philanderin' with the kind of him – that's all she's fit for – or with any boy she can lay hold of"[43]) – and wants to have a different life from that of a wife or a factory worker. She fights against brutality and sexual repression. In the end, however, we see her about to marry a man who appears to be as violent as her own father. Describing the man who has proposed to her, Annie concludes the play thus: "I think he is a man that – supposin' he was jealous – might cut your throat".[44] With these words, she appears to believe that such a man is the archetype of the real male, thus abandoning her own ideas of an independent life and conforming to the precepts of society. The depiction of an apparently strong independent female protagonist opposed to her father's brutal ways and an oppressive world fosters expectations that remain frustrated. Rather than a revolutionary uplifting finale, the play arrives at another disappointing conclusion. The fact that women are also depicted as bigoted and traditionalist, and indeed, see their independence as a threat to the *status quo*, reveals the process of cultural regression of the country: "Mrs Marks's complicity with patriarchal chauvinism and the axiomatic truth of the role of dutiful Wife is symptomatic of the general acceptance by most Irish women of Catholic gender ideology and its institutionalization in the Constitution".[45]

In Deevy's plays, two women are presented as different models within society. Once again, this is a society in which violence is a constant attribute of patriarchy: both Reuben and Annie's father beat their daughters. As we have seen, even Jim, Annie's wooer, is described as a man who might "cut your throat". It is evident that repressive violent dominance has shifted from what it was under colonial rule to a male authority that cannot tolerate a woman's sexual freedom. The new post-colonial regime exploits the old colonial hierarchical and dichotomic structures that control lives, sexualities, bodies and spiritualities. This new rule is encapsulated in Jim's reminder to Annie: "Jim: (in fury) If your father heard you were at the crossroad last night – or if the priest heard tell of it – dancin' on the board, an' restin' in the ditch with you cheek agen mine and your body pressed to me".[46]

If read metaphorically and politically, the two father figures in these plays – Peter Kinsella and Reuben Fitzsimon – symbolize the old colonial rule succinctly. On the other hand, both Jim and Stanislaus might have reversed the process of exploiting women (Ireland) and finally enact gender (and political) equality. Unfortunately, they conform to the old system and offer themselves up to pre-existing patriarchal hierarchies. They do not take their wife/lover's part, but collude with the old structures of colonial power.[47]

In this gendered society, both Deevy and Ó Faoláin apparently overcome the distinction between Lugones' opposition of 'community of place' vs. 'community of choice'.[48] Yet Katie Roche's husband

[42] Teresa Deevy, *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed, Volume Two: In Search of Valours, The King of Spain's Daughter, Holiday House, Dignity, Strange Birth, Light Falling, Within a Marble City, Going beyond Alma's Glory, In the Cellar of My Friend, One Look and What It Led to*, edited by Jonathan Bank, John P. Harrington and Christopher Morash (New York: Mint Theatre Company, 2017).
[43] Deevy, *King*, 18.
[44] Ibid., 26.
[45] Paul Murphy, *Hegemony and Fantasy in Irish Drama 1899-1949* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 182.
[46] Deevy, *King*, 24.
[47] See what Lugones ("Heterosexualism and the Colonial", 196-198) says about the case of the African people of the Yoruba and the inferiorization of women.
[48] See Maria Lugones, *Peregrinajes/Pilgrimages: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Press, 2003), 183-205.

realizes that he has to take his wife away from their own community, as city life implies the dangerous chance to dissent and consider emancipation as an option. Physical removal is the sole method of escaping any changes in society, now that the city can no longer guarantee a 'pure' identity. In *The King of Spain's Daughter*, on the other hand, Annie does not seem to act upon her own diversity. It is as if the values expressed by her 'community of place' cannot be challenged, as if society does not really offer people who want to dissent the means to put their dissent into practice. The same thing happens in *She Had to Do Something*.

Lugones talks about communities and their relationship with liberatory change, and in this she refers to Shohat and Stam's idea of polycentric multiculturalism – which to some extent recalls the ideas expressed by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in their seminal *The Invention of Tradition.* From this perspective, a tradition (and consequently a culture) is never pure; it is always made up of influences, exchanges and borrowings from different cultures. As these differences cannot easily come from the outside if a nation is intent on pursuing isolation, then, according to Lugones, a community of place might well find resistant practices within itself. The idea of identity, and of space / community as a static fixed concept (i.e., homogenous, and not, as is natural, 'impure') can be a dangerous one. Yet this was the idea that had also been expressed by the colonial power with its consequent binary oppositions, and which was unfortunately reproduced in the new Irish society even though diversity should have been the rule after centuries of subservience. It is no coincidence that Ó Faoláin saw that the chance to overcome obscurantist policies was to look to differences and influences from abroad (a French woman organizing a Russian ballet, perhaps), though the fact that this is accomplished in a fairly ludicrous way indicates that he was well aware of the fact that change and resistance (and also differences) might well be found within society itself.

If the construction of space constantly shifts under the opposing tensions of domination and resistance to domination, communities should not be seen as fragmented, which leads to binary oppositions, but as 'impure'. For the women in these three plays, being part of a community means facing and resisting certain social roles imposed by a new authority that is now not the colonial power, but the new state and the Church. In the end, Ó Faoláin seems to suggest that the only chance for her protagonist to abandon a society that marginalizes differences is through deceit or emigration. In *Katie Roche* Deevy describes with disillusionment a world in which the imposition of male authority cannot be questioned and where an ideal impure society that the city can represent is not at hand. With *The King of Spain's Daughter*, the apparent nonconformist and resistant behaviour of the female protagonist is seen as untenable within her community. Circumstances are against her, and Annie might well wonder how she can escape her fate: "where would I ever find a way out of here?"[49] Her idea of emigrating to London ("I dunno could I ever get into service in a place in London?"[50]) in order to escape her subordination to men remains a mere hypothesis without any realistic resolution.

Unlike Yeats and Gregory who at least proposed a positive image of women – albeit seen more as rhetorical than real figures – and Synge's attempt to put forward an improbable idealistic alternative to the traditional societal structure, these three later plays and their deflating finales are a more realistic depiction of the Irish political and social condition in the years following independence, civil war and partition. Taken together, they condemn the unsatisfactory response of the new republic in fulfilling aspirations for a new liberal society where women might finally be rid of the colonial/modern gender system.

[49] Deevy, *King*, 24.
[50] Ibidem.