

Treatment



Dorothy Macardle, an educated literary artist from a conservative family background, took a radical, anti-Treaty, Republican stance during the Irish Civil War. In November 1922 she was arrested for propagandist activity and imprisoned without trial for six months. She was held initially at Mountjoy but in February 1923 she was transferred with 40 other women to the disused, dank Kilmainham Gaol.

On arrest, her literary manuscripts were publicly burned on a Dublin street by malicious Free State soldiers, which had a traumatic effect on her. In her gaol diaries discovered in recent years she wrote “My poetry is all over now”. But in prison she fought back and began a new departure in her writing, with “Earthbound”, a collection of ghostly short stories. She would go on to achieve renown as a writer of Gothic Horror fiction, one of her novels becoming a major Hollywood film.

She also wrote journalistic pieces as her political ideology and strategic intelligence deepened in gaol. She kept six diaries in prison. Only three survived a further burning of her papers, this time by her brother upon her death in 1959. The surviving diaries offer insights into prison life. They record day to day events: the solidarity and also occasional tensions between the militant women prisoners and the political strategists with whom Dorothy was aligned.

But uniquely, Dorothy Macardle’s diaries also recount her innermost fears, doubts, traumas, dreams, and experiences which can only be described as uncanny. Not only does she record her sleeping dreams, in some of which she has “pre vision” of future occurrences, but she describes altered, semi-hallucinogenic states of consciousness where windows open in her cell walls looking out on familiar and unfamiliar scenes, from distorted vistas of urban Dublin to the rolling Mediterranean Sea. Surrounded by devout Catholics, she declares that she “cannot pray as they do” but she can “image things”, such as the opening of the gates to allow hunger striker Mary Mac Swiney to be liberated (an event that did indeed come to pass).

Our short film is a study of this self-described psychic, “seeing” artist, temporarily encaged. We find her in essence, still walking the corridors and stairs of Kilmainham by night when the building is silent other than to the echoes of voices and sounds of 100 years ago. Dorothy Macardle remains witness to her own past and that of her fellow Republican women who were held in inhumane conditions, doing what they and she could to make the inhospitable spaces habitable: domesticating their cells; kneeling in vigil for the hunger striking women; in Dorothy’s case writing fiction and songs, and all – regardless of differences – standing together in protest when it comes to time for them to be removed by violent force to yet another prison. She is also witness to her own psychic visionary journeys of 1923, which give her comfort.

Not a simplistic ghost movie, our film draws from Dorothy’s own writings and later success in Gothic Noir cinema to create lingering impressions of the artistry, vision, trauma and ultimate triumph of a notable woman in Irish history.

A Memory-Scape

No Ordinary Woman is alone in an empty haunted prison. The spirit/consciousness of Dorothy Macardle, a caged artist journeys through the prison a century after her imprisonment.

Location 1: Kilmainham Gaol

Walls, windows, corridors, doors (map of human suffering), extruded wood, iron cage work, gangways, staircase, graffiti (cuman na mban graffiti, neo-classical, religious, portraits, inscriptions), outside recreation yard.

Themes:

An Artist caged in prison

Vanished women in history - erasure of Dorothy Macardle - Feminist movement to recuperate her voice 100 years later/ recover her legacy.

Repressed memory/ trauma

Series of Vignettes (no particular order):

1. Burning of papers: embers are blown into the prison (using a fan) - she is picking them up, howling with despair OR there is a bonfire (Vere’s cobbles yard / forest at night) depicting the raid at her home and the public burning of her papers in 1922) Sfx burning papers & V/O Maud Gonne’s letter (source old letter from Vere).
2. Spectral figure: Translucent / half vanished/erased Dorothy journeys through abandoned prison. Peppers ghost type effect. Her spirit / presence is a consolation and deliverance. The Gaol is haunted with ghosts/presences from the past. As she sits reading a book - still shadows appear on the walls behind her.

3. Unconscious, Supernatural, Psychic sensibilities: Fainting into dreams (dancing in her cell, flowers...), nightmares (pressing hands against the walls of the cell), ghosts as consolation in prison - voices coming through the walls (terence macswiney)
4. Deprivation & Violence: looking out from her cell at riot- clinging to iron bars (V/O from scrummage)
5. Hope in prison: views from window (sfx from show and V/O of views),
6. Windows opening up in prison wall - has the 'spirit' watching her own psychic experiences - seeing that she could indeed "see" beyond
7. Vigils: Church - dorothy kneeling beside religious mural in grace plunketts cell (V/O of rosary)
8. Gaze: a feeling that she is being watched through the peephole. Surveillance
9. Writing Desk: physical reality of her desk - focus on her earthbound stories...*The Prisoner*. Consider a shot where she is writing from the comfort of her St. Stephens Green home.
10. Homemaking in prison ... books, flowers, teacups
11. Art mirroring real life (mirror)
12. Memories behave... Kaleidoscope effect
13. Time...'The Prisoner' time moving - whirling - no such thing in time as prison at all...How to show time being fragmented - whirling (water/stream & reflection - hand in water swirling)
14. Apathy Boredom - languid; Time going so slowly - ticking of the clock ... stillness.
15. Graffiti -

Style ideas: Black and White - Expressionist - Gothic - story without an end- the film reel runs out before the end. Text appearing as typed messages- old cine movie. Colour appears when she is dreaming.

MUSIC IDEAS

Pádraigín Ní Uallacháin: vocals, drones,

<https://www.irishsong.com/music/songs-of-the-scribe/>