

'Prison Notebooks'

A One-Woman Theatre Show

'Prison Notebooks', a one woman theatre show is part of a wider set of artistic and documentary undertakings by Performer & Researcher Sharon Mc Ardle and Writer & Director Declan Gorman along with diverse artists, collaborating under a loose banner, 'Dorothy Macardle Archive and Performance Project' (DMAPP).

Prison Notebooks is a new play intended for solo performance based primarily on first-hand journals and other writings undertaken by Dorothy Macardle over the course of her six-month incarceration as a Republican prisoner during the Irish Civil War of 1922-23. Macardle was arrested by Free State Soldiers and imprisoned without trial from November 1922 to May 1923, for her propagandist activity on behalf of the Anti-treaty Republicans. Already an Abbey playwright at the time of her arrest, Dundalk-born Macardle (1889-1958) went on to become a major literary artist, Hollywood screen writer, historian and international human rights advocate. Her gaol writings, undertaken in the most oppressive conditions of deprivation, uncertainty and confinement reveal not only a dedicated political activist and thinker but a developing artist of stature. Development of this work was made possible with the support of an Arts Council Theatre Projects Award. Further funding was sought from Louth County Council to develop the work to a full stage performance which was presented at Kilmainham Gaol in September 2022, before going on to Smock Alley in November 2022.

This Document traces the six-stage process in making this theatre piece.

Stage 1: Archive Research

Archive research on Dorothy Macardle was undertaken at the Abbey Theatre Archive, Alexandra College Archive, BBC Archive, Bureau of Military History, Military Service Pensions Collections, Kilmainham Gaol Archive, National Archives of Ireland, National Library of Ireland, Trinity College, James Joyce Archive, RTÉ Archive, Archive Newspapers. Published novels, Plays and Historical works by Macardle were gathered and secondary sources were also identified (See Bibliography).

In addition to researching Macardle, examining the political, historical and cultural context of Macardle's era lived was crucial. For instance, the Victorian era, World War 1, the Russian

Revolution, Cultural Nationalism, the Easter Rising, the Gaelic League, the Great Depression, the War of Independence, Home Rule, the Anglo- Irish Treaty, the Irish Civil War, the 1937 Constitution, Ireland's Neutrality in World War II, Fascism, post-war trauma in Europe, the Holocaust, Hitler's New Order.



After conducting extensive study on Dorothy Macardle, it became clear how complex her life was and that we could not reasonably present her life story in one play. We considered certain facets of Macardle's life to potentially focus on and began to consider how they would appear as stand-alone theatrical pieces:

1. Dorothy's Prison Notebooks - based primarily on first-hand journals and other writings undertaken by Dorothy over the course of her six-month incarceration as a Republican prisoner during the Irish Civil War of 1922-23.
2. Radicalisation through the Irish Literary Movement & the Abbey: Connecting with the Abbey and other archives – experimental presentations in recreated literary salons and Edwardian theatre spaces.
3. Gothic Horror Novelist & Hollywood Writer: Mining Dorothy's books for narrative; drawing from mid-20th century horror cinema for lighting, sound, and dramatic conventions - experimental presentations in abandoned cinema.

4. UN Humanitarian work in aftermath of WW2: An in-depth reading of Dorothy's immense humanitarian work for the U.N.- reflections on the Holocaust, carpet bombing of cities and the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors, then and now.

We made the decision to focus on her incarceration period as the part of her life from which to draw inspiration for a solo theatre performance.

Stage 2: Data Collection & Transcription of Gaol Journal

Data relating to Macardles' Incarceration period was identified, gathered, and organized. Gaol journals, prison files, Alexandra college files, radio scripts, letters, bureau of military history statements, literary works written in prison (Earth bound), news pieces, and other books by Macardle were among the primary sources used in this study. Secondary data comprised of journal articles, biographies etc. It was decided that the crucial data source would be Macardles' handwritten Prison Diaries, which required transcription.

Initial challenges with the journal transcription were the diary's poor organisation and structure. It did not appear in chronological order. The author moves back and forth in her journal, writes in the margins, re-writes moments retrospectively at times, includes literary drafts in-between entries etc. Only three out of six journals survive so there are obvious gaps in her prison story. Handwriting variability is also an issue as are personal references throughout the diary. She also weaves in and out of dream sequences, political rhetoric & poetic musing, all of which take some getting used to.

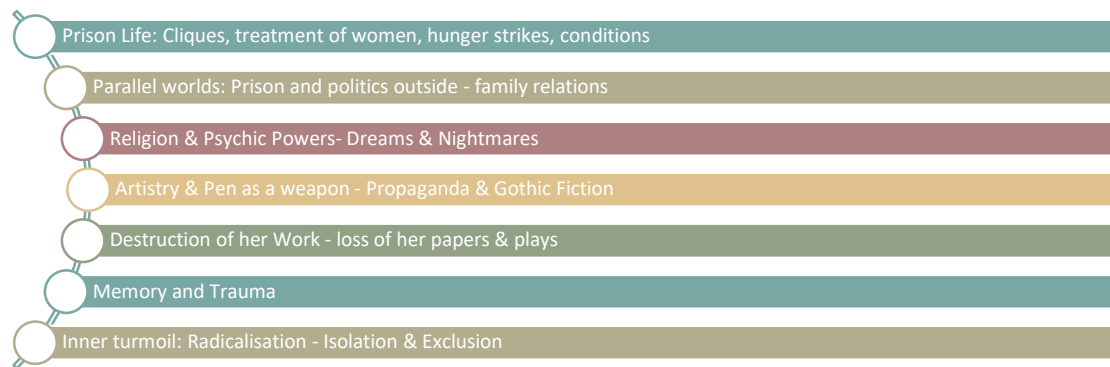
Stage 3: Collating Data

Once transcribed, the journal and all other data were coded according to the following:

1. Recurring Themes in Macardle's Prison Experience
2. Key moments in Macardle's Prison Experience
3. Writer's voice
4. Chronology & Timelines
5. Characters

1. Recurring Themes in Macardle's Life

Recurring themes began to emerge, and the following were considered as having dramatic potential:



There are many examples laid out in the diary of how the outside world of Civil war offers a parallel progression to the internal affairs of the prisoners such as the executions, militant and non-militant cliques. The loss of her papers and her acceptance of this travesty is important to note since this destruction of her papers became a recurring indignity during her life and even after her death (Gorman, 2019). There are many connections between her lived experiences and her fiction writing in *Earthbound* and we felt that the relationship between Macardles' actual trauma and her imaginative "gothic" writing is something worth pursuing partly to honour the fact that she is not just a prisoner of conscience but a creative artist (Gorman, 2019).

Within the journal itself, however, there is

The whirligig vision haunts her, as do her phobias (in dreams only, she maintains) about confinement and escape, and she perceives in Betty's exquisite dream of sewing sheets, a presentiment of her lover's death shroud. These are just a few examples of the wealth of other-worldly and visionary moments contained in her journals (Gorman, 2019)

The destruction of her papers and subsequent erasure of her memory and legacy serve as the overarching theme. The loss of memory and visibility in the matter of women's history reflects not only the common misplacing of non- official records and disregard for oral tradition: it has often been deliberate (Gorman, 2022). A recurring

horror in the life and aftermath of Dorothy Macardle is the burning, both accidental and deliberate, of her works. After her arrest, in 1922, her papers were burned on the street by Free State soldiers following a raid at her home in St Stephen's Green. In 1951, several of her play scripts, namely *Ann Kavanagh* and *Atonement* were rescued, part-damaged, from the great Abbey fire. In World War II, while living in London, her typewriter was twisted scrap following a German bombing raid at her home. The entire stock of The Irish Republic, kept at a London warehouse was destroyed by a second German bomb. Many of her remaining materials, probably including three of her six journals, were burnt by her brother Donald upon her death.

2. Key moments in Macardle's Life

The following are significant episodes and events which we considered might make dramatic material.

- Macardle's arrest
- Raid at Maud Gonne's House & Burning of Manuscripts
- Devotion and duty to Mary MacSwiney
- Vigils, Catholicism- the blessed spirit.
- Ghost of Terence MacSwiney
- Execution of Erskine Childers.
- Day-to-day prison life: The mundanity of prison life. General bickering and petty politics among the women
- Small joys and miseries; the glory of a sunbeam
- The soldiers running amok outside in a Grand Guignol anarchy
- The decline and then release of Mary MacSwiney
- December 8th – Feast of the Immaculate Conception
- The peaceful transfer to Kilmainham- the encounter with young Free State soldier- the gift of clay from Kevin Barry's grave.
- Arrival at Kilmainham- where the men of '16 were executed.
- Meeting Nora Connolly.
- The Kilmainham Tortures and the transfer to NDU

- Bullet through the window
- The return and sudden release of Mary McSwiney and then the disruptive arrival of her sister Annie
- Hunger Striking
- Concern about Honor losing her faith in the Republican cause
- Betty's growing realisation that her Free State soldier boy, Tom is probably dead.
- Prison Protests: Breaking out- stealing the key, hiding cell door locks
- Soldiers gaze on female prisoners sleeping privacy issues.
- Execution yard for exercise.
- Conditions in Kilmainham Prison - living in a tomb
- Liam Deasy Surrender
- Commemoration of the Rising Kilmainham
- Dreams

3. Macardle's Voice

Through reading her journals, we were able to follow her political, social, spiritual, emotional, and literary development. Understanding her inner voice and the development of her character depended on this. Her prison writing shifts from evocative dreamy lyricism to strong polemic passages (Gorman 2020). Her poetic voice emerges when she writes with passion about literature.

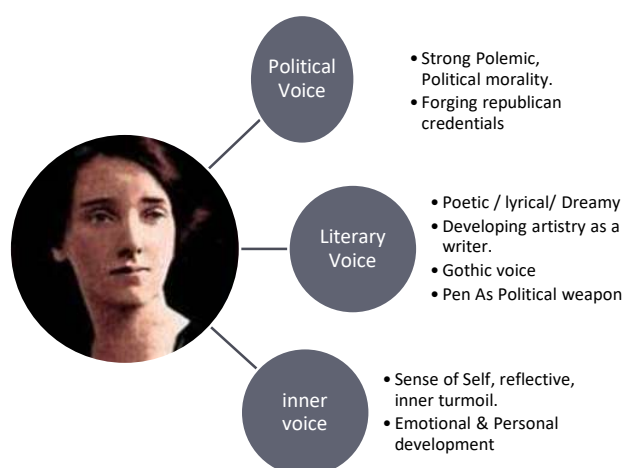


Fig. Dorothy Macardle's Voice

4. Chronology and Timelines

Macardle was imprisoned without trial on November 9th, 1922, and released on May 9th 1923. The journals cover the period from November to late February, which detail her time in Mountjoy and Kilmainham. However, we have no first-hand account of the weeks leading up to her release or her internment at North Dublin Union. To piece together the gaps, we must rely on secondary sources, augmented by her own propaganda pieces including Kilmainham Tortures. There are parallels between the political affairs outside and the internal affairs in prison and so it is important to document all events both inside and outside prison during the Civil War Period. A detailed Chronology of this period is attached (See Chronology doc.)

5. Character profiles

A Cast list of all persons associated with Macardle's Incarceration period was drawn up and broadly categorised under following headings:

internal	External	Dead
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Militant V Non Militant PoW• Convicts• Prison guards• Soldiers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• family• friends• students• political• literary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Terence MacSwiney• Kevin Barry• Erskine childers

There were concerns raised, such as how to portray characters truthfully and with historical accuracy? Do we conflate characters to represent groups? How do we establish prison cliques in solo performance? After several discussions, it was decided to honour the characters by accurately representing them rather than conflating them. Attention was paid towards identifying truthful character accent, voice, physicality.

A number of decisions were made;

1. To represent a few notable characters from the group such as; Lilly O' Brennan, Mary MacSwiney, Brigid O' Mullane, Sighe Humphries, Nora Connolly.
2. To write for an ensemble cast that allows the solo performer switch between a various characters.

3. Because Mary MacSwiney personage is so great, it was decided not to portray her. Her presence will instead be manifested through other characters. Characters can be seen kneeling in reverence before Ms. MacSwiney during vigil, or there are instances when the inmates are quieted out of respect for her.
4. To find characters journey arc, development and inner motives throughout the play.
5. To explore the emotional relationships between Macardle and other personalities in prison, such as her awe of Ms. MacSwiney, admiration for Nora Connolly and protectiveness over Betty.

From this, a Dramatis Personae of key characters was drawn up and scene studies to explore certain characters e.g.: Lili in 'The Vigil' and Paudeen in the 'riot' scene, were devised.

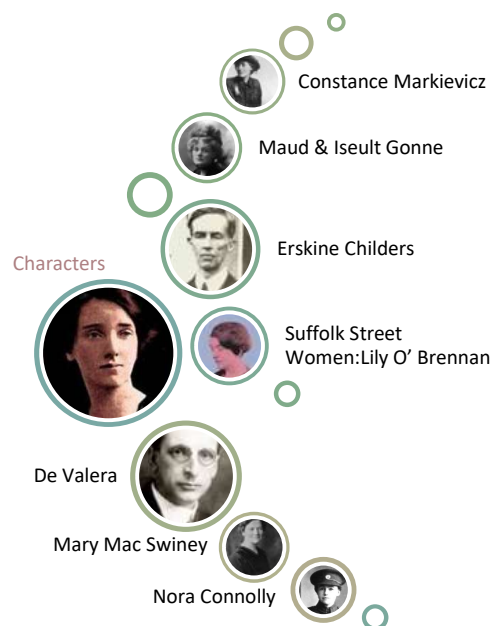


Fig. Characters closely connected to Dorothy during her incarceration period.

Stage 4: Artistic Collaboration and Script writing Process

We came to the following agreements before beginning to write the script for "Prison Notebooks":

1. Selection of Themes

2. Dramatic structure would be a Five Act form with transition
3. Selection of Key Characters
4. The overall aesthetic would be guided by Macardles' literary horror genre and her fascination with dreams & the occult.
5. Selection of Key moments, episodes and an agreed narrative, indicative of key themes and based on Gaol Journal.

To reach consensus, we discussed the merits and otherwise of the ideas each of us brought to the table. There was an understanding from the beginning that we would play to specific respective strengths and pre-agreed roles when we would come to such moments. (Gorman 2020) Declan would undertake the final stage of the writing, which he describes as 'an arranging of text' and I would perform. I would undertake the research, both historic and aesthetic and Declan would direct the performance.

For each scene study, I would create conceptual framework that would include a variety of information, such as pertinent prison journal entries, supplemental primary and secondary source material, character profiles, visual cues, suggestions for stage directions and theatrical devices, lighting, and sound.

The figure below illustrates our collaborative script writing process.

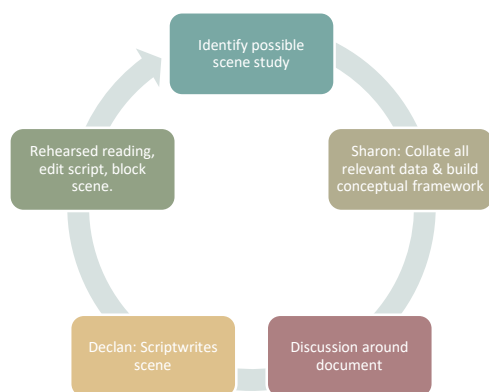


Fig. Collaborative Script Writing Process

Artist's Impressions

Once all material relating to Macardle's incarceration was gathered and treated, the following steps, outlined below by Gorman (2019) were taken to help move towards a Dramatisation.

1. We would each draw from the Gaol journals and other sources, our own personal impressions: what moved us, what contemporaneous historical insights intrigued us, and so on. These impressions would become essential in the choices we make about a theatrical representation of the Dorothy's Prison Experience.
2. We considered our audience, which would be made up, as most audiences are, of those with deep knowledge of the subject matter and those with little; those with strong political beliefs, those with opposing beliefs and those without strong opinions.
3. We would have a responsibility to be true to the spirit - and in so far as is possible – the word of Dorothy herself. But we would have an equal responsibility as dramatists to engage, stimulate, 'hold onto' and indeed entertain our audience in all its diversity.
4. We would have a responsibility to make choices about what to include and what to omit, but also to arrange the texts, not by theme, not necessarily chronologically, but logically to the dramaturgical pattern and rhythm that we would choose.

Initial Impressions were expressed. I presented a document called 'memoryscape', which was visual and conceptual, inspired by Macardle's opening section of her RTÉ memoirs.

'Memories behave in a curious way; they advance and retreat, rearranging themselves in new perspectives... Questioned about my own recollections, I felt baffled by the scatter of fragments- broken plans, altered allegiance, discarded hopes, that were all I could see, until the kaleidoscope turned. Then, I thought, a pattern began to emerge. There was rhythmic movement. A circle, small at first, enlarged itself, multiplied, like the rings of an eddy. Recurrences and reversal occurred. I imagine that for many people destiny moves like this...'

The Kaleidoscope represented a fragmentary treatment of Macardle's reflections on her Prison experience. Macardle's journals blur the lines between reality, dreams and the

supernatural provide artistic permission to experiment with the theatrical lens, shifting from naturalistic to illusion. Sound effects, lighting, theatrical flair, and symbolism were also considered.

Declan adopted a more dramaturgical perspective, outlining his impressions under categories such as personal growth, emotional matters, language, characters, precious papers, humour, political theory, dreams, visions & fiction, music, and sound. There was also mention of external intrusions, where the outside world of the war offers a parallel progression to the internal affairs of the prisoners. The strength of Macardle's political reflections without the benefit of hindsight were also intimated.

Stage 5: Psychological and Philosophical Theories

The following theories were chosen after a survey of psychological and philosophical theories as having resonance with the topics underlying "Prison Notebooks" and would be addressed as and when they came up throughout the process.



Theodor W. Adorno

- Aesthetic theory: function of beauty and sublimity in art, relations between art and society, 'truth-content' in the art object. Beckett.



Walter Benjamin: Benjamin's study of Marxism & Surrealism to develop the concept of 'the dialectical image' substituting a political for a historical view of the past. The Surrealist 'profane illumination' whereby all human experiences are revealed to have revolutionary potential, which is revealed via dialectics of shock, the blurring of real and dream worlds etc. combined with a radical concept of freedom. The Uncanny, Fantastic Effect



Tzvetan Todorov: Todorov's Fantastic effect is present in works where the reader experiences hesitation about whether a work presents what Todorov calls "the uncanny," wherein superficially supernatural phenomena turn out to have a rational explanation or "the marvelous," where the supernatural is confirmed by the story.



Giorgio Agamben: reduction of life to 'biopolitics' to bare life (homo sacer), deprived of rights, state of exception, placed outside the law. hunger strike = weapon of resistance. concentration camps WWII- state of exception becomes the rule.



Maud Ellmann

- The Hunger Artists, self-starvation, metaphor for protest...Disembodiment.

Walter Benjamin's Profane illumination whereby all human experiences are revealed to have revolutionary potential, which is revealed via dialectics of shock, the blurring of real and dream worlds combined with a radical concept of Freedom. Macardle's journal quite often slips from reality into dreams or nightmares.

Pirandello's Mirrors & Freud's Dreams where Pirandello's mirror acts as a metaphoric expression for the Play within a Play or Freud's Dream within a Dream. Art Mirroring real Life in Macardle's Earthbound stories or Prison politics mirroring real world politics.

Adorno's Aesthetic theory which explored the relations between art and society and the 'truth content' in the art object.

Todorov's Fantastic Effect which experienced the uncanny or supernatural phenomena.

Agamben's State of Exception which explores the reduction of life to 'biopolitics' to bare life (homo sacer), deprived of rights, where female prisoners are placed outside the law and the state of exception prevails as in Macardles Prison tortures.

Maud Ellmann's The Hunger Artists, exploring the disembodied nature of hunger striking as a metaphor for protest, a weapon of resistance and its' affinity with artistry.

Stage 5: Theatrical style and presentation

'Prison Notebooks' is built on the premise that it is through appreciation of Macardle foremost as an artist, that we can best assess her historical standing. Our work is informed by Dorothy's own evolving aesthetic as we apply the investigative possibilities of theatre to arrive at deeper understandings of her complex life and art. We blend elements of realist bio-drama with expressionist soundscapes, uncanny lighting and the aesthetics of dream; acknowledging Macardle's concern with truth, side by side with her partisan political propagandism and her attraction to the exaggerated and supernatural (Gorman, 2019).



We explored various theatrical responses to convey Macardle's Prison life and summarized them below:



Konstantin Stanislavski
Naturalism
Symbolism
Psychological realism
Socialist realism



Brecht:
Agitprop, propaganda, non-passive audiences, distancing effect, montage, juxtaposition, meta-theatre, anti-theatre: dividing line between play and real life erased.



Meyerhold:
Physical being, symbolism, gestures, unconventional theatre settings.



Pirandello: 'Mirror'
metaphoric expression- self-confrontation- man reflecting on himself, mise en abyme (play within the play formula), no 4th wall- Eg: 5 characters in search of an author.



Piscator:
Documentary theatre, socio-political content, confrontational



Grotowski:
post traumatic theatre 'akropolis' - response to the holocaust- translating national trauma through performance

Meyerhold's provocative experiments dealing with physical being and symbolism in unconventional theatre settings.

Piscator's confrontational, political, documentary theatre.

Stanislavski's Naturalism, Symbolism and Psychological realism.

Grotowski's Post Traumatic Theatre 'Akropolis' (response to the holocaust) and how he can translate national trauma through performance. Brecht's Epic Theatre, propaganda, agitprop plays, emphasising the socio-political content of drama.

Pirandello's Theatre techniques and his treatment of the 'mirror' as a means of self-confrontation or providing an opportunity for the actor, character, or the audience to reflect or identify themselves through the experience. Exploring how Pirandello presents life and art through theatre may provide some rationale for how Dorothy responds as an artist to the world around her. How she turns a mirror from her plays/gothic novels onto society.

Pirandello's work would see this as a shattering of the dramatic spectacle, when meta-theatre becomes a form of anti-theatre where the dividing line between play and real life is erased. Pirandello goes further in exploiting the mirror-technique by presenting the play-within-a-play formula, Or mise-en-abyme in theatre. Freud, who uses the term dream within a dream. In discussing this subject, he supposes that what has been dreamt in the dream is a representation of reality. The mirror will be a symbolic theatre prop to explore the relationship between the real, which could be illusive, and its reflection.

Stage 6: Sound - Music - Lighting - Costume – Choreography

See separate documents

