



LIGHTING

Prison Notebooks

TREATMENT

An exploration of
Lighting & Sound
Design

DMAPP

Notes on Lighting Design

The timeline of the play is from November to May and the lighting should evolve with the passing of the seasons from winter to spring or from bleak darkness and despair to hope and aspirations.

Inspiration was taken from the following photographers & painters:

- Edward Jean Steichen (1879 –1973) Luxembourgish American photographer, painter, and curator: Dorothy's Prison world: grey, black with shadows. At times smoky and blurred as though you are watching her on a film noir set.
- Autochrome Lumière, 1907 for its' Dream like muted colours which could represent Dorothy's dreams, imaginings & hopes.
- Photographer Mervyn O' Gorman (1920's)
- Rembrandt (1606–1669) for his use of light on faces, shadows cast on walls, light streaming through prison window.
- Edgar Degas (1834-1917) Mono Prints capturing fading memory scapes as Dorothy looks back on her life.
- Vilhelm Hammershoi's use of subdued light with particular attention to 'Room with Candles'. As though there is a thin veil over the scene.
- Francisco Goya (1746–1828) The Disasters of War series of 82 prints depicting Incarcerated women. With special attention to his use of light.
- Klimt Sketches (1862-1918) Sketches portraying female characters, colourful paintings of Klimt – capturing Dorothy's dreams, window visions and sunlight which are overwhelmingly beautiful when she stirs up these memories.
- The Photojournalism of Roman Vishniac (1897 –1990): Russian-American photographer, best known for capturing on film the culture of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe before the Holocaust.

Other influences were derived from the Gothic Horror Genre, German Expression, Film Noir with shadows and silhouettes.

Director's Lighting Notes for Lighting Designer at Smock Alley

Performances at Kilmainham & An Táin Arts Centre (basement) were lit with 10 theatre lamps: 6 quartets spread across a T-Bar (FOH – SL) and a boom at SR; 2 floor birdies, and 2 additional birdies. The lighting generally was an amber wash with option of a blue wash for night time or dreamy scenes.

The birdies were there for a few special effects – a ghostly prologue; a fainting sequence where Dorothy enters a reverie; various dream-dance and movement sequences, clairvoyant moments where Dorothy describes “a window opening in a wall” and also a recurring theme of fires outside in the war-torn city and in her own future life.

The lighting for these intimate shows was designed by me (a director – but not a designer) and I manually operated using a 6-way mini-fader device, in an often improvised fashion (although following fixed guidelines) – responding to the action with chases, crossfades from SR to SL etc.

The aim when we move to Smock Alley is to utilise the resources and digital technology of a modern studio theatre to capture the enclosed atmosphere of the jail and the wild dreamscapes, but with a more sophisticated and planned design than was possible in the basement cell.

1) KEY DRAMATURGICAL ASPECTS OF THE PLAY – WHICH AFFECT LIGHTING DESIGN

The entire text is taken directly from Dorothy's writings in her own words – mainly her unpublished diaries, but also (near the end) a propagandist article she smuggled out of jail, and (in the prologue) a text from one of her later-life radio broadcasts where she looks back. As inferred above, quite a lot of the 'story' unfolds in a kind of 'naturalistic' albeit murky Victorian prison setting. There is a plain bed at SR to begin (it moves to SL after the interval when Dorothy is transferred from Mountjoy Gaol to Kilmainham Gaol). A compact writing desk is at USC to which she retires occasionally to write into her diary. At SL there is a stool which allows her to climb up and look out of imagined windows. (This also swaps sides at the interval). As it is a solo show, there are occasional periods where the actor is one side of the stage only for a slightly prolonged period, and it will be for the designer to decide if concentrating light on one side only is of value during these periods.

Much of the action, therefore, is in indoor prison spaces by day: there is one brief outdoor daytime moment (in the exercise yard) and several indoor as well as outdoor night moments – all in the “realist” world of the jail.

What marks Dorothy’s diaries (and this production) out from the usual realist jail stories, however, is the way she writes about her dreams and clairvoyant experiences. As we uncovered these episodes in the diaries, our editorial and conceptual choices were guided by study of early expressionist cinema and mid-century gothic horror movies, as well as images of expressionist dance movements. Dorothy’s own creative writing changed during her jail term from the naturalist and symbolist style of her early Abbey Theatre plays towards the Gothic Horror genre in which she would later excel. We sensed from the diary that her own actual day to day life in the jail was interspersed with paranormal moments, vivid dreams and “pre-vision” of the future.

There are therefore several occasions in the drama when the lighting should capture these psychic and supernatural aspect of her diaries.

2) KEY LIGHTING / MOOD MOMENTS IN THE PLAY (WITH TIMINGS FROM THE VIDEO)

The performance itself begins 21 mins and 30 secs in to the recording

21.30 It opens with the “ghostly prologue” a vision of a future Dorothy looking back.

22.50 Then, immediately, it goes to the bustle of the female prison in 1922 – parcels arriving – she starts to write her diary with new good paper and pens – she recalls the first day of imprisonment, enacting several women, and so on.

33.45 The first hint of the surreal aspects to come, is when she enters a fainting fit during a prayer service. She hears the other women as from afar. When she wakes in her cell, she chases a kitten – is it really there?

38.30 Soon after this, she witnesses her first ghost – while kneeling in vigil outside the cell of the great hunger-striking prison matriarch, Miss MacSwiney. – a benign patriot ghost seems to pass by.

38.54 Immediately after this ghost incident we see her looking anxiously out her window as she senses a fire. This entire scene centres around a letter from her famous literary and political mentor Maud Gonne McBride telling her that all of her personal papers and literary manuscripts have been destroyed in a malicious street fire by Free State soldiers who raided

her apartment. She grieves fiercely for the lost heroines of her unpublished plays and a book on poetry she was writing. This scene has a nightmarish, traumatic aspect.

49.30 As she comes to terms with the news (which has built up in a series of tense reports from outside) that her friend Erskine Childers has been executed by Free State forces, she lies down and tries to sleep, but her sleep is disturbed by wild sounds of unrest outside in the burning city which she describes as being like a "grand Guignol play."

56.00 Act 1 ends with a slow blackout as she rests, relieved and victorious, after the release of Miss MacSwiney, following her successful hunger strike. Act 2 begins almost immediately with lights up on a prison without a cause – a grim, depressing place where riots and faction fighting begin to fill the vacuum after the hero/matriarch is gone.

1:02:45 A long 5-minute scene begins in which Dorothy enters the world of sleep and dreams – this has elements of dance, voiceover, half-waking narration, calm and sudden fear.

Midway through, the dreams are no longer from the world of sleep but from a semi-awake state of rarefied consciousness where three times in succession she sees "a window appear in a wall". Through these uncanny windows she visions peaceful and serene scenes – a university garden; a city street by night; the blue Mediterranean sea of her beloved poet Shelley.

1:10:55 End of Act 2 (Interval) – simple fade to black as she packs to leave for the new surrounds of Kilmainham gaol.

1.15.40 Act 3 begins exactly where Act 2 left off – but goes quickly to an exterior night (realist) scene in which the prisoners journey by army truck through the darkened city is enacted.

There follow several "realist" scenes of day to day events in the new gaol.

1.29:50 A surreal sleeping dream in which she has a symbolist vision of her political leader DeValera "The Chief" having a problematic encounter with Miss MacSwiney. The dream seems to prefigure a significant political split that has not yet happened but will indeed soon happen in the Republican movement – evidence of Dorothy's "pre-vision" or "pre-cognitive dreaming".

1.38.30 A significant moment of light in the "real world": Dorothy is moved from the "white sepulchre" (i.e. tomb) of the lower floor to a cell on the upper landing which is filled with glorious sunlight. It is important to have a little extra 'brightness' in reserve for this moment of short-lived happiness.

1.44.20 A darkening begins again as Dorothy's delicate cellmate Betty reveals that she is having constant dreams about her (Betty's) fiancé, who has been arrested on the outside and may face execution. As Betty seems to teeter towards a breakdown, Dorothy finds also herself reliving suppressed traumas of her own recent past – in particular the burning of all her literary manuscripts and the heroic women of her imagination.

1.46.30 Betty finally does suffer a breakdown. As Dorothy sits alone listening to the young girl weeping, she suffers a huge, sudden traumatic seizure. This is a significant moment of change and 'breakout' in our performance. It coincides with the sudden "end" of Dorothy's surviving diaries – (the missing volumes were in fact burned by her own brother many years later, after her death). We represent this breach and outrage in a "future vision" episode where Dorothy's voice from later life mingles with newsreaders and friends announcing her death in 1958. As she succumbs to her seizure, she sees her brother burning her pages and also 'pre-lives' scenes she would later witness of Bitzkrieg and Nazi atrocities in WW2. The music and reference point for this sequence draw from the psychedelic movements of the early 60s which was already beginning among the beat generation at the time of her death.

1.49.10 The seizure scene is followed by the reappearance of the ghostly woman from the prologue, who fills Dorothy in on the "missing part of her life" (ie the missing part of the diaries), during which she went on a hunger strike which damaged her physical and mental health (although she did later recover).

1.51.30 The spectral woman draws Dorothy's attention to one document which did survive from her remaining time in prison. This is a propagandist (but factual) article she wrote and smuggled out, describing the brutal treatment of the women prisoners as they tried to resist a further forced transfer, this time from Kilmainham to a temporary prison at the North Dublin Union. Part of that sequence takes place in a narrow spotlight, it is a moment of shocking testimony – reminiscent of the tribunals which have followed wars, where people give witness to torture and atrocities.

STATES & EFFECTS

You will note that there are a few key "states" many of which will repeat.

Quite a lot of the show is in a full warm wash which I call "Communal Prison – Natural" and quite a few times Dorothy returns to her writing desk ("Natural at desk at USC")

Then there a number of times where the lighting is natural but concentrated at SR or SL (and sometimes with the note “Semi – dark of night”

The key specials are:

- 2 quite long surreal dream sequences – the first gentle and meditative but the second a psychedelic nightmare where either chases or similar effects are used.
- During the first (gentle) dream – the illusion that imaginary windows are opening in the walls revealing charming visions of freedom outside
- Also 2 “real world” small windows the prisoners look out of, high up in the cell walls – one at SR and one at SL (No actual window frames are used in the set – just the sense of looking out)
- Flickering fire effect – both times Dorothy pictures her manuscripts being burned on the streets, then once as a riot proceeds on the streets outside, and then again during the above psychedelic seizure/nightmare.
- Finally 2 “specials” –
 - 1) some kind of uplighting when the ‘spectral woman’ appears at DSL in prologue and again at the start of Act 5 (She is Dorothy returning after her own death)
 - 2) a spotlight on Dorothy as she gives testimony near the end about the inhumane beating of the women prisoners.

SOUND SCAPES & MUSIC

The prisoners have heightened sensitivity to sounds around them. They hear execution shots, newspaper boys. Vigils & Rosaries take place both inside and outside prison. The Clamor of the prison itself - Singing, laughter & Squabbling of the inmates. References to Guigol play, shooting and screeching of cats, Prison guards running amok etc. Inner voice of Dorothy is also heard. External characters from past moments are communicated through voice overs. Songs and music were chosen to add to the emotional power of key moments. Some Prisoner women play music – we hear Aggie on her melodeon during the transfer to Kilmainham. Prisoner Noreen Cogley sings at numerous points through the play, to which singer Sophie Coyle lends her voice. The transition into the final act lends itself to a heavy psychedelic song from the 60's as Dorothy, given the gift of foresight, sees into the future during a convulsive fit. This is in keeping with the overall dramaturgical shape of the piece and in harmony with the opening monologue, where Dorothy appears as a spectral figure.

Music & Voice Overs

Traditional & Folk songs: El Rosario de mi Madre; Caiseacdach Bán; Siuil a Rúin; and The Beacon Song (by Dorothy Macardle) – all sung by Sophie Coyle and recorded by Ross Carew in Louth County Archive (formerly Dundalk old gaol).

Other Music: Brindavani Sarang – B. Sivaramakrishna Rao; Psychotic Reaction – The Count Fives; Brendan Begley – The Lonesome Jig / An Charraig Anair: Mairtín O'Connor – Rocking the Boat / The Emigrant

Voice Overs: Vere Lenox Conyngham, Declan Gorman & Sharon Mc Ardle;

Archive - Voices of Lennox Robinson (RTE Archive) and John Snagg (BBC Archive)