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Rediscovering Dorothy Macardle: An Interview with Caroline B. Heafey

In this interview, Caroline B. Heafey explores how novelist and historian Dorothy Macardle's writing, "often inextricable from its context and historical moment," responded to the Ireland of Macardle's time. Heafey edited and introduced the republished *Dark Enchantment* by Dorothy Macardle with Tramp Press' Recovered Voices series in 2019. She holds a BA in English and French Language and Literature from Fordham University and an MA in Irish and Irish-American Studies from New York University. Her MA thesis focuses on the prison writings of Dorothy Macardle and instances of trauma during the Irish Civil War. She is currently pursuing a PhD in English at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst where she teaches first-year writing.

Dorothy Macardle (1889-1958), an Irish novelist, playwright, journalist and historian, was born in Dundalk in 1889 to a wealthy brewing family, and educated at Alexandra College and University College, Dublin. A Republican and member of Cumann na mBan, Macardle was imprisoned for her activities during the Irish Civil War, and later worked as a journalist with *The Irish Press*. Her monumental history, *The Irish Republic*, was published in 1937, and her account of the plight of children in war-torn Europe, *Children of Europe*, in 1949. Her plays were produced at the Abbey and Gate theatres, and among her works of fiction are *Earth-Bound: Nine Stories of Ireland* (1924), *Uneasy Freehold/The Uninvited* (1942, and republished by Tramp Press in 2015), and *Fantastic Summer/The Unforeseen* (1946, republished by Tramp Press in 2015). Dorothy Macardle died in Drogheda in 1958.

Can you describe Macardle's family background and how her politics might have influenced family relationships?

Macardle grew up in an affluent family, a prime example of the growing Catholic upper middle class at the turn of the twentieth century. Her father, Thomas Macardle, owned the Macardle Moore Brewing Company in Dundalk, Ireland, which provided the family a comfortable home in Dundalk that employed a governess, a housemaid, a nurse, and a cook during her childhood. Dorothy Macardle was the oldest of five children. Her mother, Minnie Macardle raised her children to uphold reverence for the British Empire and as Leeann Lane notes, "in her mother's vocabulary the Irish were 'they', the English 'we'".¹ While Thomas Macardle sympathized with Home Rule politics, the family was firmly rooted in an allegiance to the British Crown. Thomas was even knighted in 1920 "for services in connection with the [First World] War."² Dorothy Macardle's politics were undoubtedly influenced by her family's background, even if she developed viewpoints that were in opposition to those of her parents.

Where did Macardle grow up? How did border tensions affect her family and childhood?

¹ Lane, Leeann, *Dorothy Macardle* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2019), 15.

² Supplement to the *London Gazette*, 22 March 1920, 3759.

Macardle grew up in Dundalk, County Louth, very near what would ultimately become the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. While at this time, the border would not have been so relevant, it is intriguing to consider how the religious and political views within her family varied, and ultimately may have caused some division. We can observe some of these tensions through her parents' relationship regarding their religious views. For example, the 1901 Irish census lists the family's residence on Seatown Place in Dundalk with Thomas Macardle as the head of the family. Thomas, Minnie, and all five children are listed as being Roman Catholic. In 1911, however, Dorothy Macardle lived with her mother, sister Monica, and brother Donald in Dublin on Wellington Road. Here, Minnie is listed as the head of the family. Therefore, we can infer that by this point, she and Thomas had indeed separated. The notations of religious affiliation are of considerable interest in that while Donald and Monica are listed as Roman Catholic (at ages ten and sixteen respectively), Dorothy, aged 21, is marked as having refused to provide that information, and Minnie is marked as "Freethinker."³ As such, while Minnie may have converted to Catholicism upon her marriage to Thomas, it is clear that religion within the family was indeed a point of difference and potential division.

How did Macardle's life and writing respond to her historical times in Ireland?

Dorothy Macardle wore the hats of both a writer and a historian. In many ways, I find her writing to be often inextricable from its context and historical moment. The stories she wrote in prison are perhaps the most obvious example. *Earth-Bound: Nine Stories of Ireland* is a collection of nine nationalist tales written about the War for Independence but written during the Irish Civil War. In the final story, "The Story Without an Ending," Macardle writes a vision that comes in a dream. Una, one of the narrators, has a dream where an 'enemy' soldier is wearing a green uniform, which we know of course to be the Free State uniform. The final line concludes, "You see—the war will break out again of course, we all know that—but the green uniforms—it couldn't come true."⁴ Macardle then includes "Mountjoy, December, 1922," directly signaling to her reader that her fiction is in response to the context of its inception.

Sitting in Mountjoy, imprisoned for her outspoken activism against the Free State Treaty, Macardle composes fiction as a direct response to that position. Her responsiveness is not limited to her early fiction. *Dark Enchantment*, her final novel, explores the human potential for cruelty and Othering in times of social unrest. The novel is set in the French Alps, in the years following the Second World War. Macardle paints a small town that has been traumatized by Occupation yet does not hesitate to ostracize a Romany gypsy woman called Terka because of her difference and alleged sexual deviance, having had a relationship with a married man. In doing so, Macardle seems to be responding to several historical moments. There is a disillusionment with nationalism present in the narrative, that seems to mirror the disappointment she felt with the Republic of Ireland, which she fought so vehemently to substantiate. There is an interest in trauma—marked both physically and mentally—and the social interactions that trauma can provoke. Macardle also explores gender in the novel, which reads as a critique of the opportunities available to women generally during the 1950s in Europe. In this case, Terka, the pariah, is also the only woman who is entirely fiscally independent, and as such, society

³ "Residents of a House 1 in Wellington Road (Pembroke West, Dublin)." National Archives: Census of Ireland 1911. National Archives of Ireland. Accessed December 31, 2019. http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Dublin/Pembroke_West/Wellington_Road/46610/.

⁴ Macardle, Dorothy. *Earth-Bound: Nine Stories of Ireland* (Worcester, MA: Harrigan Press, 1924), 108.

rejects her. Juxtaposing Macardle's fiction with the historical times it came from, often reveals even more within and about the stories she wrote.

How do her fiction and her non-fiction respond to borders?

Children of Europe is the work that first comes to mind is when thinking about borders. Macardle's 1950 account of the trauma that children experienced during the Second World War looks at war experiences by region. She examines trauma by context and chronicles how the impact of war—the violence that comes from the desire for power over borders—can affect the child psyche directly, thus impacting the subsequent generation. Macardle also actively spoke out against the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic, and we can ascertain her stance on Partition through her writing in *The Irish Republic*. She writes that in 1924, “the Nationalist population of the Six-county area was now a defeated minority [...] Those in particular who lived near the Border [...] were continually visited, interrogated, held up at the point of the revolver and searched”.⁵ She goes on to write about the formation of the Boundary Commission by the British government and the biases against Irish nationalism present in legislation during this period.⁶ Writing in 1937 about 1924, the anger and disappointment that Macardle feels toward the Free State government, and its legislation informing the Republic, is palpable. The border, or Partition in general, is a key source of that anger.

How do Gothic aspects of her fiction grow out of political and historical issues?

Most of Macardle's fiction engages with the Gothic for writing political and historical unrest. Her prison writings, in particular, display active engagement with gothic tropes written in response to historical context. In the titular story of *Earth-Bound*, for example, we find ghosts of Irish revolutionaries who emerge from the landscape—almost like a resurrection. Michael tells a story where he and Donal break out of prison, aided in evading the search party by Red Hugh. The landscape, in particular, evokes elements of the gothic: “The snow had lightened a little and we could see: a black heaven and a white earth; sharp granite edges thrusting up through the snow; down hill, to our left, a clump of trees.”⁷ Suddenly a guide appears from the Glenmalure landscape to distract the search party just before Michael is about to shoot Donal out of mercy. Because of the location, Michael determines that the guide is Aodh Ruadh O'Donal (Red Hugh), who vanishes back into the landscape, and whom the search party never finds.

Macardle's later fiction may not speak to historical issues as directly, but still consistently engages with elements of the Gothic. *The Uninvited* explores the supernatural in a Gothic house through mother relationships. Abigail Palko, Gerardine Meaney, and Leeann Lane have written extensively on the Gothic in Macardle's novels. Engaging Gothic tropes often allows women writers, in particular, to write moments of political unrest by depicting turmoil as supernatural. The unrest between mothers in *The Uninvited* specifically problematizes maternity and marriage. As Lane writes, in the novel, “Macardle inverts received societal and cultural attributes within the categorizations, attributing real maternal feeling and love to the unmarried mother, Carmel.”⁸ Macardle utilizes the Gothic in order to write forms of resistance against the social constraints forced upon women during this period.

⁵ Macardle, Dorothy. *The Irish Republic* (New York, FSG, 1965), 869.

⁶ Macardle, Dorothy. *The Irish Republic* (New York, FSG, 1965), 876.

⁷ Macardle, Dorothy. *Earth-Bound: Nine Stories of Ireland* (Worcester, MA: Harrigan Press, 1924), 14.

⁸ Lane, Leeann, *Dorothy Macardle* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2019), 231.

What was Macardle's response to the Republic and how do you see that changing response in *Dark Enchantment*?

I read *Dark Enchantment* as a novel that is mainly about disappointment. There is disappointment in the opportunities available to women, in Juliet's final interactions with Terka, and in the community and its display of hostility toward an outsider who does not fit in. Macardle's disillusionment with the romanticized notions of nationhood that she fought for during the Revolutionary period becomes evident in some of the disappointment she depicts in the novel – particularly the ending.

We know that she actively spoke out against the 1937 Constitution and the limitations it posed upon women's professional growth. Macardle also wrote an essay on James Connolly and Patrick Pearse, initially as a broadcast for RTÉ in a series that ran from 1955 to 1956. It was published posthumously in *The Shaping of Modern Ireland*, edited by Conor Cruise O'Brien in 1960. Here, she writes about disillusionment with the Irish Republic as it was developing in the mid-1950s. It is clear that the dreams that Macardle had for the Irish Republic were never realized, and her disappointment here is evident toward the end of her life. She writes:

Ought we to feel thankful that they did not see farther still—see the shape of Ireland as it is today? Connolly, with his dread of sectarianism—would he not have found Partition and its results intolerable? With his faith in socialism and in the generous fellowship of the workers, would he have been satisfied with the temper of trades-unionism in this epoch of its power? And Patrick Pearse, the creator of St. Enda's—what would he have felt about the compulsions and punishments with which Irish is taught in some of our joyless schools?⁹

There is a unique historical moment here where Macardle reflects both on the Revolutionary generation—her comrades and peers—to realize its shortcomings. The Ireland of her present in the mid-1950s is not the free space that Pearse and Connolly had envisioned. She concludes the address by asking, “And is not a free-born generation preparing to take the future of the Republic into able and faithful hands?”¹⁰ looking toward the future and maintaining an Ireland of her imagination, despite any disappointment of her present.

Both the young female victims and the sorceress in *Dark Enchantment* point to gender issues. How are women figured in *Dark Enchantment*?

The subject of gender issues is particularly complex in the novel, and I talk about how Macardle writes the gender roles for women in my introduction to Tramp's 2019 release of *Dark Enchantment*. The financial opportunities available for women—or the limitations posed on them—remains a key theme throughout the novel. *Dark Enchantment* begins with the problem of what to do with a woman of precarious financial circumstances. Juliet has no inheritance and does not wish to be a teacher; therefore, her father, Frith, must determine how to set her up so that she can be supported. Ultimately, Juliet finds financial security at the end of the novel, through marriage. The socially acceptable forms of economic security for women in *Dark Enchantment* are either in the home, through domestic work—

⁹ Macardle, Dorothy. “James Connolly and Patrick Pearse,” in *The Shaping of Modern Ireland*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 195.

¹⁰ Ibid.

we see an example through Juliet's decision to work at the Inn and in Martine's position as an innkeeper's wife—or through marriage. Michael's mother is wealthy but as a widow. Terka, is the only woman who is entirely financially independent, selling brooms in the market and telling fortunes for pay. Terka is also a pariah within the community; a woman marked as untrustworthy and evil by the townspeople of Saint Jacques. In her depictions of all these women, Macardle seems to be outlining the limited opportunities for financial independence available to women during this time, thus also demonstrating how social and financial autonomy become hindered for women without access to money.

How does the France of *Dark Enchantment* mirror Macardle's idea of Ireland?

It can be difficult to say what exactly Macardle's idea of Ireland was. The Ireland of her birth was so different from the country where she died. When she was born, Queen Victoria was the reigning monarch, and electricity was a rare luxury. When she died, a border had been established partitioning the island of Ireland very near to her hometown, legislation had been passed to prevent women from working outside the home after marriage, and she had made a career in part through wireless broadcasting. I think it is fair to say that Macardle never saw the Ireland that she had envisioned; however, the changes that she saw in her lifetime are staggering. She saw two wars in Ireland, two wars in Europe, and wrote indefatigably to document the violence and social unrest that she witnessed. Macardle undoubtedly envisioned an Ireland that offered women more opportunity, and we see those same themes of limitations based on gender present in *Dark Enchantment's* fictional town of Saint Jacques.

Do you think that the Romany sorceress reflects fears of the “traveler” in Irish culture?

That certainly is one reading of Terka. Macardle demonstrates how superstitious fears rooted in the Church were prominent in both *Dark Enchantment* and *The Unforeseen*. Given how Macardle writes Travelers into some of her other fiction, I tend to think of Terka as the more sympathetic character. There is a real disappointment when Juliet turns away from her and instead runs off to marry Michael (spoiler!). As a contemporary reader, it is somewhat enticing to envision an alternate ending to *Dark Enchantment*, with Terka and Juliet positioned with greater social autonomy. That disappointment strikes me as intentional, though. We might read it as a reflection of the reality that Macardle witnessed regarding treatment of Travelers at that time—or anyone who may have been different from the romanticized visions of ‘Irish culture’ —the “happy maidens, whose fire sides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age” as Éamon De Valera famously wrote in 1943.¹¹ Terka is not a woman who fits the mold of a happy maiden with a welcoming fireside, and in many ways, Macardle did not fit that mold either.

In *The Unforeseen* (1945), there is a Traveler community that plays a crucial role in the novel. While the community is not always written in a flattering light, Macardle critiques the intolerance or fears toward Travelers in the way that she writes the social dynamics between Virgilia, the Anglo-Irish protagonist, her daughter, Nan, Brigid, the Catholic housekeeper, and the Vaughan family, of the Traveler community:

¹¹ De Valera, Éamon, “The Ireland That We Dreamed Of,” 17 March 1943, Ireland, Radio Éireann, 2:50, <https://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/eamon-de-valera/719124-address-by-mr-de-valera/>.

Brigid's relations with the Vaughans were something of a puzzle. For her, the making of jams and jellies crowned the year, and she insisted on Shuiler's being put to sleep at the back, in the wood-shed, so that he might guard the fruit. Nan teased her –

'Aren't you every bit as mean as Greg Cox?' – only to learn that Brigid was sending Sal a daily supply of vegetables by Timeen and had presented the boy to Shuiler as a friend.

'I don't mind giving,' she stated, 'but to be robbed makes a fool of me.' 'Tis plain to the eye that Sal has gypsy blood.' Nan, repeating this conversation to her mother [Virgilia], asked, 'How can anyone be such a mixture of wisdom and crass, ignorant superstition as Brigid is?'

Virgilia said, 'Aren't you rather intolerant, darling?'

'I am intolerant of superstition and I always will be,' was the reply.¹²

Nan's contempt for superstition born of prejudice and discrimination is well-intentioned, but Macardle paints the Anglo-Irish young woman and her mother, the novel's protagonist, as indulgent of the romanticized Irish stereotypes that have their own classist implications. The subsequent paragraph after this passage begins that Nan hoped that the Traveler community would remain in the area because "Timeen was the perfect model for her young leprechauns"¹³ that she is painting. To a contemporary reader, this entire scene is somewhat cringe-worthy; but it also does well to showcase the implicit and explicit biases present toward Travelers and Macardle's awareness of these prejudices in Irish society.

Could you tell us about Macardle's revolutionary activities as well as her 1937 history, *The Irish Republic*, and how the book is viewed today?

In the Author's Foreword to *The Irish Republic*, Macardle writes that "this narrative is an attempt to supply what has been too long lacking: an account of the Irish Republican struggle from the viewpoint of an Irish Republican."¹⁴ It is ironic—or perhaps fitting—that Macardle, whose work is now being reissued in order to garner more attention for her life and writing, should have written her historical account of the formation of the Irish government with a similar aim: to provide an answer to questions left by gaps in historical narrative. Dorothy Macardle was revolutionary in her outspokenness for Irish independence and later opposition to the Free State Treaty, which resulted in her imprisonment. Macardle continued to be an activist throughout her life, opposing Irish censorship and neutrality during the Second World War, legislation that placed limitations on women's financial independence, and the general atrocities and violence of social unrest. She maintained a fervent interest in international relations, especially through the 1930s, when Macardle traveled to Geneva for involvement in lectures and to report on the meetings of the League of Nations. She revisits her experiences with the League of Nations in her 1944 realist novel, *The Seed Was Kind*. Macardle spent the period of the Second World War in London, writing radio broadcasts and bearing witness to the bombings in the city, which she knew would be censored in Ireland. Whatever was happening at a given moment in history, Macardle seemed to be actively engaged in the political developments of Ireland and Europe throughout her life.

For decades, *The Irish Republic* was viewed as a key reference text for understanding the Revolutionary period in Ireland. In many ways, it still is today, though with greater attention for the biases that

¹² Macardle, Dorothy. *The Unforeseen* (Tramp Press, 2018), 95.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Macardle, Dorothy. *The Irish Republic* (New York, FSG, 1965), 23.

Macardle exhibits in her narration. Leeann Lane points out that *The Irish Republic* is written as propaganda for the Republican historical narrative, but that Macardle takes care to substantiate her perspectives through well-researched data, documentation, and gathering of oral historical narrative. Lane writes that “she was a politician and a propagandist before she was a historian.”¹⁵ As historians and literary critiques look back on Macardle’s life, the text serves as a staggering representation of Macardle’s discipline and commitment to her scholarship. Indeed, she grew tired of working on it and expressed regret in taking on the project.¹⁶ For many years, this was the text that rendered Macardle a household name—and largely in part because of its preface from Éamon De Valera. Many editions, in fact, feature his picture on the cover or title pages, instead of Macardle’s. I find it unfortunate that so much of Macardle’s reputation became wrapped up in her professional relationship with De Valera, casting a shadow over all of the other work that she did. It is exciting to see a renewed interest in her fiction and for a new generation of readers.

¹⁵ Lane, Leeann, *Dorothy Macardle* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2019), 172.

¹⁶ Lane, Leeann, *Dorothy Macardle* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2019), 176.