

# DOROTHY MACARDLE

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Towards the end of Dorothy Macardle's 1942 Gothic novel, *The uninvited*, the female protagonist

Stella reflects on the eternal torment of ghosts, eternally bound into 'trying to make people know you are there, and nobody seeing you or hearing you or thinking anything about you at all'. Macardle herself suffered the erasure of her life achievements, literally through the burning of her papers on her death and symbolically as her literary works fell out of print and her participation in the republican cause fell out of memory since her death in 1958. Like other female activists of the period, Macardle had long been reduced to a footnote;

in her case, as the author of *The Irish republic* (1937), or a quirky anecdote about de Valera. Leeann Lane's detailed reconstruction of the life of this complex women seeks to reanimate those skeletal remains, re-placing Macardle in the context of the political, feminist, activist and literary circles in which she participated and influenced. In capturing the various identities of Macardle – 'literary teacher, propagandist journalist, political playwright, gothic fiction novelist' – Lane's biography carefully delineates the often-subversive ways Macardle approached both the 'politics of the intellect' and the 'politics of action'.

Lane's compelling book details the inherent performativity of Macardle's acts of self representation

– rendering the ultimate destruction of her papers even more poignant. The extracts from her jail journal highlight just how aware Macardle was of the need to assert her commitment to the republican cause, while her sense of herself as an inferior republican sits alongside an intellectual superiority that informs her motivation to write the republican story. While she recognised her failure to participate in the Easter Rising as an irredeemable lack of pedigree, Macardle fashioned sacrifices of her own: of her papers lost in a raid, of her freedom as a political prisoner and, more profoundly, of her projected trajectory as a scholar and teacher. In reconstructing not only the details of an important historical persona but also the complexities of a personality, Lane deftly darts between the detritus of Macardle's life, bringing disparate sources into conversation with each other. The resulting depiction is of a highly-intelligent woman whose commitment to activism, feminism and art provided public, private and creative motivation.

The biography situates Macardle's imprisonment as crucial to her intellectual and political development, consolidating her role as a propagandist that Lane sees as overwhelming her historical work, specifically *The Irish Republic*. The 'rigid binary of honour and integrity versus compromise and betrayal', established during her incarceration in Kilmainham, became less defined over the years, as Macardle's disillusionment with Fianna Fáil ultimately saw her disassociate from the party. Indeed in her later years, her activism took an international position, travelling across Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War, a trip which informed her book *Children of Europe* (1949) on the displacing effects of war. Fiction, for Macardle, was 'politics by other means', a tool to challenge the repressive, religious ethos of the 1937 constitution that undermined the gender equality sought by Macardle through her lifelong feminist activism. Lane's account of Macardle's life positions her as an influential and passionate political participant and an uncompromising social commentator whose perspective on the emerging Irish state demonstrates the challenges for republican women in the aftermath of the Civil War.

Leeann Lane's study brings together personal writings, archival material, political propaganda and literary publications to reconstruct the fascinating life of an individual whose involvement in cultural and political life is undoubtedly deserving of attention. As Lane observes in her introduction, the narratives of this period afforded prominence in the cultural memory are those of the heroic male figures – such as Ernie O'Malley, Dan Breen, and Tom Barry – while female revolutionaries are obscured behind their more prominent male relatives and associates. As in her excellent biography of Rosamond Jacob – *Rosamond Jacob: third person singular* (Dublin, 2010) – Lane affords Macardle the necessary sustained attention to bring light to another forgotten woman of the period.

– AILBHE MCDAID