



Hazel: A Life of Lady Lavery 1880-1935

Sinead McCool

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Until now Lady Lavery has been remembered for the numerous portraits by her husband, the painter John Lavery, celebrated in "The Municipal Gallery Re-visited" by W.B. Yeats, This first biography of Hazel tells the story the pictures cannot: ow a girl from boomtown Chicago became one of the most stylish society hostesses in London, and turned her husband's studio into a hub of Anglo-Irish diplomacy, from the 1921 Treaty negotiations through the tumultuous early years of the Irish Free State. Using hitherto-unpublished letters and scrapbooks assembled by Hazel herself, Sinead McCooole gives an intimate account of Hazel's artistic and political preoccupations, and of her extraordinary effect upon the male politicians of Ireland and Britain, for whom she and her salon often represented the only common ground.

Romance and politics converged in her relationships with two hard men of nationalist Ireland who each met violent deaths: Michael Collins, whose view on the Treaty were influenced by Hazel, and Kevin O'Higgins, whose passionate letters to Hazel reveal the inner man beneath the political carapace. Hazel also forged durable social and political alliances with the pillars of British government - Winston Churchill, Ramsay MacDonald and Lord Londonderry among other - while relishing her friendships with leading writers and artists of the day such as George Bernard Shaw, J.M. Barrie, Lennox Robinson and Evelyn Waugh.

This lavishly illustrated, richly documented life of Lady Lavery relates how one beautiful American woman reinvented herself as 'a simple Irish girl' came to personify Eir on Ireland's banknotes, 'living and dying ... as though some ballad-singer had sung it all'.

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